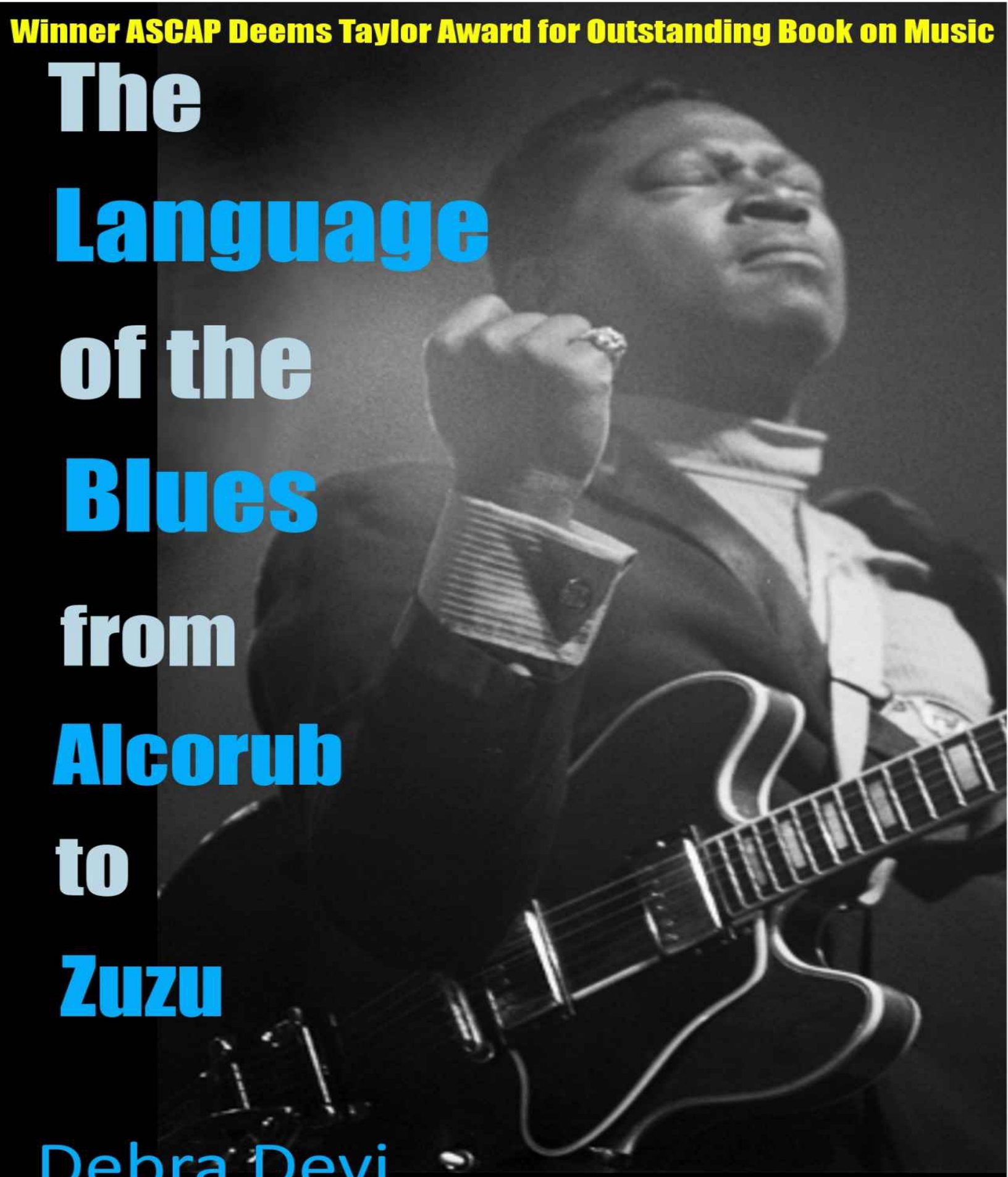
Winner ASCAP Deems Taylor Award for Outstanding Book on Music

The Language of the Blues from Alcorub to Zuzu



Debra Devi

Foreword by Dr. John

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Praise for *The Language of the Blues: From Alcorub to Zuzu*

Bonnie Raitt "What a great resource…as fascinating as it is informative. Debra's passion for the blues shines through."

Joe Bonamassa "Every blues guitarist needs to know blues history and where the blues are coming from. Debra's book will teach you what you really need to know."

Hal Willner "This is a beautiful book. After hearing 'Hellhound on My Trail' in high school I bought every vintage blues record available. Upon receiving *The Language of the Blues* I discovered my knowledge only scratched the surface."

Bob Margolin "Don't think *The Language of the Blues* might read like a dictionary. There's no plot, but you can open it up at random and fall into the world of your favorite Blues songs, and find out more about the lyrics than you would be guessing from context. I learned a lot more about the Blues music I already loved."

Al Jourgensen (Ministry) "Finally one can understand the mechanics behind the overwhelming viscera of the Blues. Debra Devi's work is a true guide book to the soul."

Jimmy Vivino "This book is fascinating! Take it to the bathroom and don't come out until you're done reading it."

Ed Sanders "This is a book that lovers of music and just plain old lovers will love to have in their collections. Its candor and witty honesty bring us into the world Debra describes so well with beautiful strength."

About the Book: "One of the wittiest, bawdiest, most fascinating dictionaries ever." (*Reuters*) To explore the origins and meanings of over 150 blues terms like "mojo," "hoodoo," and "killing floor," Debra Devi pored over academic and folkloric sources, and interviewed blues legends for their insights into what the words in blues songs really mean. *The Language of the Blues* is full of fascinating stories from great artists, including Little Milton Campbell, Herman Ernest III, Robben Ford, Henry Gray, John Hammond, Dr. John, Robert Jr. Lockwood, Bob Margolin, Bonnie Raitt, Smiley Ricks, Hubert Sumlin, Sam Taylor, Red Tyler, Jimmie Vaughan and Jody Williams. *The Language of the Blues* includes 40+ photos of blues artists and a remarkable foreword by Dr. John. Available in PRINT from Amazon, Bluescentric and hip stores everywhere.

About the Author: Debra Devi is an *American Blues Scene* contributing editor who blogs about blues-related subjects for *The Huffington Post*. A former associate editor of *Blues Revue*, Devi has written for *The Village Voice*, *Rolling Stone.com*, *Guitar World*, *Vintage Guitar,* and *Yoga Journal*. She is the lead guitarist/singer for the rock band DEVI and a Fender Girl Rock Nation artist. Get a free album download and order signed books at www.devi-rock.com.

Photo by Matt Warnock

FOREWORD BY DR. JOHN

Why listen at the blues? 'Cause it's real. But there's a million kind of blues 'cause there's a million kinds of people. There's sophisticated blues, like Charles Brown and Ray Charles, and there's jazz cats blues. There's gutbucket blues, like Lightnin' Hopkins and John Lee Hooker, and barrelhouse blues. Each set added its own language to the blues. All these guys just talked a lot of trash, and that's what this book is about.

Bucket-of-blood joints, for instance, catered to the junkies and the pimps and the hos. The street set would hang at them joints when bands they liked would be there, and they'd expect some tailored-for-them music. The juke joint was a different kind of set. It was more sophisticated than a bucket-of-blood joint. You ain't gonna see as many shankings in a juke joint as you will in a bucket of blood. You don't call it a bucket of blood for nothing.

I went into this joint to meet my old friend Little Walter, and he said, "Geez you done missed all the shit!" I said, "What happened?" And he said, "Aw, this guy got shanked under his armpit with an oyster knife! There was a big pile of blood, right where you're standing."

He said "a big pile of blood." Now that's an interesting kinda lyric. I was always listening for stuff like that. When I first would write songs I would bring them to all these guys in the different record companies in New Orleans back then, and they always would turn me down. So one day I talked to Earl King and Huey Smith, and Huey Smith did a real beneficial thing- he gave me a book for kids called *How and Why*. It had these poems in it and he said, "Just write stuff like that but write it in how people talks today." He also said, "Go listen to them songs--like what girls sing when they jump rope or play they little games."

Earl King asked me "What you get inspired from?" and I told him, "Well, I read a lotta comic books" and he said, "Yeah, what kind?" and I said, "You know, *Tales From The Crypt* or whatever" and he said, "Wow, man I don't think you gonna get them songs cut with that." So he'd give me some advice, and that was to listen to what people said on the street.

Street language is always changing and it's pretty hip stuff. Every time somebody gets wise to the street side of a word, the street shifts it around. Like if you look at "uptight," once upon a time it meant "nervous." Then street people got hip to the fact that the general public was on to that, so they reversed it and Stevie Wonder had a hit record, "Uptight (Everything's Alright)."

The street language that inspired me was not on just any streets in New Orleans; it was the lower Ninth Ward. New Orleans has got twenty different languages floating through it, but the lower Ninth Ward is the root. I heard all kinds of sayings down there. Like, if you want to get a chick, or a chick wants to give a guy head, they would say, "I gotta get some brain salad surgery." I used that line in my song "Right Place, Wrong Time."

When I was a kid, Big Joe Turner sang "Boogie my woogie, until my eyes get cherry red." But it's not really "'til my eyes get cherry red"; it's "'til your *mayoun* get cherry red."[1] That's a Creole word; it means your vagina. Girls used to answer back: "Well, then you can hoochie my coochie and toochie my noochie." That was old when I was a kid.

That stuff comes out of the dozens, which is a very strong tradition. A lot of blues language was just different inversions of the dozens. "Tutti Frutti" started off as straight-up dozens; it was "tutti frutti, good booty." Stuff like "I had a gal named Sue; she knew just how to screw." Actually, it's a show of affection. If you don't cap on people, they don't figure ya like they ass!

This stuff started in Africa, and there's a million things about the blues that's African, but don't beat a dead horse back to life. It's like gumbo--have you ever had an African gumbo? I thought it was gonna be a big kick. I tried it and I guess I'm spoiled from New Orleans gumbo, 'cause it was some weird soup with weird seasoning and I didn't enjoy it at all. I was thoroughly disappointed with the goddamned African gumbo. It's like that with the blues; you wouldn't find it in Africa the way it is here.

A lot of terminology of the blues came from the lottery business, for instance. Musicians picked that shit up- like "going on a gig," "coming out of a bag," and calling a guitar an "axe." A gig was a three-number

combo, and an axe was a gun or a piece, which was carried in a bag. You might hear something like, “that bitch was coming out of a bag on her.” Well, in the lottery business if they was coming out of a bag, that meant they was pulling a piece on someone.

This old numbers cat would always shoot ribs at the band about the words we used. He’d say, “We used all them words, you stupid suckers, and now you’re twisting it all up.” Today with hip-hop, it’s the same thing. Old cats passed stuff down and a lot of these kids is doing their thing with it- they kinda half ass it with something they heard from somebody in they family. I can tell some of those guys run with old timers, just from certain things they say. They ain’t old enough to know that stuff, and it ain’t stuff that’s popular no more. But it’s inspiration to them. I still hang with old timers. The ones that’s left, I hang with them.

It would be a ho-hum planet if everybody sounded the same. So I told Debra, who wrote this book, “Whatever you get outta this crap, go with it. You got the same kinda jive-ass brain I got, chile. I like that. Do good now.”

Dr. John
New York City

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[1] The spelling and origins of “mayoun” are uncertain, although it may be Choctaw Creole. It is pronounced “my-oon.”

To Son Seals - for inspiration

PREFACE

"Nowadays…the mighty river of the blues uncoils in the ear of the planet." - Alan Lomax, *The Land Where The Blues Began*

This book is an anecdotal dictionary of the language of the blues. In it, you can look up such words as "mojo" or "hoosegow" and phrases like "black cat bone" or "cold in hand" to find out what they mean and from where they came. There is some frankly sexual talk in here; there are some tall tales and some funny ones. I interviewed many blues legends for this book, and they all had something fascinating to contribute.

I'm a rock musician and journalist, not a scholar, so I was a little nervous about tackling such a vast topic. But my first interview, with guitarist Hubert Sumlin, showed me the way, much like seeing Son Seals play guitar for the first time showed me the way in on the electric guitar. I expected Mr. Sumlin to simply verify the longstanding notion that Howlin' Wolf's blues standard "Killing Floor" referred to a slaughterhouse floor. To my surprise, Mr. Sumlin, who was Wolf's guitarist and close friend from 1954 until Wolf's death in 1976, disagreed, and backed up his assertion with a detailed (and hilarious!) story about why Wolf wrote "Killing Floor" that I'd never read anywhere.

After our chat, I thought perhaps I could make a unique contribution to the language of the blues: I could ask the artists, directly, what these words mean to them. I did my best with research, too (369 footnotes!), and had the book vetted by two ethnomusicologists, but it was the lengthy, generous interviews given to me by such artists as Dr. John, Little Milton, Robben Ford, Henry Gray, John Hammond, Robert Jr. Lockwood, Bob Margolin, Bonnie Raitt, Howard "Smiley" Ricks, Hubert Sumlin, Jimmie Vaughan and more that provided fresh insights into the language of the blues.

I love the language of the blues, both musical and verbal. It leads us back, hand over hand, gripping a rough rope, until we find ourselves looking up at a big creaking ship full of misery that has traveled to the Americas all the way from Africa. It tells us how the people transported on that ship dug deep in order to survive enslavement in an utterly strange and different land, further from home than they had ever imagined they could go. The language of the blues tells us how they did it--by singing to themselves and to their children, and by digging joy and sustenance out of rare private moments the way a starving man might dig new potatoes and carrots out of the dirt with his fingers.

These were people who had suffered a profound cultural dislocation comparable to being shipped at warp speed to another planet. In *Blues People*, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) noted: "To the Romans, slaves were merely vulgar and conquered peoples who had not the rights of Roman citizenship. The Greeks thought of their slaves as unfortunate people who had failed to cultivate their minds and wills…. But these slaves were still human beings. However, the African who was unfortunate enough to find himself on some fast clipper ship to the New World was not even accorded membership in the human race."[1]

The first Africans to arrive in the Americas were from bustling towns along the Senegal and Gambia rivers. They were far more urban and sophisticated than their depictions in Hollywood movies would later indicate. The Senegambians lived in highly organized cities full of specialized workers and artisans who "were members of several endogamous castes, which included the smiths, leather workers, butchers, and griots," according to *The African Heritage of American English* by Joseph Holloway and Winifred Vass.[2] Later arrivals came from urban centers like Abeokuta, the Yoruban metropolis that ran for six miles along the bank of the Ogun River and hummed with the industry of its skilled ironworkers, carpenters, tailors, textile weavers, artists, and farmers.[3]

Imagine being fully engaged in your work, your religion, family life, art, music, politics, and lively debates with friends one day, and finding yourself some months later, after a horrific journey, the prisoner of an alien culture and masters who demand, on pain of death, that you shut up, worship their God, and plow acre after acre of their endless fields. "Your sorrow," Jones wrote, "must be indeterminable."[4]

The transatlantic slave trade began with some curious Portuguese sailors, who reached the mouth of the Senegal River in 1445 and began trading with the local Wolof people. In 1493 the Pope deeded the region between the Senegal River and the Gambia River to Portugal, allowing the Portuguese to monopolize European trade with Africa. The Portuguese tapped into the existing African slave trade and exported slaves to Brazil, which Portugal began colonizing in 1500.

Unfortunately for Portugal, its fragile inbred king, Sebastian I, got himself killed at twenty-four while leading an ill-advised crusade for Jesus against Morocco in 1578. Since Sebastian had no heir, and King Philip II of Spain was the son of a Portuguese princess, this gave King Philip an opportunity to seize control of Portugal. He grabbed it in 1581, and Portuguese nobles fled for their lives. One prince made it to England, where he began selling trading concessions along the more navigable Gambia River to English traders.

English traders sailed up the Gambia in 1587 and brought hides and ivory back to England. Soon English, Dutch, and French traders were enjoying a thriving business trading iron, firearms, cloth, and gunpowder for ebony, ivory, beeswax, gold, spices,

and slaves.

The first enslaved Africans landed at Jamestown in the Virginia colony in 1619.[5] They were brought to pick cotton, a plant that had originated in western Sudan.[6] In all, some 12 million Africans were transported from Africa to the Americas during the slave trade. Roughly 10.5 million survived the journey.[7]

Slaves arriving in the Americas had nothing but their culture and each other. Luckily, their cultural values were strong. In *Flash of the Spirit*, Robert Farris Thompson wrote: "…sheer artlessness may bring a culture down but a civilization like that of the Yoruba [from today's southwestern Nigeria], and the Yoruba-Americans, pulsing with ceaseless creativity richly stabilized by precision and control, will safeguard the passage of its people through the storms of time."[8] The slaves clung to the one art that left no artifacts for slave owners to destroy--music.

Human beings use music to define place, community, and tribe. We secure ourselves in time and within our generation with music. Sometimes we construct a fortress of music so impenetrable to outsiders that they throw up their hands and leave us alone. Sometimes, to our surprise, we create from our pain and alienation something so compelling that people outside our little group are struck in their hearts. They drop what they are doing and stand and listen. Suddenly, they see us. We are less different than they had imagined.

As the Africans became Americans, they applied their aesthetic values to their circumstances and created the blues, a music so emotive and rich with possibility that it birthed jazz and rock 'n' roll within decades of its own conception. "In a sense," blues historian Alan Lomax has said, Africans "made an aesthetic conquest of their environment in the New World."[9]

They made quite a dent in English, too. Early scholars assumed that most African American slang derived from efforts to speak English. Linguists have since traced many English words--even many assumed to be European in origin--to African origins.

The Wolof people were the first contributors of African words to American English. Their wealthy empire was in western Senegal along the Gambia River. In 1673, however, the Islamic Fulani, who lived just east of the Wolof Empire, waged a *jihad*, or holy war—raiding Wolof territories in an attempt to convert the Wolof people to the Muslim religion. Over the next few decades, the Wolof were also attacked by their Islamic neighbors to the north, the Mauretanians. During these battles, many Wolof people were captured by Fulani and Mauretanians and sold to British slave traders. Traders taught English to some enslaved Wolof so they could be used as interpreters and mariners during voyages along the African coast.[10]

This influx of Wolof arrived in South Carolina between 1670 and 1750. Since some already knew a little English, and most arrived with useful skills such as blacksmithing, leatherworking, and butchery, they were employed primarily as house servants. As a result, many Wolof words passed into English, such as "yam," "banana," "bug" (from *bugal*, to annoy), "chigger" (from *jiga*, for insect, or sand flea), and the use of "guy" as a personal address (from *gay*, meaning "fellows" or "persons").[11]

By 1730, the slave trade was reaching beyond the Senegambia region into the Central Africa homeland of the Bantu civilization. Large numbers of Bantu people from the Kongo Empire of southwest Africa (now northern Angola, Cabinda, Republic of the Congo, and the western section of the Democractic Republic of the Congo) were sold into slavery and shipped to South Carolina in the mid-to-late 1700s. [12]

These people, known as Bakongo or Kongo, were used mostly as field hands. Since they had much less contact with slave-owners than the Wolof, they were able to retain more of their culture intact. Scholars have documented many survivals of Bantu speech, cooking, music, dance, art, and religion in African American culture. One Bantu-speaking tribe, the Kimbundu, called a stringed musical instrument they brought to the Southern colonies the *mbanza*. In English it became banza, banjar, bangie, and finally "banjo." We also have "jiffy" from the Bantu *tshipi*, which means "short" or "in a second,"[13] and "booboo" from the Bantu *mbubu*, which means "blunder".[14]

How much African language has seeped into American English becomes apparent when we try to figure out why musicians say things like, "That cat can really play, man." The Wolof word for "singer" is *katt*. It refers especially to highly accomplished singers, such as the Wolof griots, who can keep their listeners enthralled over many long verses.[14] In addition, the Wolof suffix *-kat* is agentive, meaning it indicates a person. Adding *kat* after an adjective creates a compound word. The Wolof adjective *hipi* describes someone who is open-eyed and hyper-aware. A *hipi-kat*, therefore, is a person who is on the ball, or a "hepcat."[15]

Blues language is packed with such fascinating African retentions, yet it also reflects the freewheeling all-American lingo of the underground economy African Americans developed to survive Jim Crow. Musicians picked up slang from the illegal lottery business, for example, as Dr. John noted in the Foreword. Blues artists--looking to steal from the best, like all songwriters--nicked words and phrases from the numbers runners, hookers, drag queens, thieves, junkies, pimps, moonshiners, hoodoo doctors, dealers, rounders, and con artists who made up the street set.

Today, the language of the blues is beloved worldwide. As Texas blues guitarist Jimmie Vaughan exclaims, "I played in Finland near the North Pole and people were singing the words. You can talk about the influence of black blues and gospel on American music, but it's not just America, it's the globe."[16]

When I was growing up in the Midwest, however, rock was king and the blues were considered a quaint and--in the African American community—somewhat embarrassing relic. As B.B. King related in his moving autobiography, *Blues All Around Me*: "The blues represent a painful past; for some, the blues stand for a time when we didn't have pride and hadn't made progress. No one likes opening up old wounds. But in my mind, my blues always had dignity." The blues song, King noted, is "the one form that's followed our path from slavery to freedom."[17]

I didn't know this when I flew out of my seat and onto the dance floor at the tiny Metropole Theater on Milwaukee's Oakland Avenue while Koko Taylor growled and shimmied through "Wang Dang Doodle." I'd never danced in my life and had never heard raw blues, but this beautiful fierce lady, shining with sweat, and Son Seals--her tough, economical guitarist--grabbed me by the gut.

A few weeks later, I drove with my new boyfriend, a hyperactive blues fanatic who was a ringer for a freckled teenage Paul McCartney, to a cornfield about an hour south of Milwaukee. B.B. King was standing on a plywood stage with his guitar, Lucille, resting on his belly and his arms at his sides. It was a muggy summer afternoon and the Wisconsin state bird--the mosquito--was out in full force.

Neither heat nor bugs had prevented King and his band from mounting the makeshift steps to the stage wearing crisp white dinner jackets with snappy black bow ties, black knife-crease trousers, and patent leather shoes polished to a blinding shine. The generator, on the other hand, which had been able to handle the minimal electrical requirements of John Lee Hooker's solo set of mournful blues, was struggling with the task of powering King and crew. It cut out intermittently, often stranding King mid solo.

There's no better excuse for a guitarist to throw a fit, but King took it with a coolness that would have made a Yoruba elder proud. He smiled and shrugged his shoulders, gesturing at Lucille as if to say, "I'd be happy to play her but it won't do a damn bit of good."

Once the power kicked back on for good, there was no stopping B.B. King. There were maybe sixty people kicking up the dusty dirt in front of the stage--all black except for my boyfriend and me. Two fierce hours later, we looked up from our earnest dancing to find ourselves surrounded by a circle of people clapping and laughing and egging us on as the sun slowly dropped in the sky.

I thought about that magical evening when I went to the Apollo Theatre in Harlem almost twenty years later to see King for the second time. A line of middle-aged African Americans, Japanese tourists, bearded young hipsters, and graying hippies stretched for two blocks down 125th Street, prompting some B-boys to stop and ask "Who be jammin'?" At the answer, "B.B. King," they nodded knowingly, said "Tha's all right," and moved on.

King's band, led by his nephew, Walter King, was as crisp and tight as the players' ever-present white dinner jackets and black bow ties. Before the boss took the stage, the band cranked out some blistering jazz that gave each of the three hot horn players a chance to pin back our ears.

Only a giant like B.B. King could step in front of such sophisticated musicians and rivet all attention on himself with a single vibrating note. He strode onstage, resplendent in a pearly tux, and opened "Let The Good Times Roll" with a note so clear, so commanding, and so unmistakably his that ear-to-ear grins broke out across the theater. People were too happy to holler; they just grinned at the stage and at each other. By the second song, "Chains Of Love," the audience was clapping along as King's horn section high-stepped it, the stocky trumpet player snapping his neat shaved skull back and forth in time.

Near the end of the show, King quietly remarked, "You know, Apollo, many times in my life people would talk about the blues so bad, that it made me feel like I was black twice." As the crowd nodded and murmured, he sat down to sing, "I'm a blues man, but I'm a good man, understand."

By the time King closed his transcendent set with "The Thrill Is Gone," the aisles were dotted with dancing women and entire rows of arms were swaying in the electric air of the Apollo. "Shake your boogie, son," King commanded his trumpet player, and James Bolden hit a deep squat and pumped his hips faster than a pile driver. Under the fancy ceiling of the Apollo Theatre, the heart of Africa beat through the blues.

Debra Devi
Hoboken NJ

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[1] *Blues People* by LeRoi Jones, p. 2 (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963).
[2] *The African Heritage of American English* by Jospeh E. Holloway, Winifred K. Vass p. xx (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

[3] "Hear that Long Snake Moan," from *Shadow Dancing in the USA* by Michael Ventura (New York: St. Martins Press, 1985).
[4] Jones, p. 10.
[5] *The African Heritage of American English* by Joseph E. Holloway and Winifred K. Vass, p. 155, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 153
[7] "African Slave Trade," www.wikipedia.org
[8] *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy* by Robert Farris Thompson, p. 97 (New York: Random House, 1983).
[9] *The Land Where the Blues Began* by Alan Lomax (New York: The New Press, 1993).
[10] *Savannah Syncopators: African Retentions in the Blues* by Paul Oliver, p. 90 (New York: Stein and Day, 1970).
[11] Holloway and Vass, p. 141.
[12] Holloway and Vass, p. 143.
[13] Holloway and Vass, p. 138.
[14] *The Roots of the Blues* by Samuel Charters, p. 59. (Boston: M. Boyars, 1981).
[15] Holloway and Vass, pp. 137, 138.
[16] From the author's interview with Jimmie Vaughan.
[17] *Blues All Around Me* by B.B. King and David Ritz (New York: Avon Books, 1996).

LIST OF ENTRIES: ALCORUB TO ZUZU

A

ALCORUB

The drink of last resort for desperate alcoholics is alcorub, which is isopropyl or rubbing alcohol. In 1989 Kitty Dukakis, the wife of former Massachusetts governor and presidential candidate Michael Dukakis was rushed unconscious to the hospital in Boston after sucking down some rubbing alcohol while battling alcoholism and depression. If she had been hanging out with certain blues singers during Prohibition, she might have learned to sniff alcorub, or she could have resorted to the marginally less lethal **canned heat**.

Canned heat is obtained by extracting the alcohol from Sterno "Canned Heat" Cooking Fuel. During Prohibition, impoverished alcoholics also distilled alcohol from shoe polish by straining it through bread, drank **Jake** (a patent medicine), and sniffed alcorub to stave off the DTs.

Prohibition began creeping across the United States in 1913. By 1916 the manufacture, transportation, import, export, sale, and purchase of alcohol was illegal in 26 of the 48 states. On January 16, 1920, alcohol was outlawed across the nation by the 18th Amendment, which was ratified on January 16, 1919 and mandated that:
After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.

Prohibition created a profitable black market as huge quantities of booze were smuggled in from Canada and various Caribbean islands. This smuggling operation provided work and training to a new generation of ambitious young men, as one recalled:

"So I went to work for a friend of the family [in West Palm Beach]. He had two speedboats to go to the Bahamas and bring in bootleg whiskey. Those days the whole country was dry. I would go over to the Bahamas with a black man, Jack, that he had working for him. We would load the boat with fifty or sixty cases of whisky and start back at night. The man would bring the boat into the spot we had picked out by following the stars in the sky. We made at least three trips for Al Capone. He would have his cars at the spot where we would come in at and load the cars. Then they would go off to Chicago.[1]"

"We had to run the boat without lights. One night on our trip after loading the boat, [we were spotted] so we threw all the whiskey overboard. Without the whiskey there was no evidence. The Coast Guard did come up to us and told us to stop. We did. They searched the boat and did not find anything. They asked us where we were coming from.

We told him we had been to the Bahamas to see some girls and have a drink of some good whiskey. I know he did not believe us but it was the best story we could think of. They took the number of the boat, the name, and let us go. We had to tell our boss right away, then we had to go to the spot where the people were waiting for us to come in to tell them what happened. Those days it was understood that if we lost the load of whiskey, they had to pay for it regardless. But on the next load, we would not charge them any profit for us."[2]

The cost of enforcing Prohibition was initially estimated at six million dollars, but once the Coast Guard had to begin patrolling the oceans at night for smugglers, the cost skyrocketed. Smugglers bribed officials to look the other way, corrupting entire law-enforcement agencies while Capone and other bootleggers used their Prohibition profits to build organized and well-entrenched criminal empires. The cost of attempting to enforce Prohibition spiraled out of control. Meanwhile, the government was losing some $500 million annually in alcohol-related tax revenue.

In 1933, Congress caved in and passed the 21st Amendment to repeal the 18th Amendment. To appease the more rabidly Prohibitionist states, however, Congress added Section 2 of the 21st Amendment, which mandated that: *The transportation or importation into any State, Territory, or possession of the United States for delivery or use therein of intoxicating liquors, in violation of the laws thereof, is hereby prohibited.*

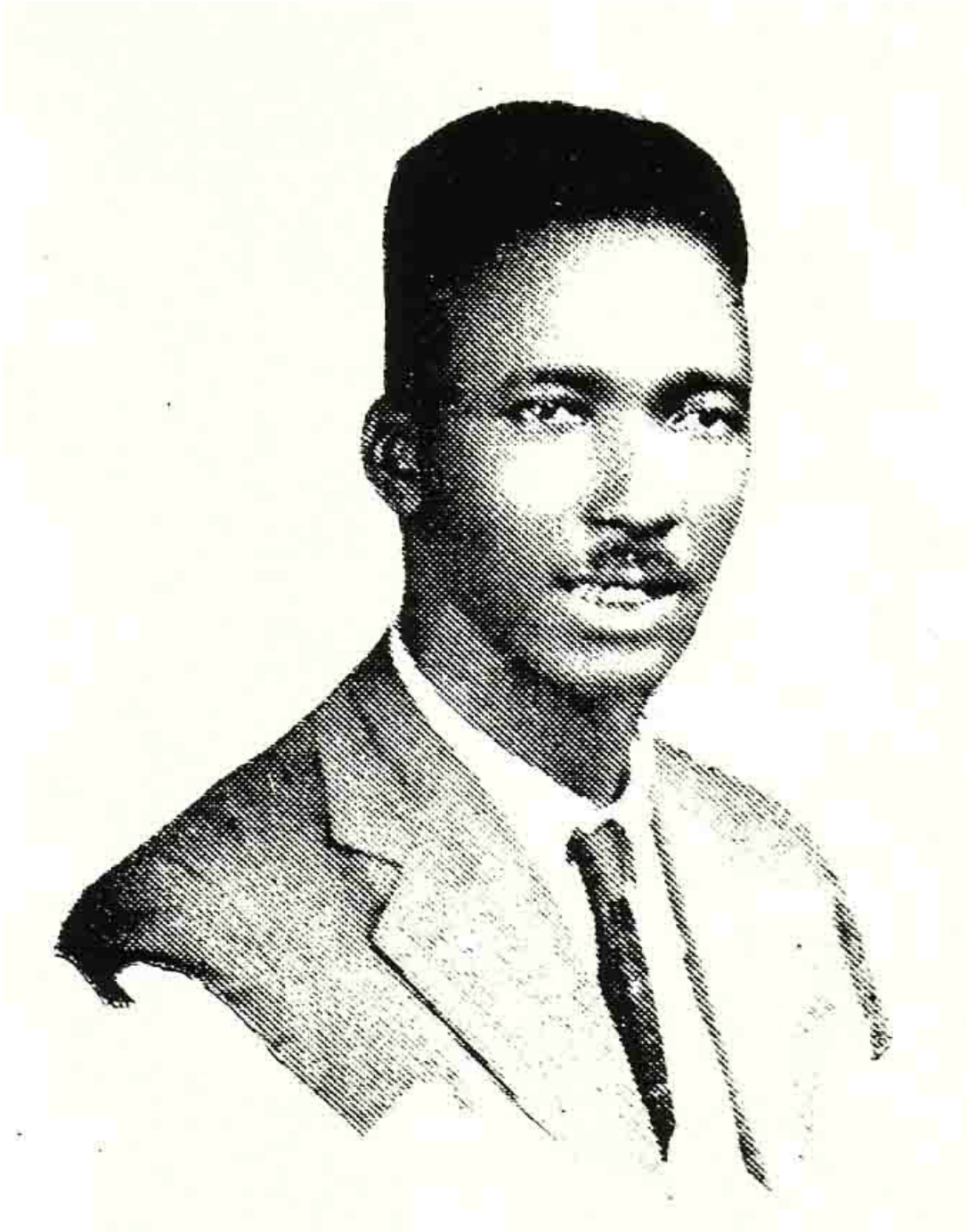
This put control of alcohol into the hands of the states, which over time ceded that power to cities and counties. It is invoked to this day whenever officials are looking for an excuse to yank the liquor licenses of unwelcome establishments.

Although people with money could get all the alcohol they wanted during Prohibition, from 1920 to 1933 affordable booze was hard to come by for itinerant alcoholics, hence the abuse of canned heat, and, as a very last resort, alcorub. As Tommy Johnson sang in "Canned Heat Blues" in 1929:

Crying canned heat Mama sure Lord killing me
Takes alcorub to take these canned heat blues

Tommy Johnson was just one of many musicians who have had their difficulties with alcohol (and drugs). Bonnie Raitt recalled that when she took time off from college in the early 1970s to go on the road with some artists that Dick Waterman managed, it was her job to keep track of who was drinking what. Of Son House, for example, Raitt recalled, "If he had a couple shots he could remember all his songs and if he had more than a couple he couldn't remember them. But if he had none,

he usually didn't want to play."



Tommy Johnson's only photo, Victor Records catalog 1928 *Courtesy Delta Haze Corporation photo archives*

"You get old guys who've been farmers and Pullman porters for twenty-five years and suddenly everybody wants to give them everything in any quantity," said Raitt, who fought her own battle with alcoholism and got sober in the mid-1980s. "It did a lot of them in," she added somberly.[3]

Songs:

"Canned Heat Blues"- Tommy Johnson

"Jig Head Blues"- Willard Thomas

ASHES HAULED

When Sleepy John Estes sang, "I need to get my ashes hauled," in "The Girl I Love, She Got Long Curly Hair" in 1929, he was expressing the less-than-romantic sentiment that he was feeling a bit backed up and needed to ejaculate. Getting one's ashes hauled does not necessarily mean that one participated in sexual intercourse. Any sexual act that leads to the desired result will do.

The term originated with the perceived need to visit a prostitute in order to "empty the trash." This justification reflected the notion, dating back to the Middle Ages, that semen must be "regularly vented to prevent a poisonous accumulation."[4]

Songs:
"I Let My Daddy Do That"- Hattie Hart
"Let Your Money Talk"- Kokomo Arnold

AXE

Axe is slang for a guitar. According to New Orleans-born pianist Dr. John (Mac Rebennack), musicians lifted "axe" from the illegal lottery business to give themselves a little anti-hero flair.

"An axe was a gun or a piece," Dr. John explained, "and they [gangsters] used to traditionally carry it in a **bag**."[5] The Thomson Submachine Gun, or Tommy gun, was a favorite. It was long and lean, like the new solid-body electric guitar developed by Slingerland in 1939.

The intense Chicago blues guitarist Frank "Son" Seals was nicknamed "Bad Axe" for his undeniable prowess on his instrument and his fierce demeanor on stage. Born in Osceola, Arkansas, Seals grew up around his father's juke joint, the Dipsy Doodle, soaking up sets by Albert King and Earl Hooker. Seals hit the road with King and Hooker when he was eighteen, and soon moved to Chicago, where he developed into one of the great powerhouses of the electric blues.

Seals released eleven albums, included 1984's *Bad Axe* (Alligator Records) before succumbing to complications from diabetes Dec. 20, 2004 at sixty-two.

Songs:
"Bad Axe"—Frank "Son" Seals
"Bless My Axe"—Kenny "Blue" Ray
"Just Playing My Axe"—George "Buddy" Guy

B

BACK DOOR MAN

A back door man is the secret lover of a married woman. He's the one scooting out the back door just as the man of the house is turning his key in the front door lock.

According to Clarence Major, author of *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang*, "The back door as an entrance/exit for blacks working in white homes during and after slavery perhaps gave the idea of the back door a great presence in the psyches of African Americans."[6]

The concept of the back door man as lover may also stem from the post-slavery phenomenon of the **sweet back papas**. These were men who dodged a lifetime of manual labor- the fate of most African American men in the South at that time- by becoming blues musicians and living off of women.

"These big-town blues players…" Big Bill Broonzy told William Ferris in *Blues from the Delta*, "They lived like a king because most of them had women cooking for some rich white man, and they lived in the servant's house behind the white man's house."[7] Blues musicians had the added allure of coins jingling in their pocket from playing house parties and **juke** joints.

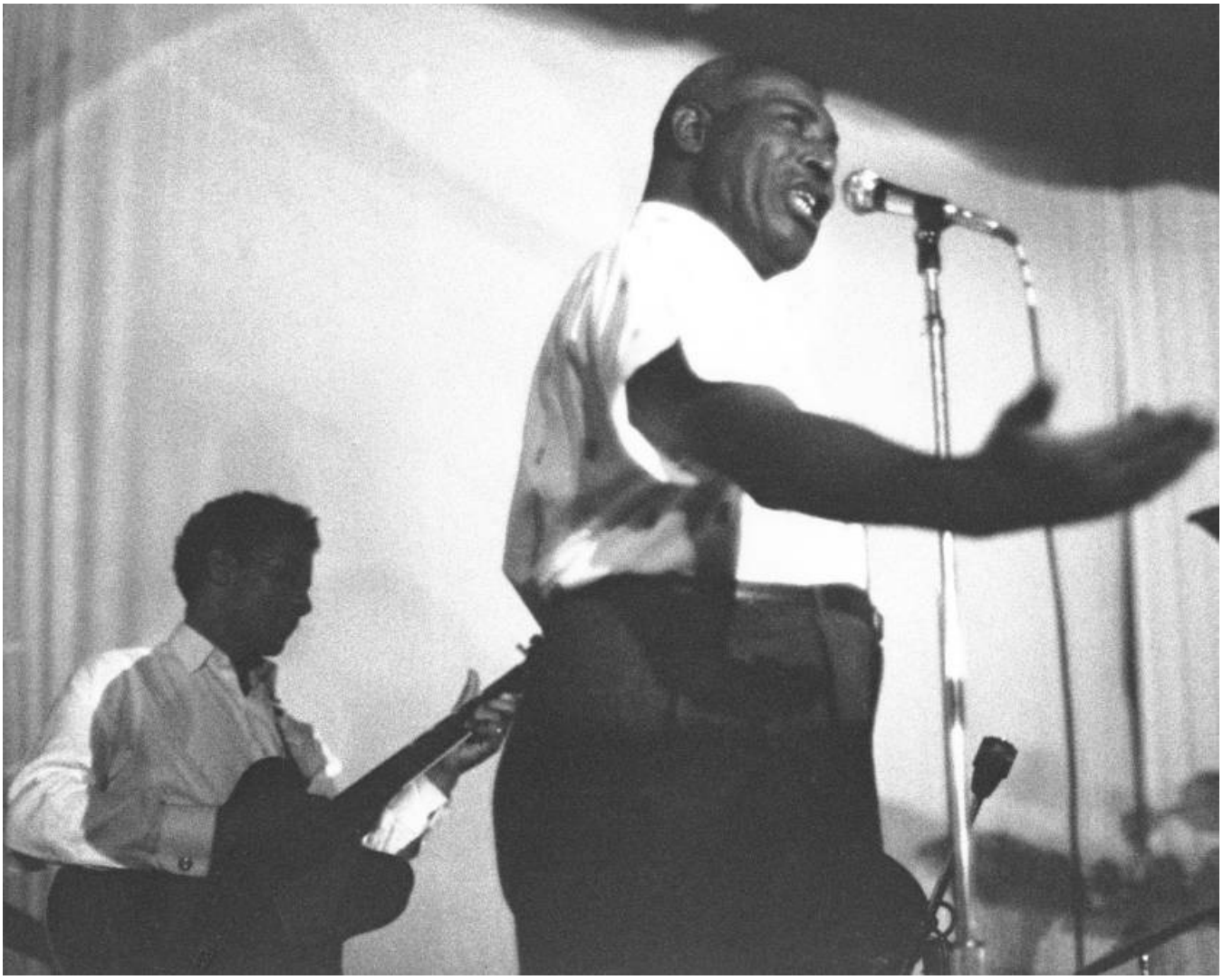
The lyrics sung to musicologist Alan Lomax by David "Honeyboy" Edwards one sultry afternoon in Friars Point, Mississippi in 1942 spell out the story. "Here's my toast," Edwards said:

My back is made of whalebone
My belly is made of brass
I save my good stuff for the working women
And the rest can kiss my ass

"Two things a musician likes, that's whisky and women," Edwards told Lomax. "And the womens likes us better than they do the average working man."[8]

Willie Dixon immortalized the back door man in a song he wrote for Howlin' Wolf, who drove "Back Door Man" home with the conviction of a man who had slipped out of more than his share of back doors.

According to Wolf's long-time guitarist Hubert Sumlin, "Wolf loved that song…'cause he was one! Know what I'm talking about? Someone who's with a married woman. The song consist of he got caught in these folks house, in this mad man's house. Hey, the man was gone! And so he got caught and like he says in the song 'If you see me coming out the window, I ain't got nothing to lose.'"[9]



Hubert Sumlin (l.) and Howlin' Wolf (r.), Avalon Ballroom, San Francisco, 1968 © *Sandy Schoenfeld, Howling Wolf Photos*

But what about Jim Morrison's leering cover of "Back Door Man," rumored to have more to do with a proclivity for anal sex than for married women? Were Dixon and Wolf also hinting at knocking on a different sort of back door? "No, it's not all of that," Sumlin responded in his calm and courtly fashion--atseventy-four still too much the Southern gentleman to bristle at a gauche question. "I imagine some people do think that, but if you listen real good at the whole song, you would get more out of it than that. It's about being at the bottom, running from a bad situation. Wolf, he did all this stuff. He got caught in that house and had to break out."[10]

According to Major, "In black culture, it [the back door] rarely refers to the anus, as it does in popular American culture."[11] By virtue of being white and singing to a white audience, however, Morrison gave "Back Door Man" a sexual twist- which must have given Morrison the poet and provocateur an extra dose of satisfaction.

Songs:

"Back Door Friend"- Lightnin' Hopkins (Sam Hopkins)
"Back Door Man"- Willie Dixon, performed by Howlin' Wolf (Chester Arthur Burnett)
"I Crave My Pigmeat"- Blind Boy Fuller (Fulton Allen)

BAG

If someone asks you, "What's your bag?" that person wants to know what you do, what motivates and excites you. Musicians use "coming out of a ____ bag" to describe their influences. An artist might say he or she is coming out of a "soul bag" or a "blues bag," for example. An equivocator might say, "I'm not coming out of a bag where I'm only about one thing." Numerous jazz albums have "bag" in the title, e.g. *Soul Bag* by trumpet player Willie Mitchell and *Blues Bag* by hard bop drummer Art Blakey.

Blues musicians use "in a **trick** bag" to mean being trapped in a bad situation. A trick bag is a **mojo** used to curse or "trick" someone, but "trick bag" came to mean any unpleasant situation, such as a bad love affair that is hard to leave.

According to Dr. John, musicians adapted "coming out of a bag" from the illegal lottery business in the same fashion that

they borrowed **axe**, which meant "gun," and used it to mean guitar. Originally, the street slang "coming out of a bag," meant to verbally or physically assault someone. As Dr. John explains in this book's Foreword, "You might hear something like, 'that bitch was coming out of a bag on her.' Well, in the lottery business if they was coming out of a bag, that meant they was pulling a piece [gun] on someone."[12]

To keep their **policy games** and numbers rackets from being shut down by the authorities, the lottery men bribed policemen and politicians. The "bagman" was originally a mob member entrusted with taking a bribe to a cop or councilman, but the term spread to corrupt police stations, which would designate a patrolman to be the precinct bagman. He'd collect the bribes from local mobsters and deliver them to the precinct captain.

The bagman was "the satchel man" down South, and it was not unheard of for the satchel man to go as high up as the governor. According to a Florida man who ran gambling houses in the 1940s, "The satchel man gets the money from people who have gambling houses and then he pays the Governor. Therefore, the Governor stays clean. We [gambling house owners] all went out for the new Governor and he was elected."[13]

Songs:

Blues Bag (Album)—Omar and the Howlers
"Bag Of Blues"—Art Blakey
"Star Bag"—Willis "Gator" Jackson

BALING WIRE

Baling wire is the pliable wire used to wrap bales of cotton or hay. Blues guitarists love to claim that their first guitars were made of baling wire tacked to the walls of their sharecropper homes. To make an instrument, one end of the wire is secured to the ground with bricks or rocks, while the other end is nailed to a wall. The player uses one hand to pluck the wire and the other to slide a bottle along its surface for a keening sound.

This makeshift guitar is called a "one-strand-on the-wall," and was typically made with baling wire or wire pulled from a broom. It is also called a "diddley bow," after the African musical bow made with a single string stretched across a gourd.

Howlin' Wolf guitarist Hubert Sumlin learned to play a one-strand by watching his older brother: "Yeah, my brother he had the wire upside the wall--baling wire, what you bale hay with. That's the only string we had at the time. So it's wrapped around a big old nail and the nail drove into the wall. Sometimes it come loose, so I put up another string.

"I wasn't listening to anything yet, just my brother. I was looking at his playing. It sounded like moaning and everything. Finally I got this old warped record by Charlie Patton. I found this old 78 record- it was so warped the only thing I could hear was this guy moaning. But boy what a sad moan! Yes it was. I loved it. After the moan, the record shattered. It just shattered 'cause it was so warped. That's the only thing I heard about that guy, but I started to get all the numbers that he made. All down the line. I learned off those records and my mother got me a guitar."[14]

Hubert Sumlin, San Francisco Blues Festival, 2005 *Mike Shea, Tritone Photography*

During a 1975 interview, B.B. King told William Ferris, director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, how bricks were used to make a one-string: "Once you nailed this nail in there, put that wire around these two nails, like one on this end and one on the other and wrap it tight. Then you'd take a couple of bricks and you'd put one under this side and one under that one that would stretch this wire and make it tighter. And you'd keep pushing that brick, stretching this wire, making it tight until it would sound like one string on the guitar. Like that."[15]

Blues musicians also used baling wire to make one- and two-stringed instruments similar to those found throughout West Africa, where they are fashioned with resonators made of carved wood, a gourd, or a tin can.[16] Big Bill Broonzy explained: "When I was about ten years old I made a fiddle out of a cigar box, a guitar out of goods boxes for my buddy Louis Carter, and we would play for the white people's picnics."[17]

Big Joe Williams recalled making a one-string guitar for himself as a child by stapling two thread spools to a small box and stretching bailing wire between the spools. He played it with the neck off a half-pint whisky bottle.[18] Harmonica players also used bailing wire to make neck racks for their **harps** so they could play guitar and harmonica at the same time.

BALLING THE JACK

When a conductor got a locomotive steaming at top speed, he was said to be balling the jack, as in "they were balling the jack at the time of the wreck."37 The train was the jack--short for "the jackass carrying the load." To "ball" meant to go flat out, pedal to the metal, and came from the railman's hand gesture signaling the crew to go faster.

By the 1920s, the expression "balling the jack" had leapt from the rail yards into the popular lexicon as an expression for any wild, all-out effort--from dancing to sex to, for gamblers, risking everything on a single toss of the dice. Shortened to "balling," it came to mean having a wild time in and out of bed.

The phrase was given a push by the Balling the Jack fad, which reportedly began as a sexy **juke joint** dance involving plenty of bumping and grinding. It evolved into a group dance "involving vigorous hand clapping and chanting or singing," according to *From Juba to Jive* by Clarence Major. [19]

A variation was performed in 1913 at the Lafayette Theater in Harlem in a play called *The Darktown Follies*. Theatrical producer Florence Ziegfeld caught the play and liked the dance so much that he bought the rights to it for his Follies of 1913. [20] Chris Smith (music) and James Henry Burris (lyrics) wrote "Balling the Jack" for the Follies based on the African American ragtime tune. The Balling the Jack craze swept white America, eventually getting mixed in with the Lindy Hop to become a popular swing step. Judy Garland and Gene Kelly performed the Smith/Burris version of "Balling the Jack" in the 1942 film *Me and My Gal*:

As Bessie Smith sang in "Baby Doll" in 1926, a man can make up for a lot by being a good dancer:

He can be ugly, he can be black
So long as he can eagle rock and ball the jack

Songs:
"Baby Doll"- Bessie Smith/H.Webman
"St. Louis Blues"- W.C. Handy (William Christopher Handy)
"I Feel So Good"- Big Bill Broonzy (Willie Lee Conley Broonzy)

BANJO

Enslaved members of the Kimbundu, a Bantu-speaking tribe from Angola, brought a stringed instrument they called the *mbanza* to the American colonies as early as 1630. By 1781, it had caught the attention of Thomas Jefferson, who wrote: "The instrument proper to them [enslaved Africans] is the Banjar, brought from Africa, and which is the origin of the guitar, its chords being precisely the four lower chords of the guitar."[21]

Jefferson was likely referring to the banjar's strings, not "chords." The ukelele-banjo is typically tuned in the same intervals as the guitar, while the standard banjo's four strings are tuned to the same intervals as a violin's.

African languages are complex and interwoven. Bantu, for example, is not a single language; it is a group of languages held together by a common core language called Luba-Kasai that contains forty-seven percent of over 500 terms common to all the Bantu languages.[22] The word *mbanza*, therefore, is strictly speaking a Bantu-Kimbundu word. In the colonies, *mbanza* became banza, banjar, bangie, and finally banjo.

The slaves made their banjos from gourds, wood, and tanned skins and strung them with hemp or gut strings. Until the 1800s the banjo was considered a strictly African instrument by Southern whites who, like Jefferson, had observed their slaves playing it at dances.

In the 1830s, however, white minstrel performers began using it in their blackface acts. At first these acts were relatively straightforward imitations by Southern whites of the songs and dances they had seen, and sometimes participated in, back home, but in the years leading up to the Civil War (which began in 1861), the caricatures became increasingly vicious.

The minstrels' mocking of African songs and dances brought the banjo to the attention of the nation, but prompted many African Americans to abandon the instrument, leaving it for Southern whites to use in bluegrass and country music.

The banjo was introduced to Europe when the Virginia Minstrels toured England, Ireland, and France in 1843, 1844, and 1845.[23] Their leader, an American of Irish descent named Joel Walker Sweeney, has been widely credited with adding a droning fifth string, called the "chanterelle," to the banjo. Paintings dating before Sweeney's birth in Virginia in 1810, however, show the fifth string on plantation banjos, which makes sense given that droning strings had been used for centuries on African and Indian instruments, such as the Senegambian *akonting*, with its short drone string, and the Indian *tanpura* (or *tampura*).

Banjos were fretless until 1878, when Henry Dobson of New York State created a fretted model to improve intonation. Banjos were plucked with the fingers until the invention of steel strings at the turn of the century enabled players to experiment with metal and ivory picks. Some players began removing the fifth drone string to make fast picking easier.

Modern bluegrass banjo players tend to fingerpick using metal picks worn on the thumb, index, and middle fingers. Old-time players have retained the African American style of picking, called "frailing," in which the index finger brushes the fretted strings on the downbeat and the thumb picks the drone string on the upbeat.[24]

During the swing era, the Duke Ellington band was the first to drop the banjo for the guitar. Other swing bands soon followed suit, and in response guitar companies developed the tenor guitar- a guitar tuned like a banjo- for working banjo players who needed to switch but didn't want to learn a new tuning.[25]

BARRELHOUSE

A barrelhouse is a bar where whiskey is served straight from the barrel. Add a piano and you've got a party. Rural South barrelhouses were rough wooden shacks where African American laborers gathered to drink and dance at the edge of small towns and levee camps. The up-tempo piano blues played in these establishments came to be called barrelhouse, as well, as in "I want to hear some barrelhouse tonight."

Barrelhouse piano playing was basically the blues sped up for dancing. It substituted a different percussive instrument- the piano- for the drums that had been outlawed during slavery. Like the African drummer who drives the dancers moving in front of him and is in turn inspired by them to play harder and faster, the barrelhouse piano got the bar swinging.

As Texas barrelhouse piano player Robert Shaw explained: "When you listen to what I'm playing, you got to see in your mind all them gals out there swinging their butts and getting the mens excited. Otherwise you ain't got this music rightly understood. I could sit there and throw my hands down and make them gals do anything. I told them when to shake it and when to hold it back. That's what this music is for."[26]

This raw, high-spirited playing began to take shape as **boogie-woogie**: a strident, uninhibited, and forcefully rhythmic new American music.

Songs:

"Barrel House Blues"- Lovie Austin, performed by Ma Rainey (Gertrude Pridgett Rainey)
"Change My Luck Blues"- Blind Lemon Jefferson (Lemon Jefferson)
"I Feel So Good"- Big Bill Broonzy (Willie Lee Conley Broonzy)
"Traveling Riverside Blues"- Robert Johnson

BAYOU

The word "bayou" comes from the Choctaw *bayuk*,[27] which French settlers in Louisiana appropriated as *bayouque*. It describes the brackish inlets and outlets from the Gulf of Mexico that meander sluggishly through the cypress swamps of the Louisiana lowlands.

The people living in the rural wetlands communities of Louisiana use the bayous like roads. "The road in front of my house ends at the swamp," noted blues guitarist Tab Benoit, who grew up in the boggy bayou of Houma, Louisiana, "and you go some more in a boat and reach the Gulf."[28]

Growing up, Benoit traveled north to Baton Rouge, where he heard the "swamp blues" of Slim Harpo, Lightnin' Slim, and Lazy Lester. Their songs reflect the easygoing quality of bayou life.

Songs:

"Bayou Boogie"- Tab Benoit
"Bayou Drive"- Clifton Chenier

BELLY FIDDLE

The "belly fiddle" was slang for the guitar from the early 1900s. It was especially popular during the swing era (1930s-1940s), when it seemed every instrument in the band had a corny name- the clarinet was a "licorice stick," the drums were "a suitcase," and the trombone was a "slush pump."

BISCUIT

The blues is loaded with culinary references to sex- this is a form of **signifying**, or the use of innuendo and doubletalk that is fully understood only by members of one's community. A delicate flaky biscuit dripping with butter and honey, therefore, becomes a metaphor for a delectable young woman, and her skilled lover is called a biscuit roller.

The biscuit roller can be male or female, as evidenced by Robert Johnson's lyric from "If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day":

I rolled and I tumbled and I cried the whole night long
Boy I woke up this morning, my biscuit roller gone

In the 1930s and 1940s the word biscuit was also sometimes used to refer to a human skull.[29] The King Biscuit Blues Festival in Helena, Arkansas, by the way, has nothing to do with any of these meanings for biscuit. It's named after the King Biscuit Flour Company, which used to sponsor the famous King Biscuit Time radio program.

Songs:

"Biscuit Roller Blues"- Kokomo Arnold (James Arnold)
"If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day"- Robert Johnson
"Big Mama's Door"- Alvin Youngblood Hart

BLACK CAT BONE

Europeans consider black cats unlucky, but African American **hoodoo** practitioners believe that every black cat has one magic bone that is a powerful **mojo**, or charm. Some hoodoo practitioners claim that carrying a black cat bone grants invisibility; others say it can be used to draw a roaming lover home or to dissolve a would-be lover's resistance. But the black cat bone's most notorious use is to bring fame, followed by an untimely death, to musicians who can't resist its lure.

When Muddy Waters recorded Willie Dixon's "Hoochie Coochie Man" in 1954, he added a list of charms guaranteed to "make you pretty girls lead me by the hand." First on the list was a black cat bone:

I got the black cat bone and I got a mojo, too
I got John the Conqueror Root, gonna mess with you

But how to get the bone out of the cat? According to bluesman Sam Taylor, who was born in Mobile, Alabama in 1934, there is only one method: boil the unfortunate animal alive.[30]

Sam Taylor rocks the Pocono Blues Festival, 2002. *Photo ©Joseph A. Rosen*

Taylor recalled that as a little child he eavesdropped behind the kitchen door while a touring **harp** player came by each

night for a solid week to beg Taylor's grandmother, the neighborhood **hoodoo** lady, for a black cat bone. When, despite her dire warnings, he kept coming, she finally told him, "I'm not goin' to get you one, but I'll tell you how to get one for yourself."

Grab hold of a black cat, she told him, and plunge it into a pot of boiling water. Boil until nothing's left but hair and bone. Take the bones down to the creek and toss them in.

"All the bones 'cept one will float downstream with the current, but that one will float back up to you," Taylor's grandmother told the young harp player. "That's your black cat bone."

Other methods include placing each bone on the tongue until one makes you invisible, or choosing the bone that floats to the top of the pot. Some use the cat oil that rises to the surface of the pot to anoint the bone and other charms for luck in gambling. A less gruesome method is to buy a "black cat bone"- most likely a chicken bone painted black- from an occult store.

According to Taylor, the harmonica player in his grandmother's kitchen was John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson, the peerless innovator who did for the harmonica what Louis Armstrong did for the trumpet. Williamson brought the harmonica front and center as a lead instrument and created new techniques that were widely imitated and formed the foundation of modern blues harp playing. John Lee Williamson is sometimes called "Sonny Boy" Williamson I; Aleck "Rice" Miller, who also used the name "Sonny Boy" Williamson, is "Sonny Boy" Williamson II.

Raised in the South, Williamson migrated to Chicago (with a black cat bone in his pocket?), where he recorded the hits that made him famous by the early 1940s.

John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson in Bluebird Records flyer, late 1930s *Photo courtesy Delta Haze Corporation*

On June 1, 1948, at the height of his fame, Williamson was murdered by a mugger. He was only thirty-two years old. His wife, Lacey Belle, found him that summer morning on the doorstep gasping his last words: "Lord have mercy."

Taylor grew up to play guitar for many legendary artists, including Etta James, T-Bone Walker, Big Joe Turner, Otis Redding, and the Isley Brothers. He was the musical director for the Sam and Dave band, providing the whistling on "(Sittin' On) The Dock Of The Bay," wrote the B.T. Express smash hit "Do It 'Til Your Satisfied," and performed with the popular Sam Taylor Band until his death at age 74 in 2009.

Songs:
"Got My Mojo Working"- Willie Dixon
"(I'm Your) Hoochie Coochie Man"- Willie Dixon
"Shootin' Star Blues"- Lizzie Miles

BLACK DOG

A black dog is a giant, hairy ghosthound that haunts a specific spot on a road, usually a **crossroads**. It is sometimes associated with a person or a family. In the Sherlock Holmes tale, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, as in many English legends, the sighting of a black dog indicates that someone will die soon after. Other stories describe the black dog as a protector of lost travelers. In England, black dogs are also called shucks, padfoots, shrikersor mauthe dogs.[31]

Black dogs are usually silent; they don't growl or bark. They just show up and quietly scare the bejeesus out of a lone traveler. Black dogs haunt roads, or areas near water. Sometimes the dog protects the traveler from harm, other times it offers silent companionship by trotting alongside for a while and then abruptly disappearing.

A black dog may also appear to foretell the death of the traveler or one of the traveler's loved ones. Or, it may be the messenger, as well as the symbol, of a partner's infidelity, as in the Lightnin' Hopkins tune "Hear My Black Dog Bark."[32]

If you want to encounter a black dog, try walking alone on a dark country road in the middle of the night.

Songs:
"Black Dog Blues"- Blind Blake (Arthur Blake)
"Hear My Black Dog Bark"- Lightnin' Hopkins (Sam Hopkins)

BLUES

The most popular version of the musical structure known as "the blues" follows a twelve-bar, I-IV-V chord progression, and typically repeats a lyric line twice at the beginning of each verse. The blues form is described in European musical terms as based on a major scale with the third and dominant seventh notes flattened, or as a twelve-bar sequence of tonic, subdominant, and dominant seventh chords.

"Such a definition," LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) argued in *Blues People*, "is like putting the cart before the horse…. The fact is that [these] are attempts to explain one musical system in terms of another, to describe a non-diatonic music in diatonic terms."[33] The blues cannot be defined in strictly African terms either, however. The best way to define the blues may be to say that blues music is an American music that reflects African musical devices and aesthetics.

Even though their native languages and music were forcibly suppressed, African slaves in the American colonies managed to hold onto the aesthetic values of African music- and these profoundly influenced the development of American popular music. Blues, jazz, and rock reflect not only African musical and vocal techniques, but also African principles regarding musical improvisation and such aesthetic values as "coolness."

In Yoruba culture, for example, the ability to connect with one's inner divinity is described as (*itutu*) or "coolness." From this we get the American ideal of the **cool** or soulful musician. Interestingly, the color most often used to symbolize this quality in African art is blue.

"The blues" stems from the 17th-century English expression, "the blue devils," which described the intense visual hallucinations of *delirium tremens*, the trembling and psychosis associated with alcohol withdrawal. Shortened over time to "the blues," the phrase came to mean a state of emotional agitation or depression. Although there are happy, up-tempo blues songs (sometimes called "jump blues"), most blues songs mine a melancholic vein, and express feelings of loss and emotional turmoil.

For white Americans, "blue" meant "drunk" as early as the 1800s.[34] Among African Americans, an intimate couples dance called the **slow drag** that involved plastering as much of one's torso to one's partner's as possible and grinding the hips together very slowly was also called "the blues." A rural juke joint at the turn of the century would be jammed on a Saturday night with couples getting their drink on and doing the precoital shuffle to the accompaniment of a bluesman on guitar, stomping the beat out on the floor with his foot.

Although no one knows for sure, it seems probable that "blue," meaning drunk, led to a dance called "the blues" that got hotter and sexier the drunker the dancers became. In turn, the slow sensual music that accompanied the dance became known as the blues.

The link between "blue" and drinking and dancing is also indicated by "blue laws" that still prohibit sale of alcohol and operating of saloons on Sundays in some states. The term "blue law" was first used by the English Reverend Samuel Peters in his 1781 book *General History of Connecticut*, which caused a stir when it appeared in London during the American Revolution.

Peters described ludicrously punitive Sabbath observance laws purportedly enacted by the Puritan governors of Connecticut. Peters also convincingly described the "march of the frogs of Windham" and claimed that the Puritans were called "pumpkin-heads" in their new homeland. Peters' work was eventually discredited as a hoax, and he is believed to have made up the blue laws to poke fun at the colonies, which he had been forced to leave during the Revolution. Nonetheless, laws on the books prohibiting certain business and entertainment activities on Sundays are still referred to as blue laws.

Today musicians all over the world play the blues, often in the twelve-bar, I-IV-V chord progression structure. That format was imposed on the blues to some extent by William Christopher Handy, the first publisher of blues sheet music.

The superb singer, guitarist, and bandleader "Little" Milton Campbell, Jr., who was born in Inverness, Mississippi in 1934, remarked, "This is just my opinion, of course, but when W.C. Handy heard that gentleman [a slide guitarist] playing down in Tutwiler, Mississippi, it fascinated him and he set out and put it to bars. He created sequences- verse, chorus, and et cetera. But the old timers didn't really play that way. For instance, the late John Lee Hooker, he didn't play by bars, he didn't count- he just made a change whenever he felt like it. He didn't necessarily rhyme all his words, neither. Whatever he was thinking, whatever came up, that's what he was singing."[35]

Handy was so inspired by the Tutwiler guitarist that he devoted himself to transcribing blues songs from the region. He published his transcriptions as *Blues: An Anthology* in 1926. "I think W.C. Handy was trying his best to make the songs seem as professional as possible, yet also simple to play," Campbell explained, "so he put bars to the music where you could count, where it could be simple. Twelve bars with a turn-back." Little Milton added, "A lot of people have a wrong concept about the so-called blues. That word has helped and it has also hurt. It's given people an impression of raggedy alcoholics, dope heads, or what have you."

The blues evolved from the work songs and hollers slaves made up in the fields. "We were always singing in the fields. Not real singing, you know, just hollerin', but we made up our songs about things that was happenin' to us at the time, and I think that's where the Blues started," said Son House, the powerful Delta bluesman who inspired Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters.[36] (House may have been born as early as 1886, although 1902 is widely accepted as his birth year.)

The singing and drumming of the newly arrived slaves struck American chroniclers as weird, harsh, and "primitive," when it was anything but. Falsetto singing, for example, was one innovation that in Africa "is considered to be the very essence of masculine expression."[37] (Anyone who has become hot and bothered listening to early Bobby "Blue" Bland, or Prince, can testify to that.) African musicians were actually more advanced in the use of polyphonic, contrapuntal rhythms than their European peers were. While European composers explored harmonic complexity, Africans focused on rhythmic complexity. To African ears, Jones explained in *Blues People*, European music would have seemed "vapid rhythmically."

Son House (Eddie James Jr.) Berkeley Blues Fest, Nov. 21, 1969 *Photo by Steve LaVere, © 1969 Delta Haze Corporation*

Europeans also did not realize at first that because African languages are tonal, Africans can talk with their drums. African drummers vary pitches while drumming to mimic both the rhythms and pitches of tonal speech. In *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, John Miller Chernoff related how his Ewe drum teacher ordered them some beers:

"During my first day practicing with Gideon I was following him well until he suddenly performed a rather complicated series of rhythms and then went back to the basic rhythm he was showing me. A few minutes later a man who had passed at that moment returned with two bottles of beer."[38]

African "talking drums" emerged soon after the first Africans landed in Jamestown in 1619, but after a slave rebellion in the South Carolina colony in 1739, drums were banned. From the official account of the rebellion:

"On the 9th day of September last, being Sunday, which is the day the Planters allow them to work for themselves, some Angola Negroes assembled, to the number of twenty, at a place called Stonehow…. Several Negroes joined them, they calling out "liberty!" marched on with colour displayed and two drums

beating, pursuing all white people they met, and killing man, woman, and child…. They increased every minute by new Negroes coming to them, so that they were above sixty, some say a hundred, on which they halted in a field and set to dancing, singing, and beating drums, to draw more Negroes to them, thinking that they were victorious over the whole province, having marched ten miles and burnt all before them without opposition."[39]

The Slave Act of 1740 in South Carolina barred slaves from owning or using "drums, horns, or other loud instruments." Other colonies followed suit with specific legislation against the use of drums by slaves, such the Black Codes of Georgia, which forbade "beating the drum and blowing the trumpet."[40] Following the Nat Turner revolt of 1831, all the states imposed similar restrictions, and forbade slaves to learn to read or write.

Although their drums, songs, and languages were outlawed in the colonies, African slaves held fast to the remarkable rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic features of their music. They continued to employ vibrato, tremolo, overtones, and hoarse-voiced and shouting African vocal techniques to convey many shades of meaning. Over time they mingled all these features and techniques with the work songs they created and with the European hymns and folksongs they heard to create the blues.

Antiphonal singing--call and response between a lead singer and a chorus--is another feature of African music that survived

slavery and vitalized American popular music. Africans working in American fields did what they would have done at home: they improvised call-and-response shouts on the spot, to the rhythm of the task at hand. A lead worker chanted the opening lines, and the chorus of workers would answer. We hear this when James Brown sings "Get up!" and Bobby Byrd answers "Get on up!"[41]

African work songs praised the gods and gave thanks for the harvests, but in America the slaves were not allowed to refer to their gods and were not of a mind to give thanks for anything. Barred from singing in their languages, they sang in self-taught English, retaining the accents and syntaxes of native dialects as they shout-sang their laments:

No more driver call me
No more driver call me
No more driver call me
Many thousand die[42]

In church, the elements of African music- syncopation, polyphony, shouts, and call and response- transformed European hymns into spirituals that rocked the walls. In the fields, these elements resulted in the improvised work songs that birthed the blues.

Although very early blues did not have the twelve-bar, three-line AAB structure of the classic blues of the 1920s, the three-line structure of the blues verse that eventually emerged was a function of call-and-response singing. The lead singer would repeat a line twice while waiting for another singer to improvise a response. African spiritual chants often repeat an important line. Yorubans, for instance, rely on the poetic chants of a divination system called *Ifá* for insights into their personal problems[43]:

The life of Ifá surpasses water's coolness
The life of Ifá surpasses water's coolness
The speaker-of-all languages married a woman
Who herself bathed only in water that is cold
The life of Ifá surpasses water in its coolness

Work songs were primarily sung a cappella, but after Emancipation, the guitar and harmonica made it possible for traveling country blues singers to earn money playing for juke joint dances, passing their songs along in the process.

Over time, the blues developed into music played and listened to for pleasure, not for work. It became music that expressed the singer's individual struggles and passions, both carnal and spiritual. It is interesting that the idea of the instrumental solo, relatively unimportant in West African music, became very important in the blues, which emerged in a country that idolized the individual and had steamrolled over the concept of tribe altogether.

Unlike Africa's wandering **griots**, who keep tribal histories intact over centuries, emerging blues singers, according to musicographer Samuel Charters, used "little history and even less political comment." Charters wrote in *The Roots of the Blue*s that "The blues function in American black society as a popular love song- in the early period almost obsessively concerned with infidelity."[44] It is possible, however, that all those songs about wreaking revenge on a "no-good woman" who kept a man "in chains" were metaphorical expressions of the determination of African Americans to free themselves from oppression. (See also **signifying**.)

While Charters was in Africa, he observed that although their songs served different purposes: "The voices themselves [of blues singers and griots] had a great deal of similarity in tone and texture. If a griot like Jali Nyama Suso had sung in English the sound of his voice would have been difficult to distinguish from an Afro-American singer. There was the same kind of tone production, the same forcing of higher notes. In the gruffness of the lower range and the strong expressiveness of the middle voice I could hear stylistic similarities to singing I had heard in many parts of the South."[45]

Blues guitarists transferred African vocal devices to the guitar, bending the strings to reach intervals beyond the limitations of the frets, and mimic singing. They flatted the thirds, fifths, and sevenths into quartertones--blue notes.

Alan Lomax offered an interesting take on this in *The Land Where the Blues Began*. He theorized that "interval size is correlated cross-culturally to those factors that restrict the social independence of the individual."[46] He noted that where strict castes have developed, such as in India, musicians use quartertones and other intervals smaller than a second. In contrast, hunters and gatherers from more easy-going societies, such as Native American and African Pygmy, sing songs filled with great leaps, such as octaves and fifths. In sub-Saharan Africa, "where only a modest level of social layering stiffened social intercourse," the most common intervals were thirds and fifths. These were sometimes flatted but not nearly so much as they are in the blues.

Lomax attributed this favoring of narrowed intervals among blues musicians to "the painful encounter of the black community with the caste-and-class system of the post-Reconstruction period."[47] Freed by the Civil War, yet hemmed in by racism, African Americans wound up on very bottom of the social heap as day laborers and sharecroppers. "Homelessness and

orphaning were the order of the day for Delta working-class blacks, creating the wellspring of melancholy whose theme song was the blues," Lomax wrote.[48]

This very expression of a tough situation, however, became a way out of poverty for some African Americans. The country blues, sung by one singer accompanying him- or herself on guitar or banjo, evolved into the classic blues of the 1920s and 1930s, sung by such stars as Bessie Smith in front of a big band or piano-led combo. The blues gave options to women like Memphis Minnie and Bessie Smith, who without it might have spent their lives scrubbing white peoples' floors and washing their clothes. The blues drew together the descendants of once-disparate tribal people who had suffered sickening humiliations in a foreign land.

This new African-American community invigorated American music with not only African musical techniques and "coolness," but also its unique aesthetics for musical improvisation. While describing Ewe master drumming in *Studies in African Music*, A.M. Jones wrote, "To play a string of master drum standard patterns even if each is repeated several times is simply not African music. The full flower of the music is in the variations, of which the standard pattern is the nucleus. The musical technique is this: the master announces a standard pattern and repeats it several times to establish it. Now each standard pattern consists of several phrases or sentences. Any of these can serve as a nucleus for variations."[49] Jones might as well be giving the aesthetic code for a blues **jam** or American jazz.

Another African aesthetic that survived slavery and became fundamental to blues improvisation is the definition of mastery of an instrument as the ability to choose the perfect note to evoke an emotion, as opposed to dazzling technical displays. As Chernoff learned from his drum teachers, "One note placed at the right point in the music will prove the strength of the drummer more than the execution of a technically difficult phrase."[50] This is a guiding principle for blues musicians and is what distinguishes mature masters from showoff-y youngsters.

To see this more clearly, substitute "guitarist" for "drummer" in this observation from Chernoff: "One might imagine that the lead drummer would proceed directly through many styles in order to display his skill and make the music interesting with accentuation. Instead, those drummers considered to be the best do just the opposite. They take their time…. The aesthetic decision which constitutes excellence will be the timing of the change and the choice of a new pattern."[51] It's not about how many notes the musician plays; it's about whether he or she has cultivated the sensitivity and maturity to choose the *right* note.

"The blues contains those values," Texas blues guitarist Jimmie Vaughan agreed, adding, "If a musician can get the blues and what it says about space and feeling…the space is as important as the notes. Because if you don't have space, you don't allow time for the listener to feel what has been said."[52]

Somehow, as Africans became African Americans, they maintained their aesthetic codes -- even as their languages and songs were stomped out. Their great achievement was that they transferred these values to a new world and created a new music that today transcends racial and cultural boundaries, such that American blues artists can fly to Japan or Poland and be met by hordes of screaming fans who may not speak their language, but understand their music.

As guitarist Robben Ford likes to say, "The blues is a big house."[53] An astonishing amount of music has been birthed under its roof, all of it based on what is proving to be one of the strongest, most flexible, and inspiring musical frameworks ever created.

Songs:

"Advice Blues"- Big Bill Broonzy (Willie Lee Conley Broonzy)

"Country Farm Blues"- lyrics by Son House (Eddie James House, Jr.), music by Blind Lemon Jefferson (Lemon Jefferson)

"Revenue Man Blues"- Charlie Patton

BOOGIE

The word boogie may have taken several routes to arrive in American English by the 1700s. The Bantu word *mbuki* means to dance, and speakers in Sierra Leone on the west coast of Africa use *bogi* to mean to dance, especially to up-tempo music.[54] There's also the Bantu *beudi*, meaning ejaculation. Then there's the Hausa word *buga* and the Mande word *bugs*. Both mean to beat drums.

The noun "boogie" means the butt, the booty, or the rear end. The verb "boogie" usually means to shake the butt, or dance vigorously, but it can also mean to have sexual intercourse. Big Joe Turner used to holler in "Cherry Red," "I want you to boogie my woogie until my 'eyes' turn cherry red," but as Dr. John recalled in the Foreword to this book, "it's not really ''til my eyes get cherry red,' it's ''til your "mayoun" get cherry red.'

That's your vagina; it's a Creole word. That's how I used to hear it. And then the girls would answer: 'Well, then you can **hoochie** my coochie and toochie my noochie.' When I was a kid, that was old." [55]

In 1998, B.B. King closed his set at the Apollo Theater in Harlem with a funky extended version of his hit "The Thrill Is Gone." "Shake your boogie, son," King commanded his trumpet player, a powerfully built young man in an elegant suit. The

trumpet player hit a deep squat, pumping his hips like a pile driver.
Songs:
"All Night Boogie (All Night Long)"- Howlin' Wolf (Chester Burnett)
"B.B.'s Boogie"- B.B. King (Riley King)
"Boogie Chillun"- John Lee Hooker

BOOGIE-WOOGIE

The fast and funky piano music called boogie-woogie evolved from barrelhouse, the earliest form of piano blues. Barrelhouse was basically the blues sped up to spur on hard-partying dancers in country taverns around the turn of the 20th century. To the barrelhouse blues, boogie-woogie players added a steady walking bass line played with the left hand.

"Boogie-woogie" is derived from the Bantu phrase *mbuki-mvuki*, which means to dance wildly, to the point of ecstasy. It can be translated literally as "I take off (in flight)" or "I shuck off all clothing that hinders my performance."[56]

Boogie-woogie can certainly inspire dancers to shed some clothing. Because of the disreputable nature of the dancing inspired by the music, boogie-woogie also became slang in some parts of the South for a case of syphilis.

Boogie-woogie was sometimes called "Western" piano, probably because it, along with ragtime, was so popular in the saloons of Western mining and logging camps. Unlike ragtime, which was mostly composed, boogie-woogie was largely improvised. The boogie-woogie pianist's bass line usually follows the same I-IV-V chord progression as a twelve-bar blues, while he or she plays chords and improvises melodies with the right hand.

One of the earliest recorded boogie-woogie tunes is "Cow Cow Blues," written and recorded in 1926 by boogie pianist Charles "CowCow" Davenport, who learned to play piano and organ in his father's church from his mother, who was the church organist. Unfortunately for his budding career with the church, Davenport was expelled from the Alabama Theological Seminary in 1911 for playing ragtime at a church function.

Soon this church-raised young man was touring carnivals and playing with vaudeville acts. He headed north to Chicago, where he played clubs and parties and worked as a talent scout for Brunswick and Vocalion records in the late 1920s.

Like Davenport, other boogie-woogie pianists migrated to Northern cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and Kansas City, where so many African Americans found work after World War I in the slaughterhouses and factories. This first generation of boogie-woogie players also included Jimmy Blythe, Hersal Thomas, Little Brother Montgomery, Cripple Clarence Lofton, Jimmy Yancey, and Pinetop Smith.[57]

The boogie-woogie pianists were in great demand in bars and brothels, and at parties thrown to raise the rent. These rent parties could last all night…or all weekend. LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) reported in *Blues People* that: "The Third Ward of Newark once boasted for several months, until the law moved in, a rent party promoted by two blues singers called 'The Function' and which advertised that one could 'Grind till You Lose Your Mind.'"[58]

In return for tips and all they could eat and drink, the piano players kept the people grinding all night long. In "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie," Clarence "Pine Top" Smith encouraged partygoers:

I want you to pull up on your blouse, let down on your skirt
Get down so low you think you're in the dirt

Chicago blues guitarist Jody Williams attended similar "quarter parties" in Chicago in the 1950s. "Basically they were the same thing as rent parties- you paid a quarter to get in," Williams explained.[59] Chicago also had "wild game dances," according to Williams. "Some of these social clubs were hunting clubs. They would go deer hunting or go up to Canada and hunt moose, stuff like that. They'd come back and have a wild game dance. The venison or whatever would be cooked and you'd pay, let's say, two dollars fifty cents to get into the dance. With that two dollars and fifty cents you'd get a wild game dinner."

The rent party favorite, "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie," was the first record to use boogie-woogie in the title. Recorded in 1928, it was extremely influential. Its distinctive theme appears in many other boogie, rhythm and blues (R&B), and rock 'n' roll tunes. Sadly, a stray bullet killed Pinetop in 1929 during a melee at a Chicago dance hall.

By the 1920s, according to Jones, "you usually weren't allowed to play blues and boogie-woogie in the average Negro middle-class home [in New York and other Northern cities]. That music supposedly suggested a low element."[60] That all changed in the 1930s when the white jazz impresario John Hammond decided to track down Meade Lux Lewis, one of the greatest of the Chicago boogie-woogie giants. In Hammond's autobiography, *John Hammond: On the Record*, he recalled, "Ever since 1928 when I first heard Clarence 'Pinetop' Smith's original boogie-woogie piano, I had been fascinated by this eight-to-the-bar left-hand blues style, which had never been recognized by white audiences. And when I heard a record of 'Honky Tonk Train Blues' in 1931 I knew I had found the ultimate practitioner in Meade Lux Lewis. But no matter where I looked, or whom I asked, I couldn't find him. Now years later in Chicago, I raised the question again while chewing the fat

with [boogie pianist] Albert Ammons. 'Meade Lux?' said Albert. 'Why sure. He's working in a car wash around the corner.' And so he was!"[61]

Shocked that his hero was working in a car wash, Hammond brought Ammons and Lewis together with Pete Johnson- another fine pianist Hammond had discovered while visiting Kansas City to audition the Count Basie band. The trio put some numbers together for the "From Spirituals to Swing" concert Hammond was planning for 1938 at Carnegie Hall. Playing boogie-woogie solo, in duets, and as a trio, they were the hit of the concert, which kicked off a nationwide boogie-woogie craze.

The Boogie-Woogie Trio, as Ammons, Lewis, and Johnson were called, were hired after the concert by New York's first racially integrated nightclub, Café Society in Greenwich Village. They and Kansas City blues singer Big Joe Turner presided there for several years, making comfortable livings from their music.

Cow-Cow Davenport, meanwhile, was working as a washroom attendant at the Onyx Club on 52nd Street in New York in 1942 when Freddie Slack's Orchestra scored a huge hit with his take on Davenport's "Cow Cow Blues," "Cow Cow Boogie," sung by Ella Mae Morse. The song fueled the early 1940s boogie-woogie craze and led to a revival of interest in Davenport's music. [62]

Although the boogie-woogie craze, which resulted in such unfortunate pop excursions as "Chopin's Polonaise in Boogie" and "Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat," died down around the end of World War II, its influence was huge and lasting. Where would Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, and Chuck Berry have been without it?

Songs:

"Pinetop's Boogie Woogie"- Pinetop Smith (Clarence Smith)

"Joe Turner Blues"- Big Bill Broonzy (Willie Lee Conley Broonzy)

"Tell Me Mama"- Little Walter (Marion Walter Jacobs)

BOTTLENECK

Although early slide guitar players used knives and polished bones as slides, by the Depression era blues guitarists were breaking the necks off of bottles and polishing the edges over campfires to create bottleneck slides. The first blues ever documented in writing, though, was played by a guitarist using a knife, as described by William Christopher (W.C.) Handy.

Handy had fallen asleep while waiting for a train in Tutwiler, Mississippi in 1895 when he was awakened by a strange, haunting melody. "A lean, loose jointed Negro had commenced plunking a guitar beside me while I slept," Handy wrote. "His clothes were rags; his feet peeped out of his shoes. His face had on it some of the sadness of the ages. As he played, he pressed a knife on the strings of the guitar in a manner popularised [sic] by Hawaiian guitarists who used steel bars. His song, too, struck me instantly. 'Goin' where the Southern cross the dog.' The singer repeated the line three times, accompanying himself on the guitar with the weirdest music I had ever heard."[63]

A traveling minstrel musician at the time, Handy was so inspired by the sound that he dedicated the rest of his life to exposing the blues to the world. In addition to composing "St. Louis Blues" and other blues-related songs, Handy worked tirelessly transcribing authentic blues songs, which he published in *Blues: An Anthology* (1926).

We'll never know the identity of the first guitarist to take a bone or a polished stone and slide it along a gut string. Since African slaves brought the technique with them to the American colonies, it likely originated in Africa. Then again, modern North Indian guitarists, such as Debashis Battacharya, use slides, too. So did the Hawaiian guitarists that W.C. Handy mentioned.

The sophistication of Battacharya's slide playing was evident at his performance at the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan in 1995. With his wide-bodied guitar flat on his lap, braced by the heel of his bare foot, Battacharya moved a solid metal slide in his left hand in quick flourishes, pulling out microtonal melodies anchored by the steady bass rhythms he drummed with the pick on his right thumb. Battacharya encored with a simple North Indian folk song so undeniably bluesy that it would have sounded like an American blues instrumental if the other performer on the bill, John Hammond, had played it on his Dobro.

The modern guitar is a direct descendant of the *oud*, an Arabic lute that was introduced to Europe during Spain's Muslim reign. Both the quartertone singing of Indian and Arabic singers and the sophisticated slide guitar playing found in North India hint at a strong connection between the Muslim world and the blues. The technique that Handy witnessed- that of pressing a knife on guitar strings- has been traced to Central and West Africa, where people play one-string zithers that way. Handy assumed the technique was borrowed from Hawaiian guitar playing, but it's possible that the itinerant guitar player Handy heard was manifesting African roots. Howlin' Wolf's guitarist Hubert Sumlin, who was born near Greenwood, Mississippi in 1931, agreed, saying, "The way the guitar was played with the slide was coming from African people."[64]

Depression-era guitarists wore bottlenecks on the ring or little fingers of their fretting hands. Slide players also used small

medicine bottles or snuff bottles, which didn't require cutting or firing. Country blues players used a variety of slides, from knives, pieces of copper pipe, and bottles to the polished cow bone favored by Joe Holmes, a.k.a. King Solomon Hill, on his recordings for Paramount in 1932.[65]

Slide guitarists who played rock, such as Duane Allman and Ron Wood, cited blues players like Elmore James and Bukka White as their primary influences. The rock and blues slide players of the 1960s often employed glass medicine bottles. "Back in the sixties some of us used the little glass bottle that contained a brand of cold pill called Coricidin," David Evans noted in a column for *Blues Revue* magazine.[66]

The 1970s ushered in the first notable female bottleneck player- Bonnie Raitt, whose debut album in 1971 featured traditional blues from the repertoires of Robert Johnson and Sippie Wallace and guest appearances by harp wizard Junior Wells and Chicago sax man A.C. Reed. Raitt's eloquent slide guitar playing won annual readers' polls in *Guitar Player* magazine over and over, making her the first woman to get into the *Guitar Player* "Gallery of Greats." "I don't mean to sound ungrateful," Raitt said modestly, "but it's kind of embarrassing winning those polls when there are so many great slide players out there. I really have a drive while I'm still well known to focus some attention on people like Roy Rogers, Sonny Landreth and John Mooney."[67]

Different slides produce different tones. Raitt and Ry Cooder favor the smooth sustain provided by a bottleneck. Keith Richards likes the more biting tone of a metal slide. Duane Allman used Coricidin bottles (after having personally emptied them, one can assume). Lipstick covers work, as do straight razors, pocketknives, toilet paper rollers, pens, cigarette lighters, small juice cans, beer bottles…anything with a smooth surface that can be held in the fretting hand. The most common way to play slide is by wearing a slide around one's ring or pinkie finger. A knife or pen, in contrast, is typically clasped between the ring and pinkie fingers.

No matter what odd device the player decides to slide along the guitar strings, the idea behind all slide playing is very simple: instead of fretting a string to create a pitch, the guitarist touches it with a slide. One's ear becomes much more important than one's eyes when playing slide, as pitch intonation depends on touching the string in exactly the right place. The guitarist has to play more like a violinist, acutely conscious of pitch.

To make a bottleneck slide, start by measuring the length of the finger that will wear the slide. Most players use their pinkie so they can use the other three fingers to form chords behind the slide, but some prefer the greater control obtained by wearing the slide on the ring finger.

Next, choose a bottle that's pretty straight at the top so as to avoid ending up with a curved slide that won't lie flat on the strings. Take a glasscutter and scratch a line around the neck of the bottle so that the distance from the top of the bottle to the scratched line equals the length of your finger.

Set aside a bowl of ice water. Heat the bottle in boiling water and then plunge it into the ice water. Take it out after fifteen seconds or so and you should be able to crack the neck right off. Sand the cut edge smooth with some fine sandpaper. And please, before you go to all this trouble, make sure your slide finger fits into the bottle.

Song:

"Talking About Bottleneck"- Big Joe Williams (Joe Lee Williams)

Bonnie Raitt using a black bottleneck slide at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, 2004 *Photo ©Joseph A. Rosen*

BUFFET FLAT

From the early 1900s to the 1930s, speakeasies and houses of ill repute in African American urban communities were

known as “buffet flats.” They were called buffet flats because they offered a buffet of sex shows, marijuana, and other illegal diversions, typically in a privately owned apartment or a house that had been divided up into apartments (flats).

The *Chicago Tribune* reported on January 24, 1911, that “from Twenty-second Street south in Michigan Avenue, Wabash Avenue, State Street, and the cross streets as far south as Thirty-first Street is a rich district of the so-called buffet flats. There, too, can be found hundreds of handbooks, gaming houses, and all night saloons of the most vicious character.”[68] By 1927, at the height of Prohibition, an article titled “Buffet Flat Solves Many of High Society’s Drinking Problems” estimated that New York City had some 10,000 buffet flats operating in Manhattan and Brooklyn.[69]

As Bessie Smith’s biographer, Chris Albertson, explained in the liner notes for *Bessie Smith, The Complete Recordings, Vol. 5* (Sony 1996), the buffet flats also served as banks for the African American community’s most respectable citizens- the Pullman train porters. The porters made better money than most African Americans at the time, but they were constantly traveling and unable to safely deposit their earnings in a bank.

During layovers in cities like New York and Detroit, therefore, the porters banked (and let off some steam) at buffet flats. “If you were carrying a lot of money,” a retired porter told Albertson, “you would leave it with these women rather than have it in your pocket.”

Bessie Smith was a heavy-set, dark-skinned woman with mischievous eyes and a face like a full moon. Early in her career she was rejected by Irvin C. Miller, the powerful African American show producer, because her dark complexion conflicted with his motto “Glorifying the Brownskin Girl.” Smith didn’t cut her first side for Columbia until 1923, when she was almost 30. Her debut, a gripping version of “Down Hearted Blues,” sold nearly 800,000 copies in six months and made her a star who sold out whites-only theaters as quickly as she did black venues.

Society’s outcasts adored Bessie Smith as one of their own. And they knew just where to take her after a show- to a buffet flat. The buffet flat was also a safe place for the drag queens who followed Smith’s tours from town to town to congregate. Smith immortalized a buffet flat she and her niece Ruby partied at in Detroit in “Soft Pedal Blues,” which described a neighborhood lady’s after-hours joint:

She give a dance last Friday night that was to end at one
But when time was almost up, the fun had just begun

Smith stops short of describing exactly what went on at the flat, beyond singing:

I’m drunk and full of fun, go and spread the news
I’ve got them soft pedal blues

The pianist is using the soft pedal on the piano, as the lady of the house- afraid of being busted for keeping a party going after-hours- has warned the crowd to “have all the fun, ladies and gents/but don’t make it too loud.”

Ruby, who traveled on tour with Bessie, held nothing back in a recorded interview called “Life on the Road,” conducted by Albertson. “A buffet flat is nothing but faggots and bull daggers,” Ruby Smith explained. “Everything, everybody that was in ‘the life.’

Buffet means everything goes on. They had a faggot that was so great that people used to come there just to watch him make love to another man. He’d give him a tongue bath and by the time he got to the front of that guy he was shaking like a leaf. People would pay good just to see him do his act.”[70]

Bessie knew how to get a party rolling herself. One night, she and Ruby wound up at a buffet flat after a show with “three girls, myself, and one gay fellow,” Ruby recalled.

“We all got to drinking and having this ball and all the sudden Bessie said, ‘Oh shit, stop all this motherfucking around and let’s get naked and be ourselves.’ Well, we had one full-size bed and everybody got in that bed. Talk about knowing what to do, there was three girls, and Bessie and I and the landlady- that’s six. Do you know that cat went through the whole crowd? And got up and walked like a man! He said, ‘I’ve had my ball, now I’m gonna call up my husband.’”[71]

Song:
“Soft Pedal Blues” - Bessie Smith

Bessie Smith beams in a publicity photo taken in New York in 1923, the year she recorded her first hit for Columbia Records. *Photo by Eltcha; courtesy Delta Haze Corporation archives*

C

CABBAGE

The blues are rife with food metaphors for genitalia. There's cabbage, cake, jellyroll, and pie for women, and bacon, hambone, hot dog, jellybean, and lemon for men. Cabbage was also slang for money during the 1940s and 1950s. In "Empty Bed Blues," Bessie Smith teased:

He boiled my first cabbage and he made it awful hot
When he put in the bacon it overflowed the pot

The use of these innocent-sounding metaphors, however, depended on what the artist judged the audience could handle. On the recording of "Low Down Blues," Jelly Roll Morton sang:

I got a sweet woman she lives right back of the jail
She's got a sign on her window "Good cabbage for sale"

During one of his Library of Congress sessions with Alan Lomax, though, Morton changed the last line to the blunter "good pussy for sale."[72]

Songs:
"Empty Bed Blues"- James C. Johnson, recorded by Bessie Smith
"Low Down Blues"- Jelly Roll Morton (Ferdinand Joseph La Menthe)

CAFÈ DU MONDE

Café du Monde is a blend of coffee and chicory that has been served since 1862 from the Café du Monde coffee stand near the New Orleans French market. The French market dates back even further, to the Choctaw tribe, who used the natural levee along the Mississippi River to trade with people canoeing on the river. Early European settlers came by boat, as well, to trade with Native Americans and to sell produce and dairy products from their farms. Jean Baptiste LeMoyne established the City of New Orleans at this spot along the river in 1718.

Only closed on Christmas Day and "on the day an occasional Hurricane passes too close to New Orleans,"[73] Café du Monde became and still is a favorite after-the-gig stopping-off spot for New Orleans jazz and blues musicians. It stays open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, serving hot coffee and beignets (French doughnuts) dusted with powdered sugar.

Song:
Café du Monde"- Jo-El Sonnier

CANNED HEAT

During Prohibition, alcoholics who couldn't get their hands on moonshine resorted to some truly dangerous methods to satisfy their cravings, such as extracting the alcohol from Sterno Canned Heat Cooking Fuel (*see also* **alcorub**, **Jake**). Canned Heat has been sold for over a hundred years in the United States as fuel for outdoor cooking and is comprised of denatured alcohol, water, and a petroleum-based gel. The Sterno Web site proudly notes: "Other uses for Sterno Products have become legend, and its steady performance in emergency situations has given the Sterno brand a reputation as being one of the basic necessity items you should always keep on hand: Water- TP- Duct Tape- Canned Foods- STERNO!"

The alcoholic extract of Sterno Canned Heat was called "canned heat," and could be bought off street dealers who distilled the stuff in basements and backyards. It was highly addictive, foul-tasting and lethal over time.

In 1929 the Delta blues singer and die-hard drinker Tommy Johnson sang of his hopeless addiction to alcohol in "Canned Heat Blues":

Crying, mama, mama, crying, canned heat killing me
Believe to my soul, Lord, it gonna kill me dead

Although he only recorded from 1928 to 1930, Johnson's expressive voice, showboating guitar antics (he played his guitar behind his neck long before Jimi Hendrix did), and anguished lyrics strongly influenced future Delta blues stars like Howlin' Wolf and Otis Spann. Wolf electrified Johnson's "Cool Water Blues," and turned it into the 1950s juggernaut "I Asked for Water (She Brought Me Gasoline)." Wolf and Spann poured over Johnson's recordings and strove to emulate him and his drinking buddy, Charlie Patton- the first great star of Delta country blues.

Far more devoted to drinking than to his career, Johnson frittered away his substantial talent on medicine shows, juke joints, and house parties while slowly killing himself with whatever alcoholic substance he could get in hand. He died of a heart attack playing a house party gig in 1956.

In 1966, a couple of ardent white blues-record collectors, Alan Wilson and Bob Hite, named their rock band Canned Heat after Johnson's song. They made rock history with a headlining slot at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival and performances at Woodstock, and had several hits, including the unofficial theme of the Woodstock movie, "Going Up the Country."

The members of Canned Heat used their fame to help their blues heroes: they collaborated with John Lee Hooker on his Grammy-winning album *The Healer*, rescued Sunnyland Slim from obscurity as a taxi driver, and helped Albert Collins secure a recording contract.

Felled by his own blues, Alan Wilson committed suicide in 1970. Bob Hite died of a heart attack in 1981, but Canned Heat continued to produce blues-rock boogie with guitarist Don Preston under the leadership of Fito de la Parra (the band's

drummer since 1967).
Songs:
"Better Leave that Stuff Alone" - Will Shade
"Canned Heat Blues"- Tommy Johnson
"Good Boy Blues"- Arthur Petties

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[1] From an unpublished autobiography; source wishes to remain anonymous.
[2] *Ibid*.
[3] From the author's interview with Bonnie Raitt.
[4] From *The Slanguage of Sex* by Brigid McConville and and John Shearlaw, (McLean, VA: Macdonald Publishing Company, 1984) as cited on The Phrase Finder Web site.
[5] From the author's interview with Dr. John (Mac Rebennack).
[6] *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang* by Clarence Major, p. 15 (New York: Penguin Books, 1970, 1994).
[7] *Blues from the Delta* by William Ferris, p. 35 (New York: Da Capo Press reprint, 1984; originally published Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978).
[8] *The Land Where the Blues Began* by Alan Lomax, p. 397 (New York: The New Press, 1993).
[9] From the author's interview with Hubert Sumlin.
[10] *Ibid*.
[11] Major, pg. 15.
[12] From the author's interview with Dr. John (Mac Rebennack).
[13] From unpublished autobiography cited in Endnote 1.
[14] From the author's interview with Hubert Sumlin.
[15] Ferris, p. 37, interview with B.B. King in New Haven, CT, 1975.
[16] *Savannah Syncopators: African Retentions in the Blues* by Paul Oliver, pp. 84~85 (New York: Stein and Day, 1970).
[17] Oliver, p. 84, quoting *Big Bill Blues*, p. 8 (Cassell, 1955)
[18] Oliver, p. 84, quoting *Jazz Journal* December 1963 article by Dave Mangurian.
[19] Major, p. 19.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Kock and Peder, editors, p. 258 (New York: Modern Library, 1944).
[22] *The African Heritage of American English* by Joseph E. Holloway and Winifred K. Vass, p. xiii (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).
[23] "The Banjo: A Short History," by Mick Moloney, Standing Stones.org.
[24] From email exchange between the author and ethnomusicologist Steven Taylor.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] "Hear that Long Snake Moan," from *Shadow Dancing in the USA* by Michael Ventura (New York: St. Martins Press, 1985).
[27] Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (MICRA, Inc, 1998).
[28] "Tab Benoit's Bayou Blues," by Bryan Powell, in *Creative Loafing*: Atlanta, April 10, 2002.
[29] Major, p. 36.
[30] All material related by Sam Taylor in this entry is from the author's interview with Mr. Taylor.
[31] From The Hellhound's Lair.com and the University of Edinburgh Web site.
[32] *Lexicon Of Black English* by J.L. Dillard, p. 36, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977).
[33] *Blues People* by LeRoi Jones, p. 25 (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963).).
[34] Major, p. 48.
[35] All quotes from Milton Campbell, Jr. in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Campbell.
[36] *Looking Up at Down: the Emergence of Blues Culture* by William Barlow, Ibid, pg. 18, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).
[37] *Urban Blues*, by Charles Keil, p. 27 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966).
[38] *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, by John Miller Chernoff, p. 75 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979).
[39] "From General Oglethope to the Acountant," Mr. Harman Verselet, Cot 9 1737 in Chandler Company Colonial Records, XXIII,XXII, p. 235.
[40] Oliver, p. 81.
[41] Chernoff, p. 55.
[42] Barlow, p. 18.
[43] *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, by Robert Farris Thompson, p. 37 (New York: Random

House, 1983).
[44] *The Roots of the Blues: An African Search*, by Samuel Charters, p. 123 (New Hampshire: Da Capo Press, 1981).
[45] *Ibid*., p. 119.
[46] Lomax, p. 354.
[47] *Ibid*.
[48] *Ibid*.
[49] *Studies In African Music*, by A.M. Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), quoted in Chernoff, p. 118.
[50] Chernoff, p. 114.
[51] Chernoff, p.118.
[52] From the author's interview with Jimmie Vaughan.
[53] From the author's interview with Robben Ford.
[54] All from Holloway and Vass, p. 138.
[55] From the author's interview with Dr. John.
[56] Holloway and Vass, p. 94.
[57] "Boogie Woogie Piano: From Barrelhouse to Carnegie Hall," by Colin Davey, August 1998 program book for 1998 Oregon Festival of American Music.
[58] Jones, p. 116.
[59] All quotes from Jody Williams in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Williams.
[60] Jones, p. 128.
[61] From *John Hammond: On the Record*, as quoted in Colin Davey article, "Boogie Woogie Piano: From Barrelhouse to Carnegie Hall," August 1998 program book for 1998 Oregon Festival of American Music.
[62] Biographical information on Cow-Cow Davenport from Red Hot Jazz.com.
[63] *Father of the Blues*, by W. C. Handy, pg. 10 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985; originally published in 1941).
[64] From the author's interview with Hubert Sumlin.
[65] *Chasin' That Devil Music*, by Gayle Dean Wardlow, p. 5 (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 1998).
[66] "…Ramblin" column by David Evans, *Blues Revue* magazine, pg. 13. May/April, 1995.
[67] All quotes in this entry from the author's interview with Bonnie Raitt.
[68] *Chicago Daily Tribune*, p. 1, Jan. 24, 1911, quotation from Doubletongued.org.
[69] *Port Arthur News*, Texas, p. 3, Jan. 9, 1927, from Doubletongued.org.
[70] *Bessie Smith, The Complete Recordings, Vol.5* (Sony 1996), "Life On The Road" interview with Ruby Smith.
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] Dillard, p. 26.
[73] From Café Du Monde.com.

CAPTAIN

The overseer of a plantation was "the captain" and was typically addressed by the slaves as "Captain." The renowned blues scholar Gayle Dean Wardlow, who was raised in Mississippi, explained in an interview, "You hear a lot of old blacks singin' about the captain told me this and that. Ain't no doubt about it, he was the captain, you'd do what he said to do."[1]

After Emancipation, many Southern white employers still expected to be addressed as Captain by black employees. In "John Henry," Big Bill Broonzy sang of the captain who threatened to bring in the steam drill and put his manual laborers out of work: "The captain said to John Henry, 'I'm gonna bring that steam drill around, I'm gonna bring that steam drill out on the job.'" In response, "John Henry told his captain, 'Lord, a man ain't nothing but a man, but before I'd let your steam drill beat me down, I'd die with a hammer in my hand.'"

The wardens at country prison farms were also called "Captain." Son House was sentenced to hard labor on Parchman Farm, a.k.a. Mississippi State Penitentiary, for shooting and killing a man at a house party, allegedly in self-defense. He did two years before a judge in Clarksdale re-opened the case and had him released, on the condition that he leave Clarksdale. In "County Farm Blues," House called the man in charge of a country farm "Captain Jack" and sang, "He'll sure write his name up and down your back."

Songs:

"County Farm Blues"- Son House (Eddie James House, Jr.)
"John Henry"- Big Bill Broonzy (Willie Lee Conley Broonzy)
"Last Fair Deal Gone Down"- Robert Johnson
"Prison Cell Blues"- Blind Lemon Jefferson (Lemon Jefferson)

CAT

Blues and jazz musicians use "cat" to refer to other musicians they respect. Scholars suspect this use of cat stems from the Wolof word for singer, *katt*.

At least seventy percent of the Africans brought to the Americas as slaves came from two major ethnic groups: the Mande from West Africa and the Bantu from Central Africa.[2] The Mande civilization was centered in the Senegambia region of West Africa and included the Wolof, Bambara, Mandingo, Fula, and Serer tribes.

The Wolof are known for their celebrated griots, a hereditary caste of singers who keep the oral history of the tribes in song, much like the bards of Europe did for the courts to which they were attached. The Wolof word for griot is *katt*, which came to refer to any highly accomplished musician.[3]

In addition, the Wolof suffix -*kat* is agentive, meaning that it indicates a person. If you add *kat* after an adjective, you create a compound word. For example: The Wolof adjective *hipi* describes someone who is sharp and aware of what's going on. A *hipi-kat* is a person who is on the ball, or a "hepcat."[4]

C.C. RIDER (*see also* **EASY RIDER** *and* **RIDER**)

Everyone from Leadbelly to the Grateful Dead has performed "C.C. Rider," but the question remains: Who was C.C. Rider?

The song is listed as "traditional," meaning that no one knows who wrote it. During the Civil War, C.C. stood for Calvary Corporal. Riding is probably the most common metaphor for sexual intercourse in the blues. The rider is a sexual partner, a steady lover. Was a woman singing to her soldier lover in "C.C. Rider"? Over time, "C.C. Rider" became "See See Rider," which is how Ma Rainey recorded it in 1924:

See see rider, see what you have done, Lord, Lord, Lord
Made me love you, now your gal has come
You made me love you, now your gal has come

On the other hand, both male and female blues singers have sung "C.C. Rider." This makes sense, given that in African American usage, "rider" may be used to mean a lover of either sex- and it makes the soldier theory rather interesting.

Song:

"C.C. Rider"- traditional

CHECKERBOARD

Not only words and music, but potent signs and symbols from Africa enrich American culture. The Ejagham people of southwestern Cameroon and southeastern Nigeria created an ideographic form of writing called *nsibidi*. These sacred signs designated the meeting places and plans of secret societies that governed the ethical and moral lives of Ejagham people.

These secret societies exercised real power. The members of the executioner society, for example, were men of the tribe

who had been endowed by the king with the authority to hunt down and kill convicted murderers.[5]

The checkerboard pattern was the symbol of the king's leopard society, comprised of the king and his governing body. The checkerboard represented the spots of the leopard, the king's power animal, whose grace, speed, and strength made it the perfect embodiment of royalty. The king was believed to have a leopard spirit that leapt into action when the king was in danger, carrying him away to safety.[6]

Among African Americans, the checkerboard became the symbol for another masculine sanctuary- the corner bar. Like the fabled Checkerboard Lounge on the South Side of Chicago, opened by Buddy Guy and Junior Wells in 1972, many blues clubs and bars use the checkerboard name and symbol.

Song:

"Friar's Point"- Susan Tedeschi and John Hambridge

CHICK

The Wolof word *jigen* described an attractive young woman who was *hipi*, or hip, meaning she had her eyes open and knew what was going on. By the 1920s, jigen converged with the English "chicken" to become "chick," meaning a sexy, hip young woman.[7]

Songs:

"Long Skirt Blues"- T-Bone Walker (Aaron Thibeaux Walker)

"It's Too Late Brother"- Al Duncan

CHINCH, CHINCH-BUG, CHINCHPAD

The Bantu word *tshishi* means any kind of small bug or insect. Bantu people were taken from their North Kongo and Angola homelands to South Carolina in huge numbers after 1730, as the slave trade penetrated beyond the Senegambia region deeper into Africa. The Bantu were brought to South Carolina to work the fields, so they became intimately acquainted with a particular bug known for destroying Southern crops. They called it *tshishi*, which in English became chinch or chinch-bug.

Chinches are black, with white wings folded on their backs, and are about a fifth of an inch long. They are considered big pests in the South, where they destroy corn, wheat, and barley crops by inserting their slim beaks into the plants and sucking out the juices. They rarely bite or sting humans.

Some scholars have said that chinch is another word for bedbug, and that therefore a chinchpad is a rooming house or hotel infested with bedbugs.[8] That is contradicted, though, by the lyrics Blind Lemon Jefferson sang in "Black Snake Moan":

Oh, that must have been a bedbug, baby
A chinch can't bite that hard.

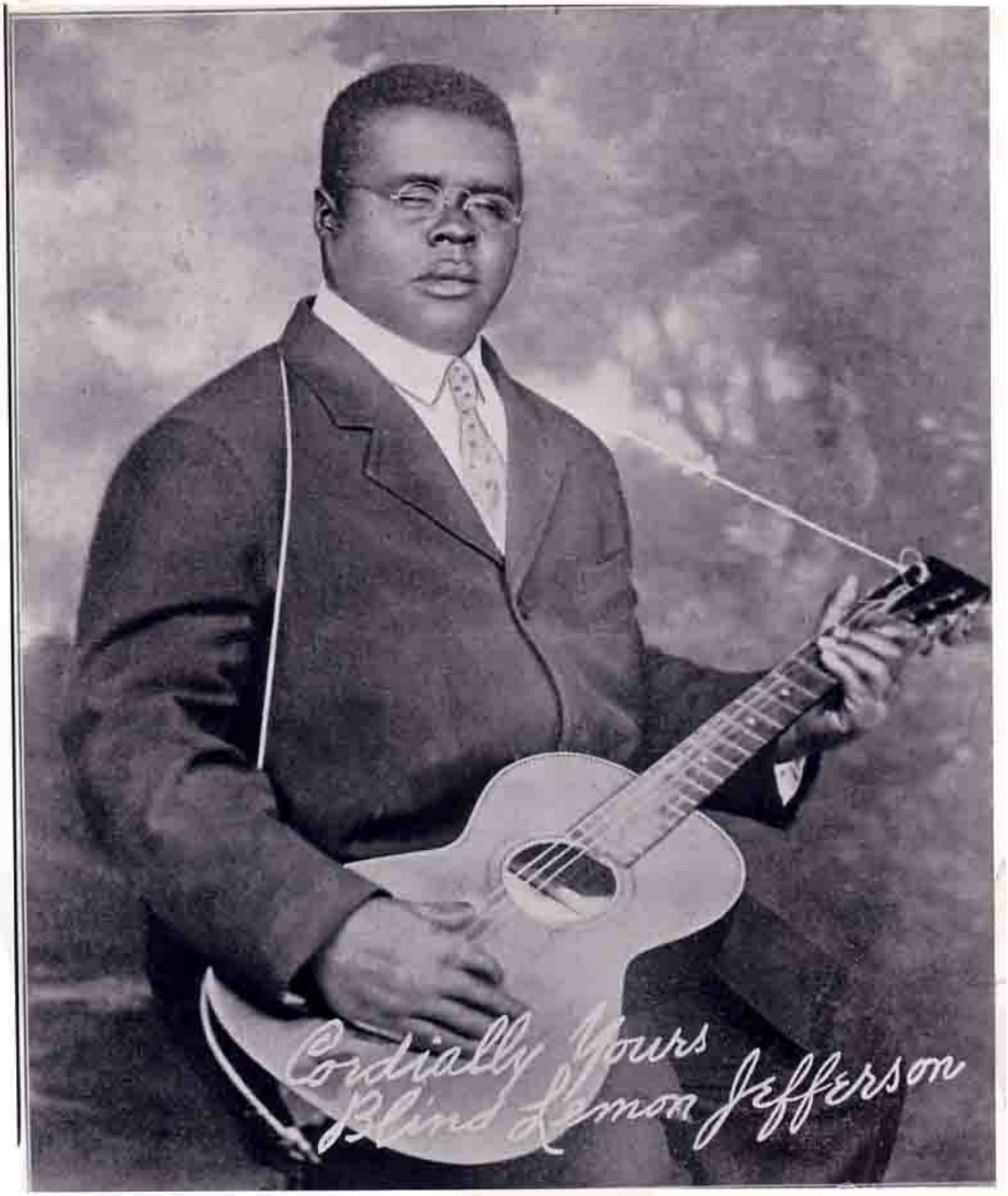
An infestation of chinches gives off a stale, musty odor, so perhaps that's the logic behind chinchpad.

Songs:

"Black Snake Moan"- Blind Lemon Jefferson (Lemon Jefferson)

"Chinch Bug Blues"- Blind Lemon Jefferson

"New Huntsville Jail"- Joe Evans



Blind Lemon Jefferson's only known photo, from the Paramount Records catalog, late 1920s *Courtesy Delta Haze Corporation photo archives*

CHITLIN (*also* **CHITLINGS**)

Short for "chitterlings," chitlins are pieces of pig intestines. Chitlins are different from "cracklings," which are the crispy fried pieces of pigskin that are also called "pork rinds."

The word chitterling comes from Old English. It described the ruffle on a shirt, which when ironed resembled small intestines.[9] The French word is *andouille*; hence andouille sausage, made from chitlins and tripe.

In the southern American colonies, hogs were slaughtered in December. The hams and chops went to the main house, and the hog guts, ears, feet, and other leftovers were given to the slaves. After Emancipation, the practice continued, only the guts were scooped up after the slaughter and sold for a few cents a pound, shit and all (*see also* **gutbucket**).

Chitlins are still a winter holiday tradition in many African American households. Boiled chitlins are dressed with hot sauce and served with ham, turkey, macaroni and cheese, collard greens, and sweet potato pie. Some African Americans consider chitlins slave food, and refuse to eat them. Papa Charlie Jackson expressed his opinion in "Mama Don't You Think I Know":

Now some people say chitlings are good to eat
I'll never eat chiltlings, long as hog got feet

Chitlins are also popular in Cajun cooking, and in Mexico, where it's eaten in a spicy tomato soup.[10]

Chitlin preparation is lengthy, tedious, and stinky. Today chitlins are sold partially cleaned, but they still require a very thorough hand cleaning by the cook. According to Moo & Oink, a company that sells thoroughly cleaned chitlins for cooks who don't have time for the lengthy preparation, "Chitlins take a lot of time and effort to clean. Along with this effort comes a lot of waste as you throw away the fat and grit. When you are buying chitlins that require cleaning, be prepared to buy ten pounds of chitlins to get five pounds of chitlins to cook."[11]

The goal of cleaning is to remove the fat from inside the chitlin. The fat side has a different color than the meaty side, so you just scrape off the fat and any dirt and grit, while repeatedly rinsing. Once separated, cleaned, and thoroughly rinsed, toss the chitlins in a pot of boiling water with a little vinegar, salt, pepper, and onions. While cooking, the chitlins will give off a strong smell. Some cooks toss a potato or apple into the pot to absorb the odor.

Songs:
"Chitlin Con Carne"- Junior Wells (Amos Blakemore)
"Chitlins Con Carne"- Kenny Burrell (covered by Stevie Ray Vaughan)
"Lemon's Worried Blues" - "Blind" Lemon Jefferson
"Mama Don't You Think I Know?"- "Papa" Charlie Jackson

CHITLIN CIRCUIT

During the 1950s and 1960s, the chitlin circuit was a string of small, primarily black-owned nightclubs that featured hard-touring soul, R&B, and blues acts.

"The chitlin circuit, that is really what brought me to where I am today," declared "Little" Milton Campbell, Jr. Campbell made his recording debut on the legendary Sun label in 1953, became one of the biggest-selling bluesmen of the 1960s at Chess and Stax Records, and was still touring worldwide and recording for Malaco Records until his death in 2005 at age 71.

"Lot of 'em did serve food but that has nothing to do with why they were called the chitlin' circuit," Campbell said. "I think it was because you could play basically any night of the week and you could draw a crowd. You could put somebody on the door and charge admission at the door- a little money like maybe twenty-five or fifty cent or what have you- and you would make enough money to sustain yourself from one day to the next. So I think that's where it came from. It was ''cause you were able to eat… chitlins, at least!"[12]

During segregation, these clubs were the only places where black artists could perform. The circuit started in the North and extended down through the Southern States. James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, B.B. King, Solomon Burke, and Jackie Wilson are just a few of the legends who built fan bases on the chitlin circuit.

CHUMP

Someone who can be easily victimized- a loser, an easy dupe, or a mark- is a chump. Of course, even the wiliest man can become a chump when a woman is involved. As Blind (Arthur) Blake put it in "Chump Man Blues": "I used to be a wise man but a woman made me a chump."

Chump may be derived from "chum," which was the term for a roommate in prison as early as the 1650s and came to mean a friend or pal.

Songs:
"Bad Luck Blues"- Lovie Austin, recorded by Ma Rainey
"Chump Man Blues"- Blind Blake (Arthur Blake)

COCK, COCK OPENER

White Chicago blues guitarist Michael Bloomfield got the shock of his young life when he was in a van with blues legend Muddy Waters and members of the Muddy Waters band, on the way to a gig- and Waters started talking about how much he loved to suck cock. It took a while for Bloomfield to figure out that Waters was using "cock" to refer to a woman's vulva, not a man's penis.[13]

Muddy Waters, a.k.a. McKinley Morganfield, was born in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, in 1915. Cock was slang for female genitalia among Southern country African American speakers during the early-to-mid-1900s. A cock opener was a penis, as in: "Baby you got a cock. This here is a cock-opener," from Charles Mingus' autobiography *Beneath the Underdog: His World As Composed by Mingus*.[14]

According to *Lexicon of Black English*, it's likely that in the early 1800s African Americans "picked up a 'low' English

usage in which cock was a verb meaning 'to copulate with, but generally in the passive.' As in 'to want cocking' or 'to get cocked.'"[15] In "On the Wall," Louise Johnson (a.k.a. Bessie Jackson) bragged:

Well, I'm going to Memphis, stop at Church's Hall
Show these women how to cock it on the wall

As David Evans explained in *Blues Revue* magazine, "The latter activity [cocking it on the wall] was described to me by a now elderly country bluesman as one of the pleasures he indulged in when going outside for a break at juke houses."[16]

The use of the word "dick," which is likely a variant of "prick," to refer to the penis is still more common among African American speakers today than "cock." "Nut" is another term that switches genders in the blues. It is used most often as slang for the testicles or having an orgasm (as in "busting a nut" or "getting a nut") bur can also refer to the clitoris.

Bloomfield, who was born in Chicago in 1943, was a passionate blues fan by the time he was in his teens. He soon found his way to the South Side, where he could soak up sets by Little Walter, Howlin' Wolf, and Waters. Bloomfield made a living playing weddings and parties in Top 40 rock bands, but on his free nights he, Paul Butterfield, Nick Gravenities, and Charlie Musselwhite could be found at clubs like Pepper's and Sylvio's, working up the nerve to sit in with the band.

As a result of Muddy's mentorship, Michael Bloomfield was one of the first white artists to gain entry into the Chicago blues scene. According to Derwyn Powell's article "Michael Bloomfield," although all four of the white youngsters "seemed to provide comic relief for the black patrons, Muddy took Michael under his wing because he could see Michael's interest in the blues was indeed genuine. If you were playing with Muddy, you were OK and not to be messed with."[17]

Muddy Waters at the Cellar Door in Washington, DC, with Jerry Portnoy on harmonica, 1976 *Photo ©Joseph A. Rosen*

Bob Margolin is another white guitarist who showed enough promise and dedication to impress Muddy Waters, and earned a chance to learn from him. Margolin, who played guitar in the Muddy Waters band from 1973 to 1980, confirmed that Waters continued to use the word cock "when he was talking about pussy," even after Waters had lived up north in Chicago for several decades.[18]

Of course, Muddy talked like that only in private, among friends and band-mates, according to Margolin, who wrote in his article "What Was Muddy Like?": "Consistently, interviewers and friends use the word 'dignity' to describe Muddy, and it's appropriate. He understood his accomplishments and was proud of them and conducted himself in public gracefully but with reserve. In situations where he was with family or close friends, or having a particularly good time on the bandstand, though, he displayed a loose, good humor that ranged from playful to downright silly." [19]

When Margolin first started playing in the band, he struggled with Muddy's fluid behind-the- beat phrasing. "My music is so

simple," Muddy used to say, "But so few people can play it right." Margolin struggled to master the subtleties of the music, and eventually succeeded, in spite of the fact that Muddy's idea of constructive criticism was to say, Margolin recalled, "Don't ever play that again, it makes my dick sore."[20]

Song:

"On The Wall"- Louise Johnson

Bob Margolin and Muddy Waters, Mancini's Club, Pittsburgh, PA, 1980 *Photo ©Joseph A. Rosen*

COFFEE GRINDING (see also **GRIND** and **GRINDER**)

Coffee grinding is a metaphor for sexual intercourse. In "Coffee Grindin' Blues," Lucille Bogan sang, "Ain't nobody in town can grind a coffee like mine."

That was actually one of Bogan's tamer lines. Her repertoire focused almost exclusively on hot topics like lesbianism, prostitution, drug addiction, and abusive relationships. Bogan recorded some of her raunchiest tunes, such as "B.D. Woman's Blues" (B.D. stood for "Bull Dyke"), under the pseudonym Bessie Jackson.

"Coffee" also describes someone with rich brown skin, while "honey" describes a person with a lighter, more golden complexion.

Songs:

"Coffee Grindin' Blues"- lyrics Lucille Bogan, music unknown

"Empty Bed Blues"- James C. Johnson, recorded by Bessie Smith

Lucille Bogan, American Record Corp. catalog, mid-1930s *Courtesy Delta Haze Corporation photo archives*

COLD IN HAND

To be cold in hand is an expression from the 1930s that means to have no money, or be broke. In "The Banker's Blues," Big Bill Broonzy complained:

Say you taken all my money give it to your no-good man
Said I have had money but now I'm cold in hand

In "District Attorney Blues," Bukka White described a district attorney who was so tough "he will take a woman's man and leave her cold in hand."

Songs:
"District Attorney Blues"- Bukka White (Booker T. Washington White)
"Cold In Hand Blues"- Bessie Smith
"Drinking Blues,"- Lucille Bogan

COMB

A harmonica's mouthpiece is called a comb; this became a slang term for the harmonica itself (*see* **harp**). An early form of the kazoo was a small hair comb wrapped in tissue paper through which the performer hummed or sang. Check out the Mound City Blue Blowers to hear comb playing. [21]

"Comb" also shows up in the blues as short for "honeycomb." In "Bumble Bee No. 2," Memphis Minnie sang:

He makes my honey

Even now makes my comb

Harmonica combs are made of wood, plastic, or metal, but most blues players prefer wooden combs. Blues players use diatonic harmonicas, which play eight-note major or minor scale. Harmonicas come in different keys- a performer usually keeps several on hand.

The comb piece holds the reed plates in place and directs air over them so they can vibrate and produce a tone. Metal combs last longer than wood, because the moisture in the air breathed over the comb can swell and warp a wooden comb, but the wood comb delivers a warmer sound. The wood comb Marine Band harmonica is the most popular blues harmonica.

Like the guitar, the harmonica was popular among Mississippi blues players because it could be carted around easily. The great blues harp player James Cotton and guitarist Hubert Sumlin met in school in Mississippi. "He come in to the same school that I was going," Sumlin recalled, "So after we left [school], we moved to Arkansas. We got a little band together, nobody but me and him. We wasn't hitting on nothing, just running around those cotton rows and playing for the people."[22]

Eventually the pair got a band together with another guitar player and a drummer and convinced Howlin' Wolf to give them a few minutes to perform at one of his shows. Wolf had met Sumlin a few years earlier when the ten-year-old Sumlin snuck out to a local juke to hear Wolf play. Teetering on some Coca Cola crates, the boy fell through the window and right onto the stage. The owner was going to toss him out on his ear, but Wolf prevailed upon him to let Sumlin sit on stage for the rest of the set. Wolf then marched Sumlin home to his mother after the show, and asked her to not be too hard on him.

"Wolf had thirty minutes on the hour and he give us fifteen minutes to play, until we got so good he said, 'You alright, I'm getting my time back.'" Sumlin said.

James Cotton, a.k.a. "Superharp," at The Center for the Arts in Grass Valley, CA, 2010 *Mike Shea, Tritone Photography*

Wolf had both Cotton and Sumlin employed with his band at various times. At age fifteen, Cotton was touring Mississippi juke joints with Wolf. In 1954 Cotton left Wolf to replace Junior Wells in Muddy Waters' band. Cotton was Muddy's harp player for twelve years, finally striking out on his own in 1966. Wolf brought Sumlin up to Chicago to become his guitarist, a post Sumlin held until Wolf's death in 1976.

Songs:

"Bumble Bee No. 2"- Memphis Minnie (Lizzie Douglas)

"Honey Bee"- Don Robey, recorded by Bobby "Blue" Bland

CONJURE

To conjure is to cast a spell, or to call upon supernatural powers to help achieve one's goal. Conjuration was "one of the African cultural survivals very early noted in the New World," according to renowned linguist J.L. Dillard's *Lexicon of Black English*.[23] The conjurer calls upon the web god of West Africa who links earth and sky. Bessie Smith sang to him in "Spider Man Blues."

African conjure rituals were noticed quite early by nervous colonists. James Grainger's 1763 poem "The Sugar Cane" described "conjurers" and "Negro-magicians" who carried carved staffs and cast spells to make themselves "secure from poison; for to poison they are infamously prone."

Grainger was probably describing tribal priests, who were among the Africans imported as slaves into in the American colonies. Although enslaved priests tried to keep African religious practices alive in the new world, these were harshly suppressed by slave owners. Those practices that survived into the 1800s were camouflaged as "medicine" or "superstition."

In Haiti, Cuba, Brazil, and Jamaica, in contrast, more elements of West Africa's *Vodun*, one of the world's oldest religions, survived to become the Vodou, Santeria, Candomblé, and Obeah religions, respectively (*see* **Voodoo**). This happened, in part, because slaves in the very Catholic West Indies grasped the similarity between their tradition of appealing to ancestral spirits to intercede in their favor with God (Vodun) and that of Catholics praying to their saints for similar intercession.[24] They grafted Catholic saints onto their spirit-gods and created religious hybrids that were able to survive waves of repression and persecution.

The term **hoodoo**, meanwhile, emerged in the early 1800s as a name for African American folk magic practices, such as the use of **mojos** or conjure hands. Grainger described their use in "The Sugar Cane" poem:

This o'er the threshold of their cottage hung
No thieves break in; or, if they dare to steal
Their feet in blotches, which admit no cure
Burst loathsome out [25]

Mojos, **foot track magic**, and other conjuration practices survived to become important elements of hoodoo, which combined herbal healing and spells with aspects of African and European religions, and Native American herbal lore.

Dried roots played an important part in hoodoo charms, spells, and healing; hence conjuration is still sometimes called "rootwork." In rural African American communities, the conjurer was more doctor than priest, priestess, or shaman. He or she was the root doctor, Doctor Yah Yah, Doctor John, or Doctor Jack.[26]

Songs:
"Root Man Blues"- Walter Davis
"Snake Doctor Blues"- Jaydee Short
"Spider Man Blues"- Bessie Smith

CONJURE BAG. CONJURE HAND

According to *Hoodoo in Theory and Practice*, "A conjure bag or hand is a charm created by a conjurer to ward off spells or to cast them. The take-off man removes the spells put on by others; the shield man sells his services to those who wish to be shielded from curses."[27]

Red flannel is the most common cloth used to make a conjure bag, but some root doctors use different colors of flannel to strengthen their spells. They might use green flannel for a conjure bag designed to bring its wearer money, white flannel for a baby-blessing mojo, etc.

There are many names for these types of bags, including "**mojo hand**," "lucky hand," "**trick bag**," "root bag," "jomo," "**gris-gris**," and "**toby**." A special bag worn only by women is called the **nation sack**. There is also a kind of mojo used for predicting the future called a **Jack ball**.

COOL

In Yoruba culture, the ability to connect with one's inner divinity manifests as coolness (*itutu*). In American culture we express that concept (although we may not realize that it is African) when we say that someone cool "has got soul." To be cool is to remain generous, calm, and confident because of that soul connection, no matter how dire one's circumstances become.

The color most often used to symbolize this quality in African art is blue. Blue, the color of the unchanging sea and sky, is associated with depth and stability, wisdom, confidence, and intelligence. Buddhists meditate on blue to transform anger into mirror-like wisdom.

In West Africa, blue is the color of the Yoruba goddess Yemoja, "Mother of Fish," who was once the most powerful *Orisha* (emissary of the God of all creation) of all. Yemoja lost her sovereignty over the world because of her repeated rages. Her dominion was reduced to the oceans, and over time the chastened goddess's anger turned to wisdom. She is worshipped as the

source of life, for without water there is none.

"I want to deliberate on this," an elder of Ipokia, capital of the Anago Yoruba, told art historian Robert Farris Thompson. "Beauty is a part of coolness but beauty does not have the force that character has. Beauty comes to an end. Character is forever."[28]

Ultimately, such character becomes the mystic coolness of Yemoja, and of the Buddha, Jesus, and all the saints and sages who have bridged the gap between their own personalities and their potential for divinity. "This is *ashe* [divine nature]," the elder said, "This is character."[29] Thompson added: "So heavily charged is this concept with ideas of beauty and correctness that a fine carnelian bead or a passage of exciting drumming may be praised as 'cool.'"[30]

The Yoruba are the largest ethnic group in Nigeria, and number close to 100 million people throughout West Africa. In traditional Yoruba morality, generosity results from coolness and is the highest quality a person can exhibit. The act of giving embodies character and perfect composure. The gods are "cooled" by libation, and other acts of propitiation.

This reverence for generosity is also obvious in the culture of the Bakongo people, who live along the Atlantic coast of Africa, from Brazzaville, Congo to Luanda, Angolao. The Bakongo proverb *kiyaala-mooko kufwa ko* means, "He who holds out his hands does not die."[31]

William Ferris, former Director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, experienced a similar commitment to generosity among African Americans living on in Mississippi Delta during his travels there in the late 1960s. As one musician told him, "Next time you come, come on to my house and walk right in. If I eat a piece of bread, you eat too."[32] Ferris said, "Black families constantly extended their hospitality by offering to feed and house me as long as I was in their neighborhood."[33]

Considering how African Americans were treated in Mississippi at that time, it's astonishing that this ethic survived to be extended to a white scholar wandering around the Delta looking for blues musicians to record and interview.

Jimmie Vaughan experienced it, too: "When I was fourteen or fifteen I used to go to a black club called the Empire Ballroom in Dallas in 1965 and '66. The manager would let me stand by the back door and kinda look after me. I knew I was a white guy and they were black people but I wasn't aware of the issues. I was just digging it."[34] That the blues spread beyond the African American community to become a worldwide phenomenon is likely due, in part, to this commitment to being cool.

The slaves, and then their freed descendants, faced grinding poverty, and the daily threats, humiliations, and viciousness of life as a denigrated minority. In the ghetto, coolness took on an edge. As LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) said in 1963: "The term cool…meant a specific reaction to the world, a specific relationship to one's environment. It defined an attitude that actually existed. To be cool was, in its most accessible meaning, to be calm, even unimpressed, by what horror the world might daily propose."[35]

A cool person is also silent unless he or she has something important to say. "His mouth is cool" (*enu è tútù*) is one way a Yoruba person would say, "He fell silent."[36] This form of coolness—silence- became a tool slaves and their descendants used both to avoid trouble with whites and to resist their domination subtly (*see* **signifying**).

The principle of coolness extends to African music making, and from African music into the blues. When ethnomusicologist John Miller Chernoff was studying drumming in West Africa, one of his teachers said of young, inexperienced drummers, "They are not careful when they are playing. They don't cool their bodies and take their time."[37] They are playing "*Yoliyoli*, which means 'nothing, nothing.'"[38] They have not learned yet to use silence; therefore their playing had no meaning, no power to move the soul. The teacher went on to say that sometimes, if a student overplays to an obnoxious degree, "we just hold his hand and collect his stick so that he won't play again."[39] Many flashy young blues musicians have experienced similar admonishments from elder bandleaders.

In the blues, older artists teach the younger generation what cool means by example. Guitarist Robben Ford's blues playing is technically dazzling, yet Ford credits his ability to maintain a soulful quality despite his speed and dexterity to his youthful apprenticeship with blues singer Jimmy Witherspoon.

"Jimmy Witherspoon was very proud to be a blues singer. He was the epitome of cool," Ford said of his mentor. "He always had this sly smile going on, like he had a secret that you wish you knew. You could feel some kind of vibration in the room, and you would go with his energy and his mood and pretty soon, man, the atmosphere would get thick. Which is a mutually created thing with the audience. Those guys [blues artists of Witherspoon's generation], they understood what it meant to relate to an audience. They didn't have that element of, 'I'm a musician, I'm gonna do my thing, you can like it or not.' That's a very important element in blues. That communication. The artist isn't on the bandstand just for himself.""[40]

One who hears the music understands it with a dance.[41]

Songs:

"After Five Long Years"- Willie Dixon

“All I Want Is A Spoonful”—“Papa” Charlie Jackson
“Cool Disposition”- “Sonny Boy” Williamson (Aleck “Rice” Miller)

Robben Ford, San Francisco Blues Festival, 2001 *Photo by Mike Shea, Tritone Photography*

COOLING BOARD

A cooling board was a wooden plank used for laying out a corpse so it could be prepared for burial. Down South, the cooling board was usually on the porch of someone’s home. It could be put into a wagon and used to fetch a recently deceased member of the community. The body would be brought to the home to be laid out for viewing while other community members built the coffin in the yard or brought food over for the mourners.

The home with the cooling board on its porch became the place for people to gather and grieve. As Breck Stapleton explained in his article, “Gibeon Sullivan’s Cooling Board,” “The cooling board tells of a different time, when death was very visible, burial preparations very personal, and funerals important community events.”

This practice persisted, due to poverty in the region, even after embalming techniques and professional undertakers were established in the early 1800s.[42] As late as the 1930s, “Blind” Willie McTell sang:

Don't a man feel bad, when his baby's on the coolin' board
Don't a man feel bad, when the hearse pulls up to his door

Because embalming and other preservation methods were not used, the funeral had to be completed in one day. “Attendants dressed the deceased in nice clothing, placing coins over the eyes to prevent them from opening during the visitation…. After several hours, the mourners looked on as the body was removed from the cooling board and placed in the coffin to be taken to the nearby cemetery for burial.”[43]

Songs:
“Coolin’ Board”—“Blind” Willie McTell
“France Blues”—“Papa” Harvey Hull
“My Black Mama, Part 2”—Eddie James “Son” House Jr.

CREPE

Black crepe bunting hung on a house’s front door is a symbol of mourning. In “State of Tennessee Blues,” Jennie Clayton sang:

When I leave this town, don’t pin black crepe on my door

I won't be dead baby but I ain't coming back here no more

In the blues, black crepe is sometimes used as a metaphor to declare the death of the singer's feelings for a lover. It may also make a thinly veiled threat. In "Booster Blues," "Blind" Lemon Jefferson sang:

Excuse me woman, I won't say that no more
I'm fixing to leave town and hang crepe on your door

Songs:
"Booster Blues"- "Blind" Lemon Jefferson (Lemon Jefferson)
"State of Tennessee Blues"- Jennie Clayton

CROSS

In **hoodoo**, to cross someone means to **jinx** or curse him or her. African crossing methods that persisted after slavery involve drawing cross-marks on the ground and spitting on them while verbally cursing the person.[44] The cross-mark poisons the person who walks through it.

Cross-marks typically involve a crossroads sign, such as an X in a circle, but there are many variations, such as three wavy lines, or three arrows. A cross is only supposed to affect only the person who is being cursed, but if you see something like this scrawled on the ground, it wouldn't hurt to walk around it.

Songs:
"Black Cat, Hoot Owl Blues"- unknown, recorded by Ma Rainey
"New Someday Blues"- Sleepy John Estes (John Adam Estes)

CROSS NOTE

Tuning the guitar to an open minor chord is called cross note, or Bentonia, tuning. The great country-blues guitarist Nehemiah Curtis "Skip" James dubbed this tuning "cross note." He learned it from his mentor, Henry Stuckey of Bentonia, Mississippi.

Skip James at Newport Folk Festival, July 1964 *Photo by Jim Marshall; courtesy Delta Haze Corporation, licensed under*

agreement with photographer

Stuckey had picked it up from black soldiers, most likely from the Bahamas or Jamaica, whom he met while stationed in France during World War II.

A guitar tuned to E minor (E B E G B E) for example, will produce the E-minor chord when strummed without fretting any notes. This is cross note in E minor. Some guitarists also play cross note in D minor by tuning the guitar to D A D F A D.

Cross-note tunings lend themselves to slide playing because they make it easy to produce haunting minor chords simply by fretting straight across the neck with the slide. Bentonia lies outside the Mississippi Delta region and has its own style of country blues. Blues musicologist Gayle Dean Wardlow tracked Henry Stuckey down in 1965, living in a poor little shack just outside of Bentonia with no screens on the windows or door.

According to Wardlow, Stuckey, then in his sixties, said he'd learned the open-minor-chord tuning "from some black soldiers in France [while he was stationed in France during World War II]. He said it came from somewhere down in the Caribbean. That's all he knew. When he came back he made some songs in this tuning but never recorded. He showed them [the songs] to [Skip] James. They played together a lot during the twenties. Johnny Temple said he was really a fine guitarist, people didn't realize, almost as good as Skippy."[45]

James used the eerie-sounding cross-note tuning to great effect in such spooky recordings as "Devil Got my Woman" and "Hard Time Killing Floor Blues." Although James used cross-note in E minor for most of his songs, he also played cross-note in D minor, and "Spanish" tuning (D G D G B D).

Songs:

"Devil Got My Woman"- Skip James (Nehemiah Curtis James)

"Hard Time Killing Floor Blues" - Skip James

CROSS-SPANISH

In cross-Spanish tuning, the guitar is tuned to E major (E B E G# B E). If you strum the guitar without fretting any notes, you will sound an E major chord. Cross-Spanish tuning is popular with slide players because simply by fretting straight across the neck with the slide, you can play major chords. Son House is credited with naming this tuning "cross Spanish." It was Duane Allman's favorite slide guitar tuning.

Many Delta blues bottleneck players also used Spanish tuning, which is open G (D G D G B D). You can hear Spanish tuning on recordings by Son House, Robert Johnson ("Traveling Riverside"), Bukka White, and Muddy Waters, to name a few.

Robert Johnson used an open A tuning (E A E A C# E), which is sometimes referred to as "Spanish"- although, more traditionally, Spanish tuning is D G D G B D. Johnson used open A for "Terraplane Blues," but he put a capo on the second fret of the guitar, in order to in order to achieve the higher pitched sound of an open B tuning. Delta blues players used a lot of creative tunings, and guitarists are still puzzling over some of Robert Johnson's tunings today.

Songs:

"I Believe I'll Dust My Broom"- Robert Johnson

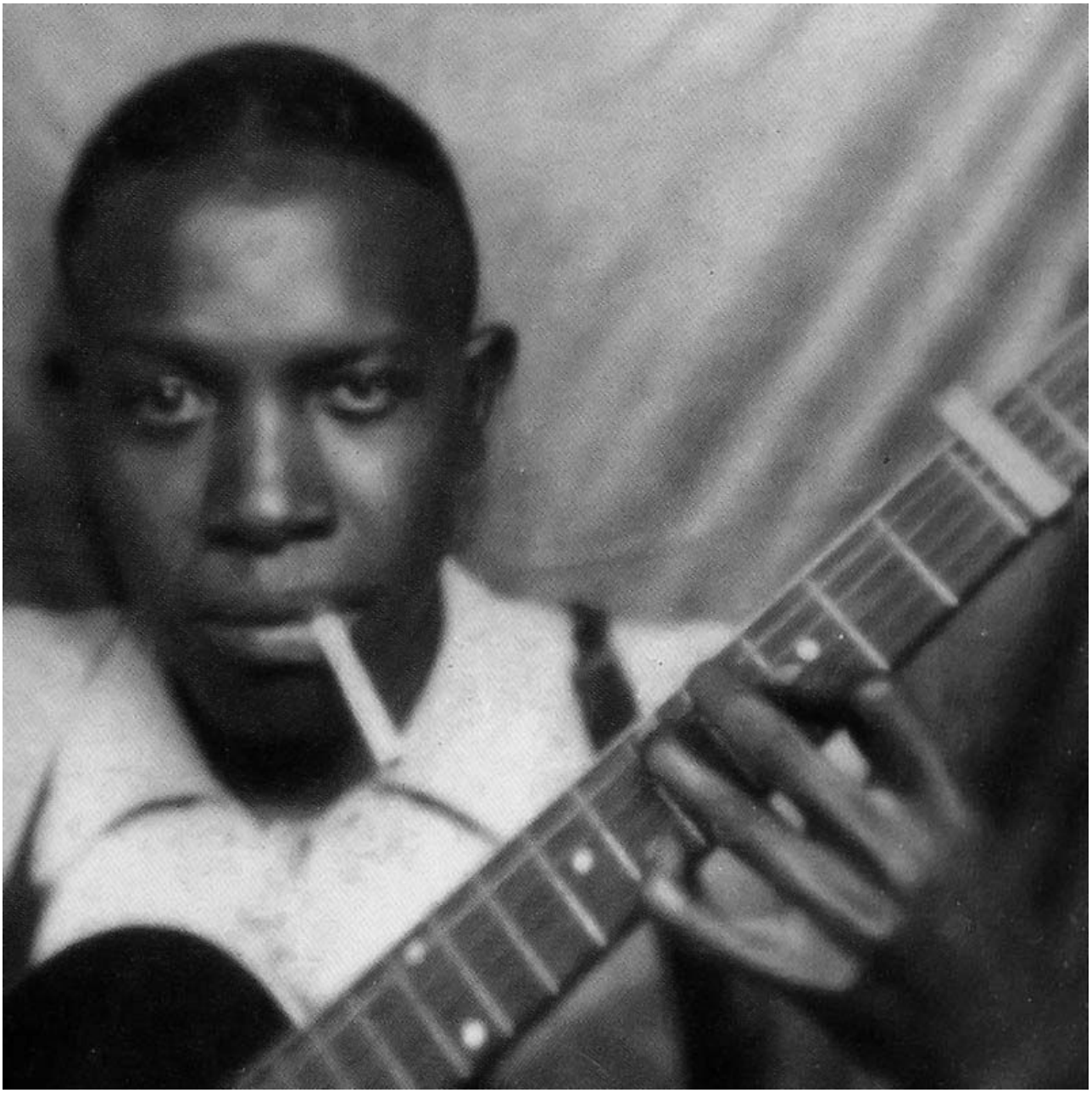
"Dust My Broom"- Elmore James

CROSSROADS

The crossroads is the place where two or more roads intersect. It symbolizes the point at which one must call upon one's resources and spiritual strength, face down one's demons, and make a life-altering decision. The exceptionally gifted blues artist Robert Johnson was believed by some to have sold his soul to the devil at midnight on a Delta crossroads in return for an uncanny mastery of the guitar.

A small-boned man with long, delicate, slightly webbed fingers, Johnson earned respect and kept fights at bay with astonishing musicianship. According Steve LaVere's liner notes for *Robert Johnson- The Complete Recordings*: Columbia Records, 1990, "He could hear a piece just once over the radio or phonograph or from someone in person and be able to play it. He could be deep in conversation with a group of people and hear something--never stop talking--and later be able to play it and sing it perfectly. It amazed some very fine musicians, and they never understood how he did it."[46]

Johnson never publicly claimed to have made a deal with the devil; that boast was actually made by Tommy Johnson, best known for his recording of "Maggie Campbell Blues." According to LaVere, "the crossroads story was also told by Ike Zinermon, Robert's primary mentor, and for Robert Johnson by Son House during interviews in the mid-1960s, which is how Johnson's relationship with the myth began." [47]



Robert Johnson took this self-portrait in a photo booth in the early 1930s. *© 1986 Delta Haze Corporation, all rights reserved*

Stories of pacts made with the devil at midnight at the crossroads have appeared in European folklore for centuries. In Bakongo culture, when making an oath, one marks a cross on the ground and stands on top of it.[48] African and Haitian trickster deities are also associated with crossroads. According to Yoruba legend, the god Eshu-Elegba was granted the ability to make anything happen--after he had his mettle tested at the crossroads.

As a little child, Eshu was always telling tall tales. One day he saw a pair of scary eyes shining in a coconut shell at a crossroads. He ran home to tell his parents, who didn't believe his latest tale. Crushed and believing himself cursed, Eshu died. Soon after, terrible disasters- floods, fires, and epidemics- struck the world.

Eshu's parents remembered his story and sent the local priests to the crossroads to try to coax his spirit to return. The shell with the evil eyes was gone, so the priests erected a beautiful smooth stone and anointed it with precious oils, such as sandalwood and myrrh. Eshu's spirit, drawn by the warm scent of the oils, came to live in the stone, and peace and order returned to the world. Today, cones made of laterite stone can be found in Yoruba markets. Palm oil is poured over them daily to keep Eshu cool (propitiated) and happy.[49]

According to art history professor Robert Farris Thompson, Eshu provokes us to test our wisdom and compassion, and our ability to rise above ego-driven arguments and attachments. "He sometimes even 'wears' the crossroads as a cap, colored black on one side, red on the other, provoking in his wake foolish arguments about whether his cap is black or red…"[50]

In Cuba, where Catholic saints camouflaged Yoruba gods to create the Santeria religion, Eshu was identified with Satan, but as a creative challenge to good.[51] Cuban people of African descent still pour cool waters at the crossroads in his honor. In Rio

de Janeiro, Brazilians light candles for him at intersections.

Unlike the Christian devil, Eshu is not inherently evil. His provocations may result in good or in evil results, depending on how people respond. Eshu challenges one to grow beyond the limitations of the ego, and he lays down that challenge at the crossroads. In African myths, the crossroads is where the living and the dead can make contact.

Spirit-gods (loa or lwa) like to hang out in the center of the crossroads. To be able to stand upon the crossroads and face the gods means one has mastered both life and death.

As author and *L.A. Weekly* columnist Michael Ventura explained in his essay "Hear that Long Snake Moan," "For the African, the human world and the spirit world intersect. Their sign for this is the cross, but it has nothing to do with the Christianist cross, which impales a man in helpless agony upon the intersection…[In Africa] The earthly and the spirit worlds meet at right angles, and everything that is most important happens at the spot where they meet, which is neither solely of one world nor the other."[52] The metaphysical goal of the African is to experience this meeting of both worlds at the crossroads, and touch the divine.

Robert Johnson recorded "Cross Road Blues" in San Antonio, Texas, on November 27, 1936. In the first verse, Johnson describes going to the crossroads and falling to his knees, crying out to God to save him. In the second verse, he stands and tries to flag a ride as dusk descends. Johnson wants a ride, which is both a slang term for a lover and a metaphor for divine possession- as in the **Voodoo** ceremonies in which the *loa*, or spirit-gods, descend to "ride" members of the congregation.

By the third verse, Johnson is expressing his fear of being caught in the dark on the crossroads with no **rider**, "no loving sweet woman that love and feel my care." He asks the listener to run and tell his friend Willie Brown "that I'm standing at the cross roads, babe, I believe I'm sinking down."

Brown, a blues musician of some renown, was a mentor and father figure to Johnson. He was patient with the little boy who would sneak away from home in Robinsonville, Mississippi, to pester him about the guitar. Brown showed Johnson how to form chords, and he and Charlie Patton, who lived in Robinsonville for a time and played the **juke joints** there regularly, were huge influences on Johnson.

Johnson, in turn, mentored another little boy--Robert Lockwood. Johnson began teaching Lockwood to play guitar when the boy was eleven years old. "He lived with my mother [Estella Coleman] common law for about eight, nine years," said Lockwood, who was born in 1915 in Turkey Scratch, Arkansas. "He taught me to play. Can't nobody play his stuff but me." [53]

Robert Jr. Lockwood circa 1980 *Photo* © *Joseph A. Rosen*

Robert Lockwood became known as Robert Junior, or Robert Jr. Lockwood, and performed and recorded under that name until his death in 2006 at age ninety one. In 2004, in fact, Lockwood appeared at Eric Clapton's first Crossroads Guitar

Festival in Dallas, Texas, and his live recording with three other blues musicians – *Last of the Great Mississippi Delta Bluesmen: Live In Dallas* – won a Grammy for *Best Traditional Blues Album*.

Lockwood and his mother lived with Johnson in Helena, Arkansas, while Johnson performed around the Delta. The family also spent time in Memphis and St. Louis. To Lockwood, Johnson was not some mysterious loner who was making pacts with the devil. "What did I think about Robert Johnson?" Lockwood said, "I think he's a nice man. All them stories about him, I don't know about that. He never told me nothing about it."

Lockwood built a powerful career on the foundation Johnson gave him. In his teens, he was a regular on the King Biscuit Time radio show out of Helena, Arkansas, with harmonica great "Sonny Boy" (Aleck "Rice" Miller) Williamson. "Sonny Boy was a natural," Lockwood asserted. "He was real, real good. He could sing good and he could play good."

After recording four titles for Bluebird in 1941, Lockwood moved to Chicago, where "I was playing [recording sessions] with almost everybody Chess [Records] had, 'cause I was one of their favorite guitar players. So I was playing jazz, blues, I was playing everything."

Lockwood remarked that people think the blues are easy to play, but that Johnson's blues weren't simple and neither are his: "Lot of blues that I play got a lot of changes, like four and five and six changes and stuff like that." Lockwood also described Johnson as an intelligent and curious man who was always on the lookout for inspiration for his songs. "I have to say that he done quite a bit of studying in his life," Lockwood said. "He did a lot of reading and stuff like that. Just about anything you could read, he read it. You read things and after you get through reading about it, you can sing about it."

Johnson's musical genius and intellectual sophistication are apparent in his songs. What's especially striking about "Cross Road Blues" is Johnson's expressed sense of failure at having dug into his spiritual resources and come up empty handed. Rather than giving us a pat story of being overwhelmed by the devil or raised to the heavens by God, Johnson stands at the crossroads, sinking down, crushed by existential dread. Christianity has failed him here, and the ancestral rituals that might have rescued him are lost to him:

Standing at the cross roads, I tried to flag a ride
Didn't nobody seem to know me, everybody pass me by

Nonetheless, rumors of Johnson's crossroads pact with the devil persisted, fueled by his supernatural musical abilities, and fanned by songs like "Me and the Devil Blues."

Johnson's death in 1938 at age twenty seven- after drinking whiskey that had most likely been poisoned by a jealous husband- put the seal on the legend of the genius bluesman's deal with the devil. To the people who loved him, however, his death was the hard loss of a very sensitive and talented person. "I was pretty shaken up," Lockwood told David Witter of *Chicago Interview*, adding "I didn't play for over a year. As far as my mother and I were concerned, he was a wonderful, wonderful man."[54]

No other acoustic artist, let alone one from the 1930s, has had such a powerful impact on electric blues and rock music. Many of Johnson's solo acoustic country blues songs have been monster hits for electric blues and rock musicians. Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, Cream, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and countless other bands have turned Johnson's songs into rock, funk and heavy metal.

These artists all heard a blueprint in his songs for the future of rock 'n' roll. "Robert was way ahead of his time," mused Lockwood. "He sounded different. When Robert played the guitar, he played the whole guitar. He played the lead and the background and everything."[55]

Songs:
"Central Avenue Blues"- Will Day
"Cross Road Blues"- Robert Johnson

CUTTING CONTEST

Pianist Dr. John came of age in New Orleans in the 1950s, when musicians engaged in fierce jam sessions called cutting contests. "That's what made a higher level of musicianship," Dr. John declared. "It's just a sad thing that we don't have that kind of outlet today. Where are there cutting contests anymore? Where are there all-night jam sessions anymore?"[56]

Sometimes called a "carving contest," a cutting contest is a jam session during which players compete for gigs, respect, and acclaim by trying to blow each other off the stage. The applause from the audience is the barometer used to grade the players and choose the winner.

From cutting contest comes "cutting"- attempting to outdo a competitor in playing a solo. This use of "cut" was not the origin of "cut a track," which means to make a recording, however. That derived from the fact that recordings were originally engraved or cut into wax masters (and later into metal, acetate-coated metal or glass masters).[57]

"Back then, if a guy wasn't sharp on his axe every night, somebody was goin' come and steal his gig on a cutting contest or

on a jam session," Dr. John explained. "See, in the 1940s through the 1950s, 1960s, and into the early 1970s there were these jam sessions and cutting contests. The place in New York of course was Nicky Ungano's, and everybody used to jam there every night."

Ungano's at 210 West 70th Street was where the hottest musicians gathered in New York City during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Jimi Hendrix first jammed publicly with Buddy Miles there to celebrate the New Year in 1970. The next day Hendrix announced that Miles would be in his new Band of Gypsies.

"Same thing in New Orleans," Dr. John added, "there was always a joint to jam. What happened was all those joints went disco in the seventies. It all died with the death of free form radio and the beginnings of disco within a year."

Kansas City had a big after-hours cutting contest scene in the 1930s that nurtured jazz greats like saxophonists Lester Young and Charlie Parker. If you want to see a re-enactment of a legendary cutting contest, check out the film *Kansas City* (New Line Features), Robert Altman's re-creation of the epic battle between Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young.

Cutting contests weren't always about snatching a gig away from another musician; sometimes they were just for fun. "I was playing with the great T-Bone Walker," Chicago blues guitarist Jody Williams recalled. "I'm having fun- both of us were having fun. He'd play a riff, you know. I'd play the same thing he'd played, note for note, and he'd look around with a big grin on his face. So he'd play something a little more complicated. I'd play the same thing identical to what he was playing, note for note. I was still in my teens at the time. So then he'd go up behind his head. I'd go up behind my head with my guitar! So we were both standing onstage playing our guitars behind our heads. But then he did one thing he was famous for…with the guitar up behind his head he would start going down slow, doing the splits. Now that was painful just for me to watch. I told him, 'Go ahead on, man, you got it!' "[58]

Experiences like this helped turn Williams into the top-notch session player who played the smoking leads on such classics as Bo Diddley's "Who Do You Love," Otis Spann's "Five Spot," and Billy Boy Arnold's "I Was Fooled." "Every night you could get up onstage at a different club in Chicago and go head to head with another great player," Williams said. "It ain't like that now."

D

DELTA

Named "the birthplace of the blues," the Delta is the two-hundred-mile triangle of rich black soil that was flooded each spring by the Mississippi River before man intervened. The land is completely flat from Memphis, Tennessee to Vicksburg, Mississippi, and is bounded by the Tallahatchie and Yazoo Rivers to the east, and the Mississippi River to the west. The Delta is covered with cotton and soybean fields, and dotted with little towns.

This river-rich soil was once covered with dense forests and canebrakes, through which sluggish bayous meandered. Cotton farmers first began the hard, slow work of clearing the land in 1835, but made little progress. Determined to get back on their feet after the Civil War ended in 1865, the farmers used cheap labor to redouble their efforts to clear the Delta and develop new plantations on it. "Thousands of black freedmen migrated to the Delta to clear and farm its fields…recruited by labor agents who promised higher wages and civil rights which had been lost in other parts of the state," William Ferris wrote in *Blues from the Delta*.[59]

Thousands of Irish immigrants went to the Delta to find work, as well. Many were forcibly conscripted to work on the levee and the land-clearing crews. Irish immigrants were sometimes referred to as "white niggers," and storefront signs in the early 1900s often read "No Blacks, No Irish." [60] In the Delta, haunting Irish folksongs of pain and woe influenced the developing blues.

The laborers cleared the fields and built levees to hold back the river and protect the new fields from the spring floods. It was dirty, dangerous work, especially building the levees, which injured and took the lives of many mules and men who tumbled down the steep, muddy slopes.

The intense post-Civil War effort created a new economy and a new society in the Delta among poor blacks and whites. "Prejudice? Yes, there was in some areas but for years and years you had whites and blacks living next door to each other in the same neighborhood, getting along," recalled electric blues artist "Little" Milton Campbell, Jr., who was born in 1934 to sharecropping parents in Inverness, Mississippi. "They would visit, they would be together, and of course," Campbell, Jr. added, laughing, "some of them would sleep together, which you can understand when you see the different shades of skin!"

When Joel Slotnikoff interviewed musicologist and Mississippi native Gayle Dean Wardlow, Wardlow told him: "Now Vicksburg and Greenville, places on the river, were already open in the 1890s. But by the early 1900s they started clearing a lot of the swamps in the Delta. They started planting cotton. Well, this meant jobs in the Delta. A lot of people moved out of the hill country where they made very little money if any. I remember [H.C.] Speir said you could make three or four times picking

cotton in the Delta what you could workin' in the hill country."[61]

According to Speir, a sharecropper in the hill country beyond the Delta region could earn about a quarter a day, whereas in the Delta he could make a dollar or more a day. "You could make real good money pickin' cotton in the fall in the Delta," Wardlow said. At one time or another most of the great bluesmen wound up in the Delta because of the money that could be made there during the fall cotton harvest.

Cotton pickers who came during the fall often went home, packed up their families, and moved to the Delta to sharecrop year-round. Giant plantations like Dockery Farms had as many as two hundred and fifty families living there at once. Many people came to work at Dockery's, according to Wardlow, because "People lived next to each other in the shacks, but if you worked hard at Dockery's you could succeed. He was an honest man."

Dockery Farms was home on and off to the blues musician Charlie Patton, who was an enormous influence on Howlin' Wolf, Robert Johnson, and many other artists. Patton and his friends Willie Brown (Robert Johnson's mentor), and Tommy Johnson played countless parties, picnics, and fish fries in the tenant quarters at Dockery.[62] Howlin' Wolf moved down to the Dockery plantation in 1929 not only to work, but to be near Patton and learn everything he could from him.

Patton began working on the plantation in 1906 at age fifteen but developed a stormy relationship with the overseers. He was hired by Will Dockery to entertain the field hands, according to blues historian Steve LaVere. [63] Although by 1916 Patton had been working on the plantation for ten years, and was considered one of the best guitarists in the county, he was dismissed from the workforce after a family argument got out of hand. Patton came back in 1918, but he was kicked off again in 1921 and went to make his living in the regional jukes and barrelhouses. He returned to Dockery Farms in 1925 and lasted until, as he recounted in "'34 Blues," "They run me from Will Dockery's" again in 1934.

Charlie Patton in the Paramount Records catalog *Courtesy Delta Haze Corporation photo archives*

In "'34 Blues" Patton nails the desperation and anxiety of unemployment, but something good came out of leaving the plantation this time- Patton went to New York and recorded twenty-nine songs for the American Record Company. When these recordings were reissued in the mid-1960s, they sparked great interest in this Delta cropper who came to be known as the father of the Delta Blues.

By the mid-1920s, about a million African Americans were living in Mississippi, and four to five hundred thousand were in the Delta- many living and working together on plantations. For guitarist Hubert Sumlin, who grew up in the region, the Delta was a musical melting pot. "Down there where I was in my part of Mississippi, where I was born, there were musicians everywhere. We had people down there they speak French, French Creole. We had black Seminole. We had people from Jamaica, the Bahamas. Oh yes, you could hear the African feeling in the songs, in the dance, the way they tapped their feet, in everything."[64]

The concentration of gifted musicians plus people who needed entertainment after a hard week's work provided a birthing ground for the blues as fertile as the soil of the Delta itself. "Back then you worked every day," recalled Campbell, Jr. "And

you keep saying 'blues,' but you know, it was music, period, that was around everywhere. I was exposed to country and western first. It was the grand Ol' Opry on the radio for me. I got a chance to listen to people like Eddy Arnold, one of my favorite singers, and George Morgan. I never was into the bluegrass stuff, but I always liked the great stories that the real slow singers would tell.

"They say that so-called twelve-bar stuff is the black man's blues and country western of that day was the white man's blues," Little Milton mused, "but I tell you there's a very thin line between the two musics. Only difference is the beat, and the bars to some extent, but the stories of happiness, sadness, being lonesome, and what have you. All of that was the same."

Songs:

"Long Train Blues"- Robert Wilkins (1929)
"Low-Down Mississippi Bottom Man"- Freddie Spruell (1928)
"My Home Is In The Delta"- Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield)

DEVIL

In blues songs the devil is sometimes a euphemism for the white slave owner or boss. The devil may also be a Christianization of important West African trickster deities such as the Yoruban Eshu or Dahomean Legba (*see* **crossroads** *for a discussion of Eshu*). In the South, the devil has many names. He's "the man in black"- "Papa Lebat" in Louisiana, "Scratch" in Missouri, and "Legba" in Mississippi.

In "Me And The Devil Blues," Robert Johnson added fuel to the rumors that he had made a deal with the devil when he sang of opening the door to Satan one morning and saying, "Hello, Satan, I believe it's time to go." That song includes one of the most chilling couplets in the blues:

Me and the Devil was walking side by side
And I'm going to beat my woman until I get satisfied

The question is, can one really make a deal with the devil to become a great guitarist? Probably not, but just in case, here's one way to go about it[65]: Get yourself a black cat bone. Cut your nails to the quick and put the trimmings in a small bag with the black cat bone. During a full moon, bring the bag and your instrument to a lonely crossroads a few minutes before midnight. Kneel in the middle of the crossroads and chant six times: "Attibon Legba, open the gate for me."

Now sit cross-legged and play your best song. At the stroke of midnight, you will hear footsteps. Do not look up until they stop in front of you and a hand reaches down to take your guitar. Standing before you will be a tall man dressed in a sharp black suit. Do not speak to him. He will take your guitar, tune it, and play a song. When he hands it back to you, the deal is done and your soul belongs to him.

Songs:

"Devil Got My Woman"- Skip James (Nehemiah Curtis James)
"Me and the Devil"- Robert Johnson
"Preachin' Blues (Up Jumped the Devil)"- Robert Johnson

DIG

To dig something is to "get" it- to understand or appreciate it. The linguist David Dalby traced this usage of "dig" to the Wolof words *deg* or *dega*, which mean "to understand, to call attention to, or to appreciate."[66] In Wolof they were often used to mark the beginning of a sentence, as in *dega nga olof*, or "Do you understand Wolof?"[67]

Songs:

"Give Me My Blues"- Albert Collins
"I Know What You're Putting Down"- Louis Jordan and Bud Allen

DOG

In Southern Nigeria, to call someone a dog is an insult that implies that the person is hopelessly oversexed.[68] By the 1920s and 1930s in the southern United States, the middle finger was sometimes called the dog finger.

In blues songs, a person who has been utterly humiliated by an attraction to a mean or unfaithful partner may describe him- or herself as a dog, and may even declare, "I won't be dogged around no more." In "Doggin Me Around Blues," Jenny Pope declared:

I been your dog every since I entered your door
I'm gonna leave this town
I won't be dogged around no more

Sometimes a dog is the messenger, as well as the symbol, of a partner's infidelity, as in the Lightnin' Hopkins tune "Hear My

Black Dog Bark."[69]
Songs:
"Doggin Me Around Blues"- Jenny Pope
"Hear My Black Dog Bark"- Lightnin' Hopkins (Sam Hopkins)

DONEY

The word "doney" is rarely heard anymore, but when it is, it's usually as part of the phrase "no-good doney." The Bantu words *doni* or *ndondi* mean "a burden or load carried by a woman."[70] A no-good doney is a lazy woman who isn't willing to stoop to hard work. By extension, she's probably working on her back. When William Ferris was in Clarksdale in 1968 recording performances at a house party, he heard this snatch of Robert Johnson's "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom" sung by a local musician named Jasper Love at a house party[71]:

I don't want no woman want every downtown man she meets
She's a no-good doney, they shouldn't allow her on the street

Songs:
"I Believe I'll Dust My Broom"- Robert Johnson
"Revenue Man Blues"- Charlie Patton

DOZENS, DIRTY DOZENS

The dozens (also called "the dirty dozens") is a verbal game in which two-line rhyming insults are shot back and forth in front of an audience.

Iron is iron and steel won't rust
Your mama got pussy like a Greyhound bus[72]

Playing the dozens is about more than fun; it's a battle for respect and a verbal duel. The dozens is an exhibition of emotional strength and verbal agility. Obscenities are used and opponents slander each other's families because the game is above all a test of one's **cool**- the first person to get angry automatically forfeits. The audience chooses the winner and spreads the word about who won. The winner can expect to be challenged to another battle before long, either by the one who lost or an up-and-comer.

According to LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), "African songs of recrimination survive as a highly competitive game called 'the dozens.' (As any young Harlemite can tell you, if someone says to you, 'your father's a woman,' you must say, as a minimal comeback, 'your mother likes it,' or a similar putdown."[73] Other cultures also engage in verbal battling. Medieval Scots called it "flyting."[74]

Blues songs are loaded with similar boasts, taunts, and jokes. In "New Dirty Dozens," Memphis Minnie warned, "Come on all you folks and start to walk. I'm fixing to start my dozens talk." She started by saying:

Some of you womens ought to be in the can
Out on the corner stopping every man
But she was just getting warmed up. Her next target was "old man Bill":
He can't see but he sure can smell
Fish man pass here the other day
I done hear him, "Pretty mama I'm going your way"

The Willie Dixon song "Wang Dang Doodle," which was a minor hit for Howlin' Wolf and a career-making smash for Koko Taylor, was based on bawdy toasts like "Dance of the Motherfucking Freaks."[75] Many blues lyrics reflect an African American tradition of verbal jousting that includes everything from toasting, boasting, and capping to cracking, bagging, dissing, and snapping.[76]

Snaps are putdowns with a setup- "Your mama's so fat..."- followed by the snap- "she broke her arm and gravy poured out." "Your parents are so poor, they got married for the rice." "Your breath smells so bad, people on the phone hang up."[77]

In the 1970s and 1980s, rappers honed their verbal skills for dozens-style battles in which all lyrics were composed on the spot or "off the dome." At the height of the scene, New York City freestylers Supernatural, Craig-G, and Juice tested each other in battles that rappers still reminisce about today.

Songs:
Old Jim Canaan's"- Robert Wilkins
"New Dirty Dozens"- Memphis Minnie (Lizzie Douglas)

Memphis Minnie flashes her gold teeth in Chicago, circa 1938. *Photographer unknown, courtesy Delta Haze Corporation*

DRY LONG SO

The word "dry" describes something plain and unappetizing, like toast without butter or food straight out of the can, uncooked and unseasoned. It also means to be without money, as in "I'm dry, man." To be "dry long so" is to be worn out by poverty to the point where it feels like you're not going to make it. Skip James used the phrase in "Hard Time Killin' Floor Blues":

Hear me tell you people, just before I go
These hard times will kill you just dry long so

Songs:
"Come On In My Kitchen"- Robert Johnson
"Hard Time Killin' Floor Blues"- Skip James (Nehemiah Curtis James)

DUST MY BROOM

Sweeping the house after dark is still considered impolite in some African American families. This tradition comes from the West African belief that one should be careful not to accidentally sweep out of the house any benevolent gods or ancestral spirits who have come in for the night to watch over a sleeping family and protect it from evil spirits.[78]

On the other hand, when you do have evil spirits in the house, sweeping them out can be very effective. According to hoodoo riddance rituals, dusting one's broom first with magic powder will sweep a house free of unwanted supernatural (and embodied!) houseguests.

Perhaps this was what Robert Johnson was planning when he sang in "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom":

I'm gonna get up in the morning, I believe I'll dust my broom
The black man you been loving, girlfriend, can get my room

Was Johnson threatening to leave while actually preparing a hoodoo ritual to get rid of his rival? Or did he plan to express his rage at his girlfriend's cheating in a different fashion? "I Ain't Superstitious," by Willie Dixon, also hints at the use of sweeping to cause harm to someone, with the line "Don't sweep me with no broom/I might get put in jail."

In Yoruba culture, the god of terror and moral retribution, Obaluaiye, walks the earth ready to strike the arrogant and the immoral with disease. He carries a broom that he can use to conjure up smallpox (*shoponnon*). When his morals are offended, he takes a whiskbroom with long fibers sprinkled with camwood paste and spreads sesame seeds (*yamoti*) on the ground. He begins sweeping the seeds in circles. "As the broom begins to touch the dust and the dust begins to rise, the seeds, like miniature pockmarks, ride the wind with their annihilating powers: the force of a smallpox epidemic is thereby unleashed."[79]

The cult of Obaluaiye was banned in Nigeria in 1917 by British authorities when its priests were accused of deliberately spreading smallpox. The cult went underground, worshipping the smallpox god under different names, such as Oluwa. To this day in Nigeria it's considered dangerous to speak of him.

His menace survives in gentler form in the display of brooms in Yoruba households that are decorated with cowry shells and carvings, and are believed to have the power to uphold morality and make things right.

Then again, maybe Johnson was just saying he was outta there. "Dust my broom?" responded Johnson's common-law stepson, guitarist Robert Jr. Lockwood, when asked what he thought Johnson meant. "What he meant was leaving. Dust my broom meant he was leaving!"[80]

Songs:
"I Believe I'll Dust My Broom"- Robert Johnson
"I Ain't Superstitious"- Willie Dixon, recorded by Howlin' Wolf (Chester Burnett)

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[1] Gayle Dean Wardlow: The Blues World Interview," by Joel Slotnikoff, www.bluesworld.com.
[2] Holloway and Vass, p. xix.
[3] Charters, p. 59.
[4] Holloway and Vass, pp. 137, 138.
[5] Thompson, pp. 227-228.
[6] *Ibid*., p. 228.
[7] Holloway and Vass, p. 139.
[8] Major, p. 93.
[9] Webster's Online Dictionary.
[10] Moo & Oink.com
[11] *Ibid*.
[12] From the author's interview with Milton Campbell, Jr.
[13] The author thanks former *Blues Revue* editor-in-chief Andrew M. Robble for this anecdote.
[14] *Beneath the Underdog: His World As Composed by Mingus*, by Charles Mingus, p. 167, (New York: Vintage, 1991), from Major, p. 101.
[15] Dillard, p. 33.
[16] "…Ramblin'" by David Evans, p. 13, *Blues Revue* magazine (May/June 1995).
[17] "Michael Bloomfield" by Derwyn Powell, The Blues News.com.

[18] From the author's interview with Bob Margolin.
[19] From "What Was Muddy Like?" by Bob Margolin on Bob Margolin.com, quoted with permission from Mr. Margolin.
[20] *Ibid*.
[21] The author thanks Steve LaVere for this information about the kazoo.
[22] From the author's interview with Hubert Sumlin.
[23] Dillard, p. 112.
[24] "A Brief History of Voodoo," in *New Orleans Voodoo Crossroads* by Severine Singh, (Cincinnati: Black Moon Publishing, 1994), as quoted on New Orleans Voodoo Crossroads.com.
[25] "The Sugar Cane," by James Grainger, 1763, quoted in Dillard, p. 112.
[26] *Hoodoo in Theory and Practice: An Introduction to African American Rootwork*, by Catherine Yronwode, published online at Lucky Mojo.com.
[27] *Ibid.*
[28] Thompson, p. 99.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 119.
[32] *Blues From The Delta* by William Ferris, p. 12, (New York: Da Capo, 1984; originally published Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978).
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[34] From the author's interview with Jimmie Vaughan.
[35] Jones, p. 213.
[36] Thompson, p. 12
[37] Chernoff, p. 106
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[40] From the author's interview with Robben Ford.
[41] Chernoff, p. 143.
[42] "Gibeon Sullivan's Cooling Board," by Breck Stapleton, *Alabama Heritage Online*, Fall 2003.
[43] *Ibid*.
[44] Yronwode.
[45] All Gayle Dean Wardlow quotes in this entry are from "Gayle Dean Wardlow: The Blues World Interview" by Joel Slotnikoff, BluesWorld.com.
[46] Stephen C. LaVere, accompanying booklet, *Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings*, Columbia Records, 1975, 1990; Robert Johnson biography, Delta Haze.com, 1998.
[47] From the author's correspondence with Steve LaVere.
[48] Thompson, p. 109.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[52] Ventura, "Hear That Long Snake Moan."
[53] All quotes from Robert Jr. Lockwood in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Lockwood.
[54] "Robert Johnson's Stepson and Protégé" by David Witter, June 2005, *Chicago Innerview*.
[55] From the author's interview with Robert Jr. Lockwood.
[56] All quotes from Dr. John in this entry are from the author's interview with Dr. John.
[57] Special thanks to Steve LaVere for this insight.
[58] From the author's interview with Jody Williams.
[59] Ferris, p. 3.
[60] From "Irish Blue" by Míchealín Ní Dhochartaigh, Ireland's Own.net
[61] From "Gayle Dean Wardlow: The Blues World Interview," Slotnikoff.
[62] From the National Parks Service "Links to the Past," (www.cr.nps.gov.)
[63] From the author's correspondence with Steve LaVere.
[64] From the author's interview with Hubert Sumlin.
[65] From "Devil Music" by David Holthouse, *Phoenix New Times*, April 4, 1996.
[66] "The African Element in Black English" by Dr. David Dalby, 1972; re-published in *Readings In African-American*

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[67] "The Impact of African Languages on American English" by Joseph E. Holloway, California State University Northridge, Slavery In America.org.
[68] Dillard, p. 35.
[69] Dillard, p. 36.
[70] Holloway and Vass, p. 97.
[71] Ferris, p. 123.
[72] Source: An "African American teenager" quoted in *A Study of the Non-Standard English* by William Labov et al.; in Dillard, p. 135.
[73] Jones, p. 27.
[74] From Essays in Medieval Studies, Vol 13, 1996, "Flytes of Fancy: Boasting and Boasters from Beowulf to Gangsta Rap," in *Essays in Medieval Studies*, Vol 13, 1996, by Alta Cools Halama.
[75] "Willie Dixon, Fostering The Blues" by Tom Townsley, *Blues Revue*, Winter 1994, pg. 23.
[76] "Some History About Playing the Dozens," Online Magazine.com.
[77] All snaps from *Ibid*.
[78] Jones, p. 35.
[79] Thompson, p. 63.
[80] From the author's interview with Robert Jr. Lockwood.

E

EAGLE, EAGLE ROCK

In blues songs, the eagle represents the dollar that flies into a working man's hand on Friday. "The eagle flies on Friday, Saturday I go out to play."

The Eagle Rock was a popular African American dance move performed with the arms outstretched and flapping slowly like wings, while the body rocked side to side, like an eagle in flight. It was incorporated into a dance called **Ballin' the Jack**, as described in the 1913 vaudeville tune "Ballin' the Jack" written by Chris Smith (music) and James Henry Burris (lyrics):

First you put your two knees close up tight, then you sway 'em to the left
Then you sway 'em to the right, step around the floor kind of nice and light
Then you twist around and twist around with all your might
Stretch your lovin' arms straight out into space
Then you do the Eagle Rock with style and grace

The Eagle Rock may have been picked up from Native American dances in which dancers mimic the movements of a flying eagle, as was done at the Eagle Rock Reservation in northern New Jersey. Another theory is that it was named after the Eagle Rock Baptist Church in Kansas City, where worshippers were prone to waving their arms and rocking side to side.[1]

Songs:
"Baby Doll"- Bessie Smith and Webman
"Ballin' the Jack"- James Burris and Chris Smith
"Stormy Monday Blues"- Aaron T. Walker

EASY RIDER (see also **C.C. RIDER** and **RIDER**)

Originally, "easy rider" may have referred to the guitar that hung on the back of a traveling bluesman. It came to mean a man who is a prostitute's lover and sponges off her earnings.

Easy rider can switch genders to refer to either a male or a female lover. When used to refer to a man, it usually implies that the man is slippery and faithless. Bessie Smith made her feelings about one such man clear in "Rocking Chair Blues":

Easy rider, you see I'm going away,
I won't be back until you change your ways

Songs:
"Easy Rider Blues"- Blind Lemon Jefferson (Lemon Jefferson)
"Rocking Chair Blues"- Bessie Smith/I. Johns

F

FARO, FAROR

Pronounced "pharaoh," faro or faror is an old rural Mississippi synonym for girlfriend. It was occasionally spelled fairo. Its origins are unknown, but it could be short for "fair brown," which was sometimes used to describe a beautiful woman or a girlfriend. In "Big Leg Blues," Mississippi John Hurt sang:

It was late at midnight and moon shine bright like day
I seen your faror goin' up the right of way

The oldest recording to use the word is Peg Leg Howell's "Tishamingo Blues" (1926), in which he declared:

I got a loving faro, she's long and tall like me
I love my brownskin, don't care where she be

Songs:
"Big Leg Blues"- Mississippi John Hurt (John Smith Hurt)
"Cool Drink of Water Blues"- Tommy Johnson
"Stop Look And Listen"—Kokomo Arnold

FAT MOUTH

The phrase “fat mouth” entered American English in the late 1600s, and was probably derived from the Mandingo word da-ba, which translates as “fat-mouth.”[2] The Mandingo were among millions of Africans taken from the Senegambia River region of West Africa, home to the Bambara, Wolof, Mandingo, Fula, and Serer people. Together, these tribes comprised the Mande civilization, considered the earliest and most complex civilization to emerge in western Sudan (circa 200 A.D.).

Da-ba was used to describe an obnoxiously excessive talker, especially one who tries to get a partner into bed with obvious flattery. This was probably also the origin of “blabbermouth.”

In Tommy Johnson’s “Big Fat Mama Blues,” he noted that actions are more effective than words when he sang:

Every time the meat shake
Fat mouth lose a home

Songs:
“Big Fat Mama Blues”- Tommy Johnson
“Long Lonesome Blues”- Blind Lemon Jefferson (Lemon Jefferson)

FIX

A mojo is a charm that can ward off evil spirits and curses, or affect someone’s behavior. A root doctor “fixes” a mojo by anointing it with oils, saying words over it, etc. to give it the power to carry out its task. The mojo itself can be used to “fix” another person, meaning that it will have the desired effect on the person’s behavior. A woman can use a mojo to “fix” a man so that he can’t make love to any other woman, for instance. In “Me and My Whiskey,” Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks) warned:

Don’t let your gal fix you, like my gal fixed me
She made me love her, now she’s way down in Tennessee

A person who has been hoodoo’ed like this would be “in a fix,” and would have to consult a root doctor to find a way out.

By the 1950s, mojo was sometimes used to refer to narcotics. This led to the use of “fix” by heroin addicts to refer to a shot of dope that would prevent them from going into withdrawal.

Songs:
“Alimony Blues”- Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson, recorded by T-Bone Walker (Aaron Thibeaux Walker)
“Me and My Whiskey”- Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks)
“Bad Luck Situation”- Johnny Winter

FOOT TRACK MAGIC (see also **STONES IN PASSWAY**)

Foot track magic is a hoodoo practice. It involves jinxing by a wide variety of methods, such as placing stones in a certain configuration in someone’s path, sprinkling goofer dust or graveyard dirt in his or her shoes, or placing dirt from the person’s footprint into a bottle. The resulting curses can range from giving the person bad luck or memory loss to causing incurable disease and death.

These practices were common enough in Mississippi in the 1920s and 1930s that Delta blues artists made reference to them in their songs, as Robert Johnson did in “Stones in My Passway”:

Now you tryin’ to take my life, and all my lovin’ too
You laid a passway for me, now what are you tryin’ to do?

In her wonderfully comprehensive online book, *Hoodoo in Theory and Practice: An Introduction to African American Rootwork*, Catherine Yronwode described foot track magic as “a form of evil work in which a magical poison enters the victim through his or her feet, causing an unnatural illness.”[3]

Interestingly, the most common symptom reported by people who believed themselves victims of foot track magic is painfully swollen legs and feet, a symptom of diabetes. Yronwode divided foot track magic into two categories: 1) Curses that involve putting goofer dust or something similarly noxious in the person’s path so they cross it or get it on their feet or shoes, 2) Curses that involve taking dirt from the person’s footprint or his or her socks, shoes, toenail clippings, or skin from the foot and doctoring them with magic powders or oils

“One old-style way to cross someone,” Yronwode wrote, “is to mix gum arabic, unraveled bits of hemp rope, and sulphur powder or goofer dust, and strew it in their path. This mess will stick to their shoes and work on them for a long time. A shed snake skin placed in an enemy's path, especially if filled with a ‘killing powder’ like graveyard dirt, is also said to intend sure death to the one who steps on it.”[4]

An even older method echoes the Nsibidi signs or ideograms that came over from Africa. It involves drawing cross marks in the dirt and spitting on them to activate the curse. Common hoodoo marks include a circle with an X inside it, or three rows of wavy “snake” lines.

FUNK

Funk is derived from the Ki-Kongo word *lu-fuki* (or *lu-funki*), which means "bad body odor."[5] Ki-Kongo is the language of the Bakongo people. Many Ki-Kongo words and concepts, such as funk and jazz, survived slavery to become part of African American culture. The traditional civilization of the Bakongo people encompasses modern Bas-Zaire and neighboring territories in modern Cabinda, Cogo-Brazzaville, Gabon, and northern Angola. Slavers in the 1500s used the name "Kongo" or "Congo" only for captured Bakongo people, but it eventually became the designation for any slave from the west coast of Central Africa.

The earliest meaning of funk in African American slang was "fear" or "panic," perhaps because someone panic-stricken gives off a particularly strong scent. This may be the basis for the use of funk also to mean a mood of depression or anxiety, as in "I'm in a funk today." Funk came to be associated with the scent of hot sweaty lovemaking.[6] As late as the 1950s and early 1960s, "funk" and "funky" were still considered too indelicate for use in polite company.[7]

Today, in an interesting case of cross-cultural fertilization, Bakongo people in Africa use both the English "funky" and lu-fuki to praise master musicians who have sweated to achieve a high level of performance and have thus obtained the power to make listeners get up and get sweaty, too.

The Bakongo use "funky" and lu-fuki interchangeably "to praise persons for the integrity of their art," as Fu-Kiau Bunseki, an authority on Kongo culture, told Thompson in *Flash of the Spirit*. Such praise might be voiced like "there is a really funky person! - My soul advances toward him to receive his blessing." (*yati, nkwa lu-fukti! Ve miela miami ikewenda baki*)[8]

Songs:

"Blue Funk"- Jack Teagarden
"Funk-Shun" - Albert King
"Good Old Funky Music" "- The Meters

FUZZ

The fuzz is slang for the police. It may be derived from the Wolof word *fas* for horse, possibly because African slaves observed police patrols mounted on horseback.[9]

Songs:

"Kool It (Here Comes The Fuzz)"- Kool & The Gang
"Fuzzbox Voodoo" - Z.Z. Top
"Fuzzy Wuzzy Rag" - W.C. Handy

G

GALLINIPPER

A gallinipper is a particularly fierce large mosquito found in floodwaters. It lays its eggs on low-lying dry land, and they hatch when the land is flooded, releasing swarms of vicious biters up to a half-inch long, with shaggy legs. Galliniper (or gabber nipper) is also used in the South to refer not only to these mosquitoes but also to biting horse or crane flies.

Song:

"Mosquito Moan"- Blind Lemon Jefferson (Lemon Jefferson)

GATE, GATEMOUTH

A gate is a fellow, a guy. Gate may be an abbreviation of gatemouthed, which means gator-faced, and by the 1920s came to mean a jazz musician or any hip male.[10] Louis Armstrong reportedly claimed to be the first to use gatemouth this way.[11]

In "Gimme a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer," Bessie Smith sang:

Just at the break of day you can hear old Hannah say,
"Gimme a pigfoot and a bottle of beer. Send me, gate"

In the original version, the line was "Send me, daddy."

The most famous gatemouth is Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, the virtuoso multi-instrumentalist who plays some of the most fiery and musically sophisticated blues around- and mixes it up with bluegrass, country, swing, funk, and zydeco. Brown's brothers were called Widemouth and Gapmouth.[12]

Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown at New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, 2002 *Photo ©Joseph A. Rosen*

Born in Louisiana and raised in Texas, Brown has been performing on guitar, violin, harmonica, mandolin, viola, and even the drums, since 1945. "In the forties it was Gatemouth Brown and T. Bone Walker," said Texas blues artist Jimmie Vaughan. "They were great rivals. Gatemouth Brown was like the Jimi Hendrix of that time."[13]

Songs:

"Gimme a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer" - Wesley "Sox" Wilson, recorded by Bessie Smith

"You Run Your Mouth & I'll Run My Business" - Louis Armstrong

GIG

Musicians use "gig" to refer to a performance for which they expect to get paid- the question is, how much? Musicians picked up "gig" from the illegal lottery business, which is where they also got **axe** and **bag**. The lottery terminology, in turn, was borrowed from horse racing. A two-number betting combination was called a "saddle", and a three-number combo (the most popular play) was called a "gig."

For club dates, musicians are typically paid from whatever is left over after the club takes its share of the door proceeds. Just like a club date, a gig might or might not pay off. Some gigs were so well known that they had their own names, such as "the washerwoman's gig" (4, 11, 44) and "the dirty gig" (3, 6, 9). Of course, as Dr. John noted, "The lottery people knew that, so that ain't gonna let that number roll too fast."[14]

GOOFER BAG, GOOFER DUST

The word goofer comes from the Bantu *kufua* and the Ki-Kongo *kufa*. Both mean, "to die."[15] Goofer dust (also known as "goober dust") is powder made from a mix of graveyard dirt and other ingredients, such as salt and powdered snakeskin. It's used as a hoodoo to kill or harm someone.

Goofer dust can be administered as foot track magic by placing it in the path of the intended victim. It can also be sprinkled on the victim's pillow, around the home, or in his or her clothes. A goofer bag is a bag of charms that protects the wearer from such deadly spells. Romeo Nelson sang about how to use goofer dust in "Getting' Dirty Just Shakin' that Thing":

Spread the goofer dust around your bed
In the morning, find your own self dead

Excerpts from folklorist Harry Middleton Hyatt's seminal study, *Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork*, suggest that

although some goofer dust was just ground-up bones and dirt, some was indeed made from poisonous substances. An interview subject from Fayetteville, North Carolina, told Hyatt, "Goofer dust is snake haid, scorpion haid, lizard haid- listen, snake haid dust, scorpion dust, and lizard dust. Dat's whut yo' call goofer dust. Yo' git them things an' yo' kill em an' yo' cut de haids off an' yo' dry that. After yo' dry that, yo' powder that up. That's whut dey call goofer dust."[16]

Another interviewee, from Waycross, Georgia told Hyatt, "Jest a- yo' see yo' git a snake- yo' can take a rattlesnake an' dry his haid up, pound it up, an' den yo' kin go to work an' use dat as goofer dust. Kill anybody."[17]

According to hoodoo expert Catherine Yronwode, goofer dust almost always includes graveyard dirt, powdered sulphur, and salt. Other ingredients may include powdered black cat bones, powdered snakeheads or snakeskin, powdered lizard or scorpion, cayenne or black pepper, powdered insects or snails, and dried powdered herbs.[18]

The Ma Rainey tune "Black Dust Blues" hints at another ingredient- the fine, oily black dust around a blacksmith's anvil. This song is a classic tale of goofering. In it, Ma Rainey sang that after having quarreled with a woman who accused Rainey of stealing her man, she went out one morning and found black dust all around her door. Rainey began to lose weight and "had trouble with my feet." By the end she couldn't even walk:

Black dust in my window, black dust on my porch mat
Black dust's got me walking on all fours like a cat

The first sign of goofering is a sharp pain in the feet or legs, followed by severe swelling of the feet and legs and inability to walk. These symptoms, Yronwode has noted, are "identical with those of diabetic edema and diabetic neuropathy."[19] If the person has truly been goofered, though, a medical doctor won't be able to help. Unless a root doctor intervenes, the person will wind up crawling on all fours howling in pain and death will soon follow.

Songs:
"Black Dust Blues"- Selma Davis (music), Ma Rainey (lyrics)
"Getting' Dirty Just Shakin' that Thing"- Romeo Nelson
"I Don't Know"- "Cripple" Clarence Lofton

GRAVEYARD DIRT

Among the Bakongo people of Central Africa, earth from a grave is believed to contain the spirit of the person buried in it.[20] It is a powerful ingredient in magic, therefore, if one knows how to activate the spirit's energy and harness it. Different spirits have different energies, so choose the grave wisely. The choice depends on what kind of spell you want to cast.

For a spell to bring something positive into your life, such as a job or love, dirt from a baby's grave is recommended. If you are casting a spell to make someone fall in love with you or return to you, get dirt from the grave of someone who loved you very much .He or she will help you obtain the love you desire. Dirt from over the heart will be most effective.[21]

If you want to curse someone with an illness, misfortune, or worse, find the grave of a murderer- just be sure you can handle a spell that evil. Many people recommend dirt from a soldier's grave, because soldiers are strong, fearless, and disciplined to follow orders. If you want members of a family to fight and get vicious with each other, obtain some dirt from the grave of a con artist, a rounder, or similar troublemaker. The general principle is that the worse a person acted during the life, the worse his or her spirit can cause someone to behave.[22]

First, though, you have to "buy" the dirt. This entails getting in touch with the spirit, respectfully asking to use the dirt, and leaving some form of payment that will please the spirit. This might be money or booze, depending on the person's desires in life. Since the 19th century, the traditional payment left by hoodoo practitioners has been a silver dime.

Blues historian Steve LaVere, who handles blues legend Robert Johnson's estate, asks "Could this be why we always find money on Robert Johnson's headstone?"[23]

Song:
"Conjured"- Esmond Edwards, recorded by Wynnonie Harris

GREENS

Greens are the tough-yet-nutritious leaves of collards, kale, mustard, or turnip. These are cooked with pork fat (and sometimes ham hocks) until tender enough to eat. Though delicious when cooked properly, they are sometimes looked down upon as symbols of poverty.

In "Black Gypsy Blues," Furry Lewis gets the message that his woman is onto him for fooling around with someone else when:

Lord I asked for cabbage, she brought me turnip greens
I asked her for water, and she brought me gasoline

Greens are soul food, served not only in African American homes and soul-food restaurants, but in the black-owned nightclubs of the **chitlin circuit**, where countless blues musicians paid their dues playing one-night stands for a little pay and a hot meal.

Songs:

"Black Gypsy Blues"- Furry Lewis (Walter Lewis)

"Southern Woman Blues"- Blind Lemon Jefferson (Lemon Jefferson)

GRIND, GRINDER (see also **COFFEE GRINDING**)

To grind is to have sexual intercourse, specifically for a man or woman to enhance a partner's pleasure by grinding in a circular motion against him or her during intercourse. This use may stem from *grayna*, which means "to eat" in Krio, the English-based Creole language of Sierra Leone.[24]

From "Bawdyhouse Blues" (composer unknown):

I got an all-night trick again

I'm busy grindin so you can't come in

A grinder is a man (although the term sometimes refers to a woman) who is so good at making love that other men fear losing their women to him. This term may be derived from the tale of Joe de Grinder, a man with such magical lovemaking powers that other men feared losing their women to him because he would visit them during the day while their men were away at work.[25]

This tale may also be the source for the current use of the name Jody in the armed forces for a man who makes love to enlisted men's wives while their husbands are away on deployment.[26]

Songs:

"All Around Man"- Bo Carter (Armenter Chatmon)

"Grinder Man Blues"- Memphis Slim (Peter Chatman)

"What's the Matter With the Mill"- Memphis Minnie (Lizzie Douglas)

GRIOT

African griots serve the same purpose as the bards and skalds of medieval European courts once did. Griots keep and comment upon the history of the court. They are a hereditary caste of singer-historians who keep the oral histories of families, tribes, and dynasties. As Alan Lomax explained in *The Land Where the Blues Began*, "They [griots] are social satirists, whose verses once on a time dethroned chieftains."[27]

Some griots are employed by sultans, chiefs, or headmen, and can sing the history of the employer's family in verses that reach back over centuries. Others are attached to professional groups, such as fishermen or butchers, and play songs praising the workers. A village may have local griots who also work at trades, such as farming or fishing. The most renowned griots are independent and travel around, leasing out their services.

The word griot comes from the French *guiriot*, which is probably derived from the Portuguese *criado*, or servant. Criado comes from the Latin *creatus*, meaning one brought up or trained. Griots are indeed brought up in the griot tradition by their fathers and uncles "and are trained over many years in order to learn the enormous quantity of traditional songs. A griot is required to sing on demand the history of a tribe or family for seven generations and...to be familiar with the songs of ritual necessary to summon spirits and gain the sympathy of the ancestors," according to Paul Oliver, who studied them during his travels for *Savannah Syncopators: African Retentions In The Blues*[28] To be a griot requires the development of an extraordinary memory. Griots hold not only the history of the people, but their mythology and religious rites.

Among Mandingo people, griots are called *jaliya*, according to musicographer Samuel Charters, who spent time with some jaliya in the Gambia River region in Senegal in the late 1970s. The jaliya were very important to their tribes, Charters noted, because the tribes did not use a written language to keep their histories. Other renowned griots are the Fula *jelefo*, and the Wolof *katt* (*see also* **cat**).

Griots are paid handsomely to play for weddings and other ceremonies, and can become quite celebrated and wealthy. Of course, as Charters learned in his travels, the griots' oral histories are probably influenced by the need to flatter the person paying to hear the history. Historian Charlotte A. Quinn noted when she was working in Gambia that: "A fascinating study in themselves, the griots' tales collected during 1965 proved to be less valuable for the history of Gambian Mandingo society than the traditions and memories of nonprofessional informants whose livelihood was not dependent on the aesthetic or hortatory virtues of their presentation."[29]

What's interesting about the griots with regard to the blues is that, unlike most West African musicians, they accompany themselves and usually sing alone. Most African music is performed by groups, and is dominated by drumming and dancing.

The griot, in contrast, plays a stringed instrument, such as the *kora*, and sings while others sit and listen attentively. Lomax suggested in *The Land Where the Blues Began* that "through the work of performers like Sid Hemphill, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Charlie Patton, and their like, the griot tradition has survived full-blown in America with hardly an interruption."[30]

In *Savannah Syncopators*, Oliver added: "There seem to be many interesting parallels between the attitudes of these savannah communities to the griot and those of the black community to the blues singer…Blues singers are not necessarily socially acceptable in the black community, but they are certainly known to most members of it. They, too, are the sources of humor and entertainment, of gossip and comment, and a singer like Lightnin' Hopkins is very much a griot in personality, with a similar flair for spontaneous and devastating comment on the passing scene."[31]

Like certain blues musicians, griots have also been suspected of familiarity with the devil, hence the tradition of interring them standing upright in a hollow tree, rather than burying them in the earth and risking its desecration. Some of this may have to do with the griots' seemingly magical knowledge of everything that has happened to the people for whom they are singing. As a *jali* named Nyama told Charters, when new people come into the village, "I know it already, before they come. I know all the names of the people because that is my job as a jali. I must know the history of the families and I must know how your great-grandfather and your father come down to you. I learn all of this because we, my family, we are seven generations of musicians here. We aren't just people who come after, we are the beginning of the griots here. You see, we know it."[32]

Another jali sang Charters a song about the Mandingo kings who collected slaves to sell to the Portuguese, who then sold them to the Dutch, who in turn brought them to an English colony in Virginia. Charters noticed that the jali did not present dates, but rather relationships between families over time. "It was a history told in symbols rather than in specific details," Charters said. "Hardly a recital of what would be called 'facts' by a European historian, yet it explained what had happened, and the roles that all of the parties involved had played."[33]

After many verses tracing the dawn of the slave trade, the jali's song concluded[34]:

When the Europeans came,
when they brought their ship from Portugal,
the ship used to start its journey from Banjul,
then it went to Snemunko Jammeh, and Mansa Demba Sanko,
and Samkala Marong, and Wali Mandeba, and Jata Sela.
Anyone who had slaves they collected them all together and took them
to the places called Aladabara and Jufure
to sell them to the Portuguese.
Then the Portuguese put them in their ship
And left there and went to Jang Jang Bure.
When they arrived there they went
right to the slave house to collect slaves there
and take them to the Hollanders.
Then the Hollanders collected them and sent them to America.
It is because of this that slaves are plenty in America.
They call them American Negroes

GRIS-GRIS, GRIS-GRIS CHURCH

Gris-gris is a French adaptation of the Senegalese word *grigri*. Used as a noun, grigri means charm or amulet. The verb means "to bewitch."[35] There's also the Mandingo *grigri*, which means "to shake."[36] In the Caribbean, a gris-gris is called a *wanga* or *oanga* bag, from the African word *wanga*, which also means "charm" or "spell."[37]

Simply put, a gris-gris is an amulet or charm worn to protect the wearer from curses (a gris-gris may also be used to cast a curse). A dime with a hole in it, worn tied around the ankle to bring good luck, is an example of a simple Mende gris-gris that people still wear today.[38]

In New Orleans they speak of the "gris-gris church" and the Catholic Church as running pretty much neck and neck. The "gris-gris" practice a religion called Vodou or Voodoo. Priestess Marie Laveau, known as the Voodoo Queen, is revered in New Orleans for having consolidated and strengthened the gris-gris church into a formidable force in the 1800s. Today an estimated fifteen percent of the population of New Orleans practices the Voodoo religion.

"Everything down in New Orleans is connected with Catholicism and gris-gris, as it's called in Louisiana," according to R&B pianist and singer Dr. John. "Gris-gris music of New Orleans was the main influence for the Dr. John band. People never knew what we were doing; they just thought we was playing psychedelical music. But we snuck it in the picture."[39]

Dr. John's stage name is also a nod to the gris-gris church, with its Reverend Mothers and Root Doctors. "Dr. John was one

of those tradition names, like Mother Katherine, Doctor Ya-Ya, and Marie Laveau," Dr. John explained. "And, besides, my name is Malcolm John Michael Crow Rebennack so I took one of my real names and put it into a form that was a lot easier to remember than my own name!"

"I respect the gris-gris church for not recording any music," Dr. John added. "I really think it would get diluted and lost in the mainstream, and I respect them for that. On the other side, somebody's got to record some of it some way so future generations know what it was. One of the happiest things I ever felt when I cut 'The Litany of the Saints' on the Goin' Back to New Orleans record was when I played it for some Saint Christo gris-gris and they cried. They'd never heard their music put in a classical context. That made me feel really good, 'cause some of them reverend mothers been on my ass for years and they said, 'You did a good thing.'"

Songs:

"Gris-Gris Gumbo Ya Ya"- Dr. John (Mac Rebennack)

"Hoodoo Blues"- Bessie Brown

GUMBO

When Mark Twain exclaimed that "New Orleans food is as delicious as the less criminal forms of sin," he probably had gumbo near the top of the list. This fragrant, chocolate-colored stew gets its richness from roux- flour cooked in fat until it acquires a dark color and complex, nutty flavor- and its name from the Bantu word *kingombo*, which means okra.[40]

Okra is the African vegetable that is a primary ingredient of gumbo. Other ingredients may include chicken and andouille sausage, and plenty of cooked rice. For a seafood gumbo, substitute crawfish, shrimp, and fish fillets for the chicken and sausage. New Orleans Voodoo Queen Marie Laveaux reportedly served bowlfuls of delicious gumbo to keep practitioners fortified during the intense dancing and drumming ceremonies held at Bayou St. John.

Okra originated in Ethiopia and was brought to the North America by African slaves. It was quite popular down South by the 1780s. Meanwhile, some slaves who had escaped were taken in by Native Americans, from whom they learned to use ground green sassafras leaves as a spice. Many of these slaves were recaptured and returned to their plantations. They brought with them the use of sassafras, which Louisiana slaves called "file." By 1805 an early gumbo had emerged- a soup of okra pods, shrimp, and powdered sassafras leaves. [41]

Cooking tip: To prevent cooked okra from being disgustingly slimy, wash the okra pods, towel dry them, and leave them out for an hour or so to dry some more. [42]

Songs:

"Gris-Gris Gumbo Ya Ya"- Dr. John (Mac Rebennack)

"Mary Come on Home"- Sleepy John Estes (John Adam Estes)

GUTBUCKET, GUT BASS

On plantations down South during slavery, the hogs were slaughtered in December. The hams and chops went to the main house, and the hog guts, ears, feet, and other leftovers were given to the slaves. The gutbucket was the bucket the slaves took to the plantation slaughterhouse and use to collect the hog parts. Slaves improvised dishes with these kitchen castoffs, which became "soul food" such as **chitlins**, ham hocks, hog maws (jowls), pigs' feet, and cracklins (fried pig skin).

Gutbucket also referred to the bucket placed underneath whiskey barrels in dive bars, or barrelhouses, to catch any liquor leaking from the barrels. Soon anything "low down" was called "gutbucket"- gutbucket blues, a gutbucket joint, etc. A gutbucket joint was also sometimes called a bucket-of-blood joint due to the number of shankings that tended to take place in these establishments. (*see* **shank**)

Country blues musicians would take a gutbucket and turn it upside down on the ground to create an African-style earth bow. According to anthropologist Harold Courlander's observations of African earth-bow players, "The string is plucked and beaten by one player, while a second beats on the inverted tub as though it were a drum."[43]

Similarly, a washtub bass or "gut bass" is created by turning a galvanized tin washtub upside down, and stretching a wire from the tub to the top of a stick attached to it. To do this, stretch a cord from the center of the bucket to the top of a broomstick. Place the stick against the lip of the tub, so that when the string is plucked it makes a musical tone that resonates in the tub. To play the bass, stand with one foot on the tub to keep it steady on the ground, and pluck away at the string.

H

HAMBONE

In blues songs a hambone is typically a euphemism for a penis, although some female blues singers have used it to refer to their own genitals. In the earliest recorded song to use "hambone," "Southern Woman's Blues," Ida Cox announced that she'd had it with the men up North:

I'm going back south where I can get my hambone boiled
These northern men about to let my poor hambone spoil

By the late 1920s, though, when hambone showed up in a song, it meant "penis." Cab Calloway used hambone this way in his racier live version of W.C. Handy's relatively tame "St. Louis Blues." Calloway improvised this verse in 1930:

I'm goin' way back to Chicago to have my hambone boiled
These women in New York City let my good hambone spoil

Songs:
"St. Louis Blues"- W.C. Handy
"Southern Woman's Blues"- Ida Cox

HARP

Harp is slang for a harmonica, which is also called a comb. Down South a harmonica is sometimes called a mouth harp or a French harp. Glenn Weiser, author of the fascinating book Blues and Rock Harmonica, noted that in the late 1800s, the Carl Essbach company marketed a couple of harmonicas (model numbers 22 and 44) with the name "French Harp" on the covers. The French Harp harmonicas were especially popular in the South during the early part of the 20th century, coinciding with the emergence of the blues.[44]

According to Weiser, the forerunner of the modern harmonica, the accordion, and the concertina was a free-reed instrument invented by Chinese Emperor Nyn-Kwya in 3000 B.C. Called the *sheng*, it was brought to Europe in the early 1800s.[45]

The *sheng* is the oldest known free-reed instrument. Free-reed instruments use a reed framed in a chamber. The reed freely vibrates when air passes over it. These vibrations cause the characteristic warbly sound of the harmonica and the accordion. With fixed-reed instruments, in contrast, such as the clarinet, the saxophone, the Indian *shanai* and the Chinese *sona*, the air passing over the reed vibrates in sympathy with the reed, producing a clearer tone.[46]

African American musicians explored the limitations of the harmonica and discovered that its notes could be lowered in pitch or "bent" by changing the pressure exerted on the reeds. W.C. Handy recalled hearing train imitations played on the harmonica by blues musicians as early as the 1870s. As Weiser noted, "The 'blue' notes of the African vocal scale and the moans and cries of the field holler had been successfully reproduced on a new instrument."[47]

HELLHOUND

A hellhound is the devil's bloodhound- a supernatural dog that guards the gates of hell. In Greek mythology, this was Cerberus, the watchdog of Hades. The hellhound is as big as a calf and shaggy, with eyes that glow like burning coals.

In Bakongo culture, "between the village of the living and the village of the dead there is a village of dogs."[48] These dogs are believed to be able to find any person who has run to escape punishment for a crime. They are also seers who can see into the future.

Afro-Cuban charms called *minkisi* involve combining many ingredients in a large three-legged iron pot. Some such charms include the body of a black male dog, in order to grant the user of the charm a dog's acute sense of smell and tracking ability.[49]

The hellhound differs from the supernatural **black dog** in that black dogs, or "shucks," sometimes protect travelers and sometimes forecast their doom.[50] A hellhound, on the other hand, is hunting you down. Robert Johnson expressed the terror of being chased by the devil's bloodhound in "Hellhound on My Trail." He described being pelted by hail as he ran, knowing the beast was closing in.

Song:
"Hell Hound on My Trail"- Robert Johnson

HIP

To be hip is to be aware of what's happening in pop culture, music, and world events. Linguist David Dalby traced hip to the Wolof word *hipi*, which means "to open one's eyes" and "to be aware of what's going on"[51] The Wolof language includes an agentive suffix, *-kat*, which means "person." Add "kat" to "hipi" and you get the Wolof word for a conscious person who knows what's going on- a *hipi-kat* or "hepcat."

In the 1930s, one of the first African-American radio DJs, Texan Lavada Durst, became famous for the swing music he

played and his fast **jive** on-air patter. He called himself Dr. Hepcat.

Swing-era hepcats evolved into the hipsters of the 1950s and the hippies of the 1960s.

Songs:

"Get Hip" - Bobby Parker
"Hip Guy" - Charlie Sayles
"This Is Hip"- John Lee Hooker

HOBO

The first hobos were farm boys, or "hoe-boys," who hopped freight trains with their hoes over their shoulders and their belongings in a sack in order to find day work in the fields. These migratory workers showed up in droves at planting time starting in the mid-1800s.[52]

By the time the Civil War began in 1861, railroads were being built at an astonishing rate. The amount of track in the United States grew from 30,000 miles in 1860 to 230,000 miles by 1890. Riding the rails to search for work became a way of life for many people during the economic depression of the 1870s and 1880s. By the 1930s, the country was criss-crossed with a quarter-million miles of track carrying trains toting raw goods from the South to factories and slaughterhouses in northern cities like Detroit and Chicago. In 1934, the U.S. Bureau of Transient Affairs estimated that there were 1.5 million hobos riding America's trains.

Hobos were not all drunks and vagrants; many were filling gaps in the job market by using the rails to flow to where they were needed- to haul lumber in the Northwest in the winter, to harvest fields of wheat in the Midwest in the summer, and to pick cotton down South in the fall.

Today's hobos communicate via cell phones and email, but traditionally hobos used ideograms--signs marked in chalk or coal on a trestle, fence, or sidewalk. There are American, British, French, and Swedish systems of hobo signs (sometimes called "gypsy signs" in Europe). Two linked circles, for example, indicate handcuffs and to watch out for police in the American system, but in the Swedish system the same sign means, "Here there is nothing to be afraid of; go on begging."[53]

From the Hobo Jungle Web site comes this perspective: "Some would say that during the early days the hobo was one into doing a lot of bad things, stealing and you name it, that they would derail trains and take over the entire train. But in the rural communities people would help them and give them jobs during the harvest time. Every hobo had a thing that he do real well, repair shoes, make wire fruit bowls and he sure could hoe a garden for a little something to eat."[54] As someone unknown explained in the 1920s, "The hobo works and wanders, the tramp dreams and wanders, the bum drinks and wanders."

Songs:

"Evil"- Howlin' Wolf (Chester Burnett)
"Hobo Blues"- John Lee Hooker
"Outdoor Blues"- Memphis Minnie (Lizzie Douglas)

HOBO COCKTAIL

When you walk into a café or restaurant and ask for a glass of tap water, you're requesting a hobo cocktail. Hobo cocktail is not actually part of the hobo slang lexicon; it's from the snappy **jive** talk that originated among African Americans during the swing era (1930s-1940s).

HOKUM

A lighthearted subcategory of urban blues called hokum was popular in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Hokum songs were uptempo, funny, and on the raw and raunchy side. Songs like "Please Warm My Wiener" relied heavily on double entendre and were about sex, drugs, or some illicit combination thereof. Ironically, one of hokum's most popular composers also opened the first black gospel music publishing company and wrote some of gospel's biggest hits.

"Hokum" may be a blend of "hocus-pocus" and "bunkum," which means insincere or foolish talk. The word "bunkum" was derived from Buncombe County, North Carolina. The county's congressman once defended charges that a speech he was giving was so much horse manure by claiming it didn't matter because he was speaking to Buncombe.[55]

Guitarist Tampa Red kicked off the hokum craze with his and Georgia Tom Dorsey's 1928 hit "It's Tight Like That." Tampa Red, whose real name was Hudson Whittaker, was born in Smithville, Georgia in 1904. He was orphaned at a young age and moved to Tampa to live with his grandparents. Red worked the vaudeville circuit until he moved to Chicago in the mid-1920s, where he teamed up with blues and jazz pianist Dorsey, who had been pursuing his own pet project- writing and selling sheet music for the bluesified church music that would become known as "gospel."

As a young man, Dorsey had suffered from crippling depression and suicidal thoughts. According to *People Get Ready: A*

New History of Black Gospel Music, Dorsey claimed his depression was cured by Bishop H. H. Daley, who told him: "Brother Dorsey, there is no reason for you to be looking so poorly and feeling so badly. The Lord has too much work for you to do to let you die."[56] Haley then reportedly pulled a live snake from Dorsey's throat.

Dorsey was never afflicted by depression again, and he was moved to devote his musical abilities to serving God. At the time, though, the established African American churches mirrored white practices, with choirs singing the sacred compositions of Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn, and the like. The blues were banned.

According to Darden's book, Dorsey believed that church music and the blues carried "the same feeling," which Dorsey called "a grasping of the heart."[57] After his first wife died in childbirth, along with his son, Dorsey wrote the now-famous gospel song "Precious Lord Take My Hand." He wrote many others, including "If You See My Savior, Tell Him That You Saw Me," and produced sheet music that he peddled to African-American churches through his company, Dorsey House of Music.

The churches were a tough sell, however, and by 1930 Dorsey was struggling to feed his family. He agreed to dabble in secular music again with Tampa Red, and they had an instant hit with the ribald "It's Tight Like That."

Once "It's Tight Like That" became a hit, Red and Dorsey were in big demand as accompanists for blues stars like Ma Rainey (Dorsey had put the Wild Cats Jazz Band together for Rainey in 1925). They started their own band, "The Hokum Boys," and toured all over the country. The band would eventually record over sixty of Dorsey's hokum compositions, including "What Is It that Tastes Like Gravy?", "What's that I Smell?", and "Terrible Operation Blues."

In 1930, however, "If You See My Savior, Tell Him That You Saw Me" was sung at the 1930 National Baptist Convention in Chicago, and was an instant hit. Dorsey sold 4000 copies of the sheet music at the Convention alone. Encouraged, Dorsey left The Hokum Boys to promote his new style of church music again, which he called "gospel" ("gospel" is from the Old English "godspel," which meant "good message"). In 1931, Dorsey was asked to organize a choir at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Chicago by a new preacher who wanted to broaden the church's appeal and attract the new wave of immigrants then coming in from the South. Several more gospel choirs sprang up around Chicago, and gospel music finally took hold.

Meanwhile, Tampa Red's success gave other Delta blues artists, such as Big Bill Broonzy, the nerve to make the trek to Chicago. Red and his wife, Francis, always had a hot meal and a bed in their Chicago apartment to help ease the transition from country to city life for a blues musician who'd made it up North.[58] Broonzy joined the Hokum Boys in 1930 and cut such urban party blues with them as "Pig Meat Strut" and "Saturday Night Rub" before moving on to his own spectacular solo career.

Examples of hokum songs:
"Banana Man Blues"- Memphis Minnie
"I Had To Give Up Gym"- Hokum Boys
"You Put It In, I'll Take It Out"- "Papa" Charlie Jackson

HONEY DRIPPER

A honey dripper is a female lover…or someone who makes the ladies' honey drip. It's unclear who first coined the phrase "honey dripper," but in 1929 pianist/singer Edith North Johnson had a hit with "Honey Dripper Blues No. 2."

New Orleans boogie-woogie pianist Roosevelt Sykes began calling himself "The Honey Dripper" on his recordings in 1936. In "Little Bittie Gal's Blues," recorded in 1944, Big Joe Turner sang that he was "thinking about my honey dripper and all the wrong she's done."

Songs:
"Honey Dripper Blues"- Georgia White
"Honey Dripper Blues No. 2"- Edith North Johnson
"The Honeydripper"- Joe Liggins
"Little Bittie Gal's Blues"- Big Joe Turner (Joe Turner)

HOOCHIE COOCHIE, HOOTCHIE COOTCHIE

Coochie (also spelled cootchie) is slang for "vagina." Hoochie (also spelled hootchie) is slang for "whore" or "hooker." A hoochie-coochie dancer is a stripper, and a hoochie-coochie man is a pimp.

The word "coochie" definitely came first. The sound "cu" was associated with femininity and fertility even before the development of written language. The Indo-European root "cu" led to the Nostratic "kuni" for "woman," the Irish "cuint," and the English "cunt." Slang terms for vagina, such as cooch, coot, and cooze, all stem from "cu."[59] The same word base is also the root for "cow" and "cove" and for words that mean "knowledge," such as Middle English "cunne." This is why one can be cunning, and can conceive both an idea and a baby.

Coochie can also be used as a verb, as in: "I got a girl across town/she coochies all the time." Hoochie is probably derived

from hooch, slang for **moonshine**. Hooch is named for the Hoochinoo tribe of Alaska, known for its potent homemade brew. It wasn't much of a leap from hooch to hoochie, and from there for some wit to rhyme hoochie with coochie.

Rap music has made hoochie and hoochie-mama popular modern terms for a promiscuous woman who dresses revealingly to get attention, as opposed to a straight up "ho," or prostitute. In rap, a man who screws around may also be called a hoochie.[60] And the hoochie coochie dance is still with us, according to the *National Enquirer*'s report that: "Fiery diva Jennifer Lopez explodes at fiancé Ben Affleck when she walked in and found him enjoying a private hoochie-coochie dance performed by curvy co-star Christina Applegate."[61]

Does that make Affleck a hoochie?

Songs:

"Broken-Hearted, Ragged, and Dirty Too"- Sleepy John Estes (John Adam Estes)
"(I'm Your) Hoochie Coochie Man" - Willie Dixon
"J.C. Johnson's Blues"- T.C. Johnson

HOODOO

Hoodoo is not **Voodoo**, although the two are often confused. Voodoo- more properly spelled "Vodou"- is a religion derived from *Vodun*, which originated in West Africa and is considered one of the world's oldest religions. Hoodoo, in contrast, is an African American system of folklore. It consists of tales, herbal medicines, and magic practices, and is neither a religion nor a denomination of a religion, although it incorporates elements from African and European religions into its core beliefs.[62]

American hoodoo expert Catherine Yronwode defined hoodoo as follows: "Hoodoo consists of a large body of African folkloric magic with a considerable admixture of American Indian botanical knowledge and European folklore."[63] According to Yronwode, a strong vein of English and Germanic folklore runs through African American hoodoo, and "many a black hoodoo practitioner can cite chapter and verse" of European occult works like *The Black Pullet*, *Secrets of the Psalms*, and *The Book of Secrets of Albertus Magnus*.[64] The latter was not actually written by the prolific writer and 13th century German bishop Albertus Magnus, but was compiled from various sources by an unknown author. In order to attract readers, it was not uncommon for books on magic in the 16th century to assume the name of a notable historical figure.

Examples of hoodoo include **foot track magic**, **mojos**, the use of indigenous herbs and roots to treat illnesses and cast spells, and the use of divination charms like **Jack balls** to tell the future. A person who practices hoodoo is called "a hoodoo," as in "That Doctor Ya-Ya is one strong hoodoo," or may be described as a hoodoo woman or a hoodoo man. A person who has been the victim or beneficiary of some hoodoo was "hoodoo'ed," as in "He done hoodooed that gal to death." Hoodoo is also called "conjuration" and "rootwork."

Harry Middleton Hyatt, an Anglican minister from Quincy, Illinois, collected much of the information we have about hoodoo practices.[65] Hyatt was an avid amateur folklorist who began his hobby in Illinois but eventually worked his way throughout the Southern United States. He created two major collections of his field notes and transcripts, *Folklore from Adams County, Illinois* in 1935 and the massive *Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork* in 1970. The latter is considered the most complete reference on hoodoo available.

Hyatt never nailed down the origin of the word "hoodoo," however. It is likely African, although Eoghan Ballard, folklore academician at the University of Pennsylvania, has an interesting theory that it derives from *judio* (pronounced "hoo-dyoh"), the Spanish word for Jewish. He noted that there are two groups in Cuba who practice hoodoo-style magic by creating charms using woods, roots, and herbs (and sometimes animals; see **hellhound**). The two groups are named Palo Cristiano and Palo Judio. The latter are so named not because they are Jewish, but because they have remained unconverted to Christianity.[66]

Henry Gray at Howlin' Wolf band reunion, Rock-n-Bowl, New Orleans 2003. John Primer plays guitar behind Gray.
Photo ©Joseph A. Rosen

Blues songs are also a great source of hoodoo lore. Songs like Robert Johnson's "Stones in My Passway" and Ma Rainey's "Black Dust Blues" describe hoodoo practices and their purported effects in detail. It's important to bear in mind, however, that just because blues musicians used hoodoo imagery in their songs to wonderful effect, it doesn't necessarily mean that they believed hoodoo really worked.

As guitarist Robert Jr. Lockwood put it, "Hoodoo? Well, it's been around for years, but I don't believe in it. I don't believe nobody can do nothing without my wanting them to do it."[67] Pianist Henry Gray, who played in Howlin' Wolf's band in Chicago from 1956 to 1968, expressed similar feelings. Gray, who grew up near Baton Rouge, Louisiana, recalled how people from the Baton Rouge area who feared they'd been hoodooed would head straight to New Orleans to get help. "Lot of 'em would go across the river," Gray said, "They got a place over there in New Orleans called The Seven Sisters, and they supposed to be able to read your palms, tell your future- when you gonna die and all that. Well, I never believed in that stuff but a lot of people do, and they would go over there and get something to get a [mojo] **hand** removed or whatever they needed done."[68]

In "Seven Sisters Blues," recorded in 1931, J.T. "Funny Paper" Smith described taking a similar journey to get a curse removed:

They tell me Seven Sisters in New Orleans
that can really fix a man up right
I'm headed for New Orleans, Louisiana
traveling both day and night

"We do have people in Louisiana that believe in that [hoodoo]," Gray acknowledged. "I knowed people that believed in it, when I was growing up. But I never believed in that. I believed in, you know, what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna do. I don't need nobody trying to put no hoodoo on me because I don't believe it. But a lot of people do. A lot of people always think somebody gonna try to do something to 'em. They'll be saying, 'He got a hand. He tryin' to hurt me.' "

Gray also played piano with Muddy Waters in Chicago and recalled how transplanted Southerners like Waters and Ernest "Tabby" Thomas would play with hoodoo imagery in their songs: "Well, hoodoo, that's something that would come up in songs like the 'Hoodoo Party' by Tabby Thomas, and Muddy Water [sic] used it, you know, in "Got My Mojo Working" and stuff like that. He was just using it mostly for a song, you know, but he really didn't believe in it. But some people do believe in it, really, and they scare themselves!"

Songs:
"Got My Mojo Working"- Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield)
"Hoodoo Lady"- Memphis Minnie (Lizzie Douglas)
"Hoodoo Man,"- Junior Wells (Amos Blackmore)
"Hoodoo Party"- Ernest "Tabby" Thomas

HOOSEGOW

A hoosegow is a jail. Hoosegow is derived from the Mexican Spanish *juzgado*, or courtroom, from *juzgar*, to judge.

Juzgado was usually painted on courtroom doors in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America in the 19th Century. Many an unfortunate gold-seeking Yankee who fell into the hands of local law-enforcement went straight from the courtroom to the jail- which was typically in the same building. Perhaps that is why the word for "courtroom" became the word for "jail."

Given that there were some 5,000 African American cowboys in Texas alone after the Civil War, it seems likely that they brought "hoosegow" into the blues lexicon.

Songs:
"Linin' Track"- Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter)
"Bone Orchard Blues"- Rex T. Sherry (Tommy Sherry)

HOT FOOT POWDER, HOT FOOT OIL

Hot Foot Powder and Hot Foot Oil are **hoodoos** for ridding one's home of unwanted guests, removing unpleasant neighbors, and driving away enemies. Like Drive Away Oil and Get Away Oil, Hot Foot products contain a spicy mix of red and black pepper, sulfur, essential oils, and herbal extracts.[69]

Got a pesky neighbor you'd like to see pack up and move? Sprinkle Hot Foot Powder under his welcome mat. Hot foot powder can also curse ex-lovers to roam the world forever alone and unsatisfied.

To send someone packing, collect some dirt from the person's footprint. Place the dirt in some paper on which you've written the person's name nine times and sprinkle it with Hot Foot Oil or mix it with Hot Foot Powder. Toss the mixture over your left shoulder into running water and walk away without looking back. The person will leave you alone and may even "hot foot it" out of town.

Robert Johnson described this effect in "Hellhound on My Trail":

You sprinkled hot foot powder all around your daddy's door
It keep me with ramblin' mind, rider, every old place I go

Songs:
"Hellhound on My Trail"- Robert Johnson
"Hot Foot Powder"- Peter Green

J

JACK BALL

A Jack ball or "Jack" is a **mojo** made of knotted threads or fabric wound around a core object, such as a piece of **John the Conqueror** root or a lock of hair. Since "John" and "Jack" are often interchanged, the Jack ball may have taken its name from the practice of inserting a piece of John the Conqueror root inside it.

Jack balls are also called "Jack bags" and "luck balls." Depending on how they are made and what is placed inside them, Jack balls may bring luck, love, a job, or protection. Certain types of Jack balls are used as divination pendulums to tell the future. If you want to know whether a solider will return safely from war, for instance, make a Jack ball with something from that person at the core.[70]

Misused, Jack balls can cause all kinds of trouble. In "The Mojo," J. B. Lenoir depicted what happened when he was carrying a Jack ball in his pocket that his aunt had given him- without teaching him how to use it correctly:

I went to a nightclub, I was squeezing it tight
I believe that's the cause of them peoples starting to fight

The precursors for Jack balls are Kongo charms that involve tightly binding objects inside pieces of cloth with symbolic numbers of knots. Bakongo mythology states that the very first charm given to man by God was Funza, the distributor of all charms. Funza was believed to be incarnate inside twisted roots. "When you see a twisted root within a charm," ritual expert

Fu-Kiau Bunseki explained, "you know, like a tornado hidden in an egg, that this *nkisi* [charm] is very very strong."[71] This belief in twisted roots as reserves of great power survived in African American hoodoo use of John the Conqueror.

In *Flash of the Spirit*, author Robert Farris Thompson described a luck ball made in Missouri in the nineteenth century using four lengths of white yarn doubled four times and knotted, and four lengths of white sewing silk folded the same way and knotted to provide sixteen knots in all. Whiskey was spit on the luck ball "to keep the devils from getting through the knots" and tin foil was inserted inside it to represent "the brightness of the spirit who was going to be inserted into the ball."[72]

Song:
"The Mojo"- J.B. Lenoir

JAKE

Jamaica Ginger, or "Jake," was a patent medicine with a very high alcohol content that was much sought after during Prohibition. When the Treasury Department became aware of this, the Department ordered anyone making Jamaica Ginger to change the formula.

What unscrupulous vendors did, instead, was doctor their Jake with an industrial plasticizer (a chemical that makes plastics soft and bendable) so that if government agents tested a bottle, they wouldn't be able to detect alcohol. This bright idea caused tens of thousands of customers to become paralyzed in their hands and feet. For many the damage was permanent.

Tommy Johnson described the effects of drinking doctored Jake in "Alcohol and Jake Blues:"

I drink so much of Jake, till it done give me the limber leg
If I don't quit drinking it every morning, sure gonna kill me dead

Songs:
"Alcohol and Jake Blues"- Tommy Johnson
"Jake Head Boogie"- Lightnin' Hopkins (Sam Hopkins)

JAM

To jam is to improvise with other musicians. Linguist David Dalby traced jam to the Wolof word *jaam* for slave. As early as the 1700s, when slaves gathered together for their own entertainment, they called the get-together a *jama*.[73]

Fierce jam sessions and **cutting contests** inspire blues, rock, and jazz musicians to stretch beyond their limitations. As composer/multi-instrumentalist Elliott Sharp put it, "Improvisation is the immediate and spontaneous manifestation of visceral musical intelligence."[74]

The musician with the most jamming stamina ever may have been jazz saxophonist John Coltrane, who would jam all night and keep going while he signed autographs, while he was in the dressing room, and even while he was in the club's bathroom.

The first blues musician to tap into Coltrane's concept of super-extended improvisational soloing was Michael Bloomfield, the Chicago guitarist who played with the original Paul Butterfield Blues Band. "Man," Bloomfield said to a close friend, journalist Andrew M. Robble, "Coltrane just blew my fucking mind."[75]

The Butterfield Blues Band's 1966 recording of "East-West" by Nick Gravenites lasted twelve minutes and was the first lengthy improvisation recorded by a non-jazz ensemble. Live, the group would sometimes extend the piece up to forty-five minutes.

"'East West' is all Coltrane-Indian Ragafeel-acid experience awakening and the blues- the real thing, no **shuckin'** here," Bloomfield told Robble. That recording had a profound effect on the San Francisco psychedelic scene and the British electric blues scene that spawned such talented white blues guitarists as John Mayall and Eric Clapton.

"East West" was an appropriate title for the composition, because "in the classical music traditions of African Muslims and the Middle East, there are many rules about what's acceptable improvisatory practice, but every performance on a given mode or form is a unique improvisation," according to ethnomusicologist Steven Taylor. [76] "The rules of Koranic recitation *require* improvisation. Only the Holy Word of the One God delivered of the Blessed Prophet is unchanging, therefore the music behind the words must always be different," Taylor explained. Middle Eastern and African musicians are judged by their ability to balance the freedom of improvisation with elegant treatment of the requirements of a musical form.

Similarly, blues standards such as "I'm a King Bee" and "Sweet Home Chicago," which are played most every night at a blues jam somewhere on earth, provide an elegant, mutually accepted form within which each musician is expected to improvise, without stepping on other musicians in the jam and while respecting the tolerance of the audience.

JAZZ

The Bantu root for "dance" is *ja*. In order to say "to make or cause to dance," one doubles the verb root, to *jaja*.[77] In Wolof, *yees* means to become extremely lively or energetic. It evolved into the Southern slang term "jass" for sexual intercourse. These are two possible sources of the term jazz, but some linguists have also argued that jazz is a variation on "jizz," which is likely derived from the Ki-Kongo verb *dinza*, "to discharge one's semen."[78]

By the late 1800s, African American brass marching bands that played European-style brass instrumentals were very popular in New Orleans at parties, picnics, and dance halls. As the blues also became more popular and widespread, however, the first blues-oriented brass bands started performing in New Orleans. These bands were called "jass" or "dirty" bands,[79] because their music was funkier and they didn't march--they danced. New Orleans is considered the birthplace of jazz, but it's a fallacy to think that country blues artists in the Delta region were living in some kind of isolated blues cocoon. Many blues artists loved jazz, too. The accomplished soul/blues bandleader "Little" Milton (Milton Campbell, Jr.), who grew up on a farm in Mississippi, recalled: "The radio was mostly country and western but in the evening Louis Jordan had a little syndicated show that would come on in the area where we lived at 6:15 in the evening. They'd play his records for fifteen minutes."

Guitarist Robert Jr. Lockwood, who was born in Turkey Scratch, Arkansas in 1915, also listened to a wide variety of music while growing up in the Delta. "I always did like big bands like Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and all that stuff," Lockwood said.[80]

Lockwood began studying the guitar at age eleven, with help from his mother's common-law husband, Delta blues genius Robert Johnson. When Lockwood was in his teens, he started playing with harmonica player "Sonny Boy" (Aleck "Rice" Miller) Williamson. Williamson convinced the manager at KFFA radio in Helena, Arkansas to let him and Lockwood perform live on the air at noon every day, and advertise their gigs. "I was on KFFA for about two years in Helena," Lockwood said, "and I hired a bunch of guys to be my band, and this bunch of guys that I hired was jazz musicians. They played all those standards. So that's the way I learned to play the standards. I had them to help me play the blues, and I learned what they played."

This experience served Lockwood in good stead when he moved to Chicago and started working with Chess Records: "After I recorded my first records [with Doctor Clayton for Bluebird Records in 1941], I started working with Chess and Checker in Chicago. And I was playing with almost everybody Chess had, 'cause I was one of their favorite guitar players. So I was playing jazz, blues- I was playing everything. Now that's the one thing I think that all musicians are supposed to do, try to play more than one type of music."

Songs:

"Give Me My Blues"- Albert Collins

"The World's Jazz Crazy and So Am I"- Trixie Smith

JELLY, JELLY ROLL

A jelly roll is a dessert made of sponge cake that has been spread with jam (or jam mixed with cream) and rolled up into a log. Jelly roll is also one of many evocative culinary euphemisms for female genitals heard in the blues. Men sing about wanting to taste a good jelly roll, while Bessie Smith bragged that "Nobody in Town Can Bake a Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine."

Interestingly, "Jelly" was a popular nickname for bluesmen, especially smooth and flashy types such as pianist Jelly Roll Morton, bassist Jelly Williams, and guitarist Jelly Thompson. Before Morton became "Jelly Roll Morton," he tried out the nickname "Mr. Jelly Lord." Both names were rumored to indicate Morton's predilection for cunnilingus.

Jelly may also be an Americanization of the Mandingo word for **griot**, *jali*. African griots tend to be very popular with the ladies due to their finely honed skill with words, music, and flattery.[81]

Songs:

"Nobody In Town Can Bake a Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine"
- Bessie Smith

"Hungry Calf Blues" - Blind Boy Fuller (Fulton Allen)

"Shake It And Break it"- Charlie Patton

A pensive Jelly Roll Morton, most likely in New York, 1928 *Photographer unknown, courtesy Delta Haze Corporation*

JINX

A jinx is a curse, or **cross**, that brings bad luck into the life of the person who has been jinxed. That unlucky soul can also be called a jinx, because his presence brings bad luck to others.

There are many creepy ways to jinx someone, such as burning the person's name in the flame of a black candle, or placing certain insects, spiders, snake dust, or stones in his or her path. (see also **stones in my passway**) People can also be "throwed after," which means that they've been jinxed by having had bad-luck powders thrown behind their backs.[82]

To remove a jinx, make a **mojo** bag out of red flannel and dress it with Stop Evil Condition Oil, Jinx Removing Oil, or Uncrossing Oil. There are many variations on what goes in the mojo, but some recommendations drawn from the archives of folklorist Harry Middleton Hyatt's massive collection of hoodoo folklore, *Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork*, include[83]:

- Devil's Shoestring (long flexible roots of cramp bark or black haw to trip the devil)
- Salt
- A broken length of chain
- Chicken feathers
- Herbs

It's best to consult a root doctor, though, to make sure the jinx is properly removed.

Songs:

"The Ins and Outs of My Girl" - Bo Carter (Armenter Chatmon)
"Call the Fire Wagon"- Memphis Minnie (Lizzie Douglas)
"Revenue Man Blues"- Charlie Patton

JIVE

Talk that's either coded (as in hipster lingo) or deliberately misleading is jive. David Dalby connected "jive" to the Wolof word *jev*, which means "to talk disparagingly" about someone.[84] Jive began as coded language used by enslaved Africans to communicate in English (since their languages were banned) without being fully understood by whites.

Interestingly, the Efik-Ejagham (Cameroons) word *jiwe* means "monkey," and is used to represent the trickster that appears in African stories- sometimes as a small black man, and sometimes as a monkey. This figure, according to scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., crossed over to the continental United States and became the "signifying monkey" of African American folktales. (**Signifying** is the use of jive, innuendo, and doubletalk that is understood fully only by members of one's community.)

By the 1930s, jive was also the name for uptempo, swinging big-band music and, by the 1940s, for a wild and uninhibited version of the jitterbug dance.

Songs:

"Nobody Loves Me But My Mother" - B.B. King (Riley King)
"I Get Evil"- Albert King
"My Grandpa Is Too Old"- Lightnin' Hopkins (Sam Hopkins)

JOHN THE CONQUEROR

John the Conqueror root has been a staple of **hoodoo** magical practices since the 1850s. It is wrapped in **Jack balls**, carried in **mojo** bags and pockets, and chewed and spat to activate spells. Root doctors distinguish three types of John the Conqueror Root: High (or Big), Low, and Chewing John.

There is some dispute as to which plant is actually used as High John, probably because root doctors rely on whatever is available locally. The woody root of a morning glory, *Ipomoea purga*, is most commonly used. It originated in Xalapa, Mexico, where it is also known as *jalapa*. When dried, the roots resemble the testicles of a dark-skinned man, which may account for their inclusion in mojo bags and sexual spells.

Low John is typically the root of the trillium wildflower, or wakerobin, (*Trillium grandiflorum*). Chewing John, sometimes called Little John, is galangal (*Alpina galanga*). According to Catherine Yronwode, "It is a member of the ginger family and is medicinally used as a stomachic and carminative. In hoodoo practice, its pleasant gingery taste is part of its charm and, unlike High John and Low John, Chewing John is actually chewed and the juice swallowed."[85] Chew the root, swallow the juice, and discretely spit the cud onto the courtroom floor before the judge walks in, and he will decide the case in your favor.

The origins of the name "John the Conqueror" are unclear. John the Conqueror root may be named for a mythical man who ripped off the Devil's arm and beat him silly with it. Another theory is that John the Conqueror was the son of an African king who was enslaved and brought to America, yet never let his spirit be broken. Instead, he undermined his master with clever tricks, and inspired other slaves to do the same.

According to interviews that folklorist Harry Middleton Hyatt conducted with hoodoo practitioners in the 1930s, John the Conqueror's reputation as a trickster was so great that just reciting his name was protection against being hoodooed. His name may be a derivation of the Bantu word *kankila*, which means "to tremble with fear."[86]

When Muddy Waters recorded Willie Dixon's "Hoochie Coochie Man" in 1954, he added a verse in which he declared:

I got John the Conqueror
I'm gonna mess with you

African American charms made with High John are called "High" or "Big." In *Voodoo in New Orleans*, author Robert Tallant interviewed hoodoo practitioner Abner Thomas, who said, "For love and gambling the power of Johnny is considered supreme. High John is the same as Big John; that is the strongest."[87]

There are as many ways to use John the Conqueror in a spell as there are desires that people have. Folklorist Harry Middleton Hyatt collected many stories about the use of roots to get a job, control a lover, protect oneself from evil curses, etc. Many involved the African practice of activating a spell by spitting, as one interviewee told Hyatt: "…you kin git High John de Conker and go anywhere to the boss to get a job, they put it in their mouth and chew it and spit, and walk up and talk to this boss and spit around, say if there any job anywhere there the boss is goin' to hire you."[88]

Hyatt also related the story of a man who wanted his wife back. The man tucked a piece of root into his cheek and went up to his wife, who had left him, and asked her to return to him. He kept chewing the root, spit the juice out on the ground a few times, and said, "Well, kiss me."

The wife said, "I can kiss you but I ain't going back to you." She kissed him, and next thing she knew she was headed back home with him.[89]

High John is also inserted into luck balls or **Jack balls**, carried in the pocket, or included in **mojo** bags. For best results, the

root piece should be "fixed" by dressing it with the appropriate oil. Some ways to **fix** the root include[90]:

- To attract money: Wrap folding money around the root and keep it in pocket. Anoint regularly with John the Conqueror Oil, rubbing it in well.
- For luck in gambling: Combine John the Conqueror root and silver dime with a lucky hand root and wrap them as above in a $2.00 bill. Dress the mojo with Lucky Hand Oil or with a lover's urine, and wear it hidden while at the card table.
- To attract women: Place John the Conqueror root in a red flannel mojo bag with a lodestone dressed in magnetic sand. Anoint mojo with love-drawing oil and wear hidden below the waist.

Songs:
"Mannish Boy"- Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield)
"Hoochie Coochie Man"- Muddy Waters
"My John The Conquer Root"- Willie Dixon

JUJU

The Bantu word *niju* means danger, harm, or accident. A juju is a fetish, charm, or amulet that provides protection against niju.[91] Juju is the term Africans use to describe such protective objects, which African Americans call **mojos**, or **gris-gris**. Juju is also the name of a style of Nigerian music mixing electric guitar and drums that was popularized by King Sunny Ade and His African Beats. Their album *Juju Music* was a huge international hit and the most influential West African record ever released.

When musicologist and African drum student John Miller Chernoff was in the town of Afiadenyigba in the Volta region of Ghana, he was consecrated into the Yeve Cult of the Ewe tribe as an apprentice to master drummer Gideon Folie Alorwoyie. Chernoff described a lengthy ceremony during which two chickens, male and female, were killed and their blood poured over his drumsticks.

While the chickens were cooking in a stew, the priest took Chernoff through the ceremony, repeatedly throwing cowry shells for guidance and "feeding" or "dressing" the sticks by pouring gin, corn soup, and corn meal over them. Finally the priest said, "You cannot think bad toward any man. You can only play the drum. If someone should think bad toward you, the juju we have cast will make him so, when he is drinking water, he will drink his own blood." [92]

In 1968, B.B. King recorded a song called "You Put It on Me," with lyrics by poet Maya Angelou and Quincy Jones:

They say there ain't no man that a woman can trust
That they all use juju and goofy dust [goofer dust]

King alludes to the protective power of a juju, though, by declaring that he's glad his girlfriend used one on him because it stopped him from partying and helped him settle down.

Songs:
"Hoo Doo Ball"- Omar Dykes
"You Put It on Me"- B.B. King (Riley King)

JUKE, JUKE JOINT

A juke or juke joint is a funky little bar (and sometimes brothel) that provides dance music, whether from a piano player, a band, or a jukebox. The word juke has been traced to the Gullah (Georgia Sea Islands) word *joog*, meaning "disorderly." *Joog* has been traced in turn to the Bambara tribe's word *dzugu*, which means "wicked."[93] There's also the Wolof word *dzug*, which means to misbehave or lead a wild life, and the Bantu *juka*, which means to rise up and do your own thing.

In *From Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang*, Clarence Major wrote that "jook" is an "African word meaning to jab or poke--as in sexual intercourse, and was also used in the Caribbean."[94] Alligator Records founder Bruce Iglauer reported, "Juke or jook is a term that I've heard older musicians use to refer to a particular sexual activity. Hound Dog [Taylor] used it as a verb to describe manual stimulation of the female genitals, including manual insertion of a finger…he obviously considered this a form of foreplay."[95]

Bluesmen also used juke as a catch-all verb for their lifestyle, as in "I'm gonna juke forty years more and then join the church." The blues was looked upon as wicked by Southern church-going people, especially by the sanctified members of the Church of God in Christ, which was very popular in Delta towns in Mississippi. Members were allowed to dance and **shout** and raise the roof during the services, but were forbidden from singing or dancing outside the church.

The sanctified preachers loved to give blues musicians tongue lashings from the pulpit. As musician James Thomas explained to William Ferris in *Blues from the Delta*, "It's just like if you was singing the blues right now and you die, well, they say you gone to hell because you was singing the blues."[96] Some bluesmen planned to dodge this fate by eventually

returning to the church, even becoming ordained ministers à la Little Richard and Al Green.

Playing the blues was not allowed inside many African American homes in the South. Pianist Henry Gray, who played in the Howlin' Wolf band in Chicago from 1956 to 1968, was born in Kenner, Louisiana in 1925. Gray's family moved to a small farm in Alsen, Louisiana, just north of Baton Rouge, and Gray began playing piano "when I was about eight years old. I taught myself. The blues was really popular when I was growing up, yes indeed. Stuff like Big Maceo, Tampa Red, Memphis Minnie, all that old-time blues."[97] Gray was forbidden to play the blues on the piano at home, though. His parents steered him toward the local church, where he played the organ and piano.

At age sixteen, Gray was asked to play with a band at a local juke joint. He wanted to play the **gig** but was scared to ask his parents. Gray finally worked up the nerve to ask his father, who agreed to let him play the show, but insisted on accompanying him to the club. "Well," Gray said, "he saw that it was alright, and that I could make some money at it, so he let me start playing at the jukes, so long as he could keep an eye on me."

Playing the jukes meant a shot at a better life for kids who'd grown up working in the fields. "Little" Milton Campbell, Jr. was born to sharecropper parents in the Mississippi **Delta**. Everyone he knew worked very hard for very little money. "I could sing ever since I can remember," Campbell recalled, "and my parents had me in the Baptist church at a very early age, singing. A time or two they took up a collection and I discovered that I could get paid for doing it, you know."[98]

Soon "I was making little homemade instruments 'cause I couldn't afford a store-bought instrument. I would entertain my parents and maybe sometimes they would have some friends come by and I would sing for them," Campbell said. By age twelve he had saved up enough money to buy a guitar. "I played basically everywhere that I could play, even if it was on a tree stump! I was determined because people like Louis Jordan, Frank Sinatra, T- bone Walker, and so many more would dress extremely well and give the impression that they were doing extremely well."

Set on emulating his heroes, Campbell hit the jukes when he was only fifteen. "You know, if you dressed a certain way back then it wasn't near as strict as it is now. Nobody paid a lot of attention unless you acted like a young kid. I just stuck to my guns and refused to let anybody dictate to me, including my mother! Fortunately, she was happy that I did do this because I was able to do a lot of things for the family once I really got involved in it."

Campbell made a great impression on other musicians in the area and caught the attention of R&B legend Ike Turner, who was scouting talent for Sam Phillips. Turner brought Campbell to Phillips, who signed him to a Sun Records recording contract in 1953. This kicked off a career notable for both quality and longevity, as Campbell recorded hits like "The Blues Is Alright" and sixteen albums, including the acclaimed *Billboard* blues smash *Cheatin' Habit* (Malaco) and 2002's *Guitar Man* (Malaco).

Songs:

"Early In The Morning"- Charlie Musslewhite

"Juke"- Little Walter (Walter Marion Jacobs)

"Juke Joint Is Calling Me" and "A Juke Joint in My House"- Little Milton (Milton Campbell, Jr.)

JUNKIE, JUNKO PARTNER (*also* **JUNCO PARTNER**)

A junkie is a heroin addict. A junko partner is someone who shares the ritual of shooting heroin with another addict. The traditional song "Junco Partner" has been covered by many artists, from Aaron King & the Imperials, Louis Jordan, and Professor Longhair to Warren Zevon and The Clash. It was jokingly called the national anthem of Angola Prison:

Oh, down the road came poor little Junco
Boys, he was loaded as he could be
The poor man was knocked out, knocked out and loaded
And he was wobblin' all over the street.
I heard him singing six months ain't no sentence
He said one year was not no time
He said he had friends still in Angola
Serving from fourteen to ninety-nine

The derivation of junco is uncertain but it may have to do with the connection between opium and the Chinese. The Chinese ships called "junks" got their name from the Old Javanese word *jonk*, which meant "sea-going ship."[99]

Too many blues artists have been lost to drug (and alcohol) addiction, yet, as Bonnie Raitt remarked, "Some people, like Buddy Guy, have overcome bitterness and drug or alcohol abuse and have really surged forward. I believe that Charles Brown and John Lee Hooker were with us for as long as they were because they were not among the people that kept up bad habits. It makes you wonder what Freddie King and Magic Sam, who died so early, or even Paul Butterfield and Michael Bloomfield, and the other young white blues artists who died from drug use, might have accomplished."[100]

Songs:
"Junko Partner"- Michael Bloomfield
"Junco Partner"- traditional (composer unknown)
"Junker Blues"- Champion Jack Dupree

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[2] Holloway and Vass, p. 140.
[3] *Hoodoo in Theory and Practice: An Introduction to African American Rootwork*, by Catherine Yronwode, published online at Lucky Mojo.com.
[4] Yronwode.
[5] Thompson, p. 104.
[6] Jones, p. 219.
[7] From Wikipedia.com.
[8] Thompson, p. 104.
[9] Holloway and Vass, p. 140.
[10] Major, p. 193.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 193
[12] Thanks to record producer Dick Shurman for this information.
[13] From the author's interview with Jimmie Vaughan.
[14] From the author's interview with Dr. John.
[15] Holloway and Vass, pg. 98.
[16] Excerpt (1396), 2532:4 from Harry Middleton Hyatt collection *Hoodoo—Conjuration—Witchcraft--Rootwork* (1970) , as quoted in Yronwode.
[17] Excerpt (1074), 1737:9 from Hyatt; quoted in Yronwode.
[18] Yronwode.
[19] *Ibid*.
[20] Holloway and Vass, p. 140.
[21] Yronwode.
[22] Hyatt, as quoted on Mojo Moon.net.
[23] From the author's correspondence with Steve LaVere.
[24] Dillard, p. 25.
[25] "What Happened to Jody," by Bruce Jackson, *Journal of American Folklore 80* (Oct--Dec 1967, pp 169-170).
[26] Dillard, p. 23.
[27] Lomax, p. 357.
[28] Oliver, p. 45.
[29] Mandingo Kingdoms of the Senegambia," by Charlotte A. Quinn, p. xvii (Evanston, Illinois: , Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. xvii, as quoted in Charters, pg 14.
[30] Lomax, p. 357.
[31] Oliver, p. 98.
[32] Charters, pg. 21.
[33] *Ibid*., p. 47.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 50 from "The Song of Alhaji Fabala Kanuteh," reproduced with permission.
[35] Oliver, p. 80.
[36] Dillard, p. 128.
[37] Yronwode.
[38] Holloway and Vass, p. 141.
[39] All quotes from Dr. John in this entry are from the author's interview with Dr. John.
[40] Holloway and Vass, p. 146.
[41] Holloway and Vass, p. 151
[42] Thanks to Partha Mitra for this tip.
[43] From notes to *African and Afro-American Drums*, Folkways Album no. FE4502, by Harold Courlander, quoted in Oliver, p. 36.
[44] From email exchange between the author and Glenn Weiser, author of *Blues and Rock Harmonica*. (Centerstream Publications, 1990).

[45] From *Blues and Rock Harmonica*, by Glenn Weiser, (Centerstream Publications, 1990), quoted on Celtic Guitar Music.com.
[46] From "The Asian Free Reed" by Robert Garfias, Ethnomusicology Department University of California-Irvine, School of Social Studies Web site.
[47] Weiser, *Blues and Rock Harmonica*.
[48] Thompson, p. 121.
[49] *Ibid*., p. 122.
[50] "Apparitions Of Black Dogs," University of Edinburgh Web site, http://nli.northampton.ac.uk/ass/psych-staff/sjs/blackdog.htm.
[51] Holloway and Vass, p. 139.
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[54] From "Hobo Jungle" Web site, www.2ndarmoredhellonwheels.com/hobo-jungle.html.
[55] *The Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000).
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[57] Darden, p.170.
[58] Tampa Red biographical information from SkinPopScratch.com and The Devil's Music.net.
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[60] Urban Dictionary.com.
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[62] Yronwode.
[63] *Ibid*.
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[66] Dr. Eoghan Ballard's argument summarized by Catherine Yronwode on Lucky Mojo.com.
[67] From the author's interview with Robert Jr. Lockwood.
[68] All quotes from Henry Gray in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Gray.
[69] Yronwode.
[70] *Ibid*.
[71] Thompson, p. 131.
[72] *Ibid*., p. 130.
[73] Major, p. 254.
[74] From the author's interview with Elliott Sharp.
[75] The author thanks Andrew M. Robble for sharing this story about his friend Michael Bloomfield.
[76] From the author's interview with ethnomusicologist Steven Taylor.
[77] Holloway and Vass, p. 99.
[78] Thompson, p. 104.
[79] Jones, p. 75.
[80] All quotes from Robert Jr. Lockwood in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Lockwood.
[81] Holloway and Vass, p. 143.
[82] From "Uncrossing And Jinx Breaking," Yronwode, Lucky Mojo.com.
[83] Hyatt, quoted in *Hoodoo in Theory and Practice: An Introduction to African American Rootwork*, by Catherine Yronwode, published online at Lucky Mojo.com.
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[84] Dalby referenced in Holloway and Vass, p. 143.
[85] Yronwode.
[86] Holloway and Vass, p. 100.
[87] *Voodoo in New Orleans* by Robert Tallant, (New York: Collier, 1962).
[88] Hyatt, p. 593, quoted in Dillard, p. 122.
[89] *Ibid*.
[90] Yronwode.
[91] Holloway and Vass, p. 144.
[92] Chernoff, p. 12.
[93] Oliver, p. 93.

[94] Major, p. 262.
[95] From email correspondence between the author and Bruce Iglauer, founder of Alligator Records.
[96] Ferris, p. 85.
[97] All quotes from Henry Gray in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Gray.
[98] All quotes from Milton Campbell, Jr. in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Campbell.
[99] *Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000).
[100] From the author's interview with Bonnie Raitt.

K

KILLING FLOOR

To be down on the killing floor is to have hit rock bottom, according to guitar legend Hubert Sumlin, whose licks on Howlin' Wolf's "Killing Floor" are the building blocks of electric blues guitar. As composer/multi-instrumentalist Elliott Sharp noted, "Without Hubert there'd be no Eric Clapton, no Captain Beefheart. He gave every one of Howlin' Wolf's songs their own identity with the licks he played. He's a great originator of the blues."[1]

When asked how he came up with the memorable guitar hook for "Killing Floor," Sumlin modestly replied, "I guess I found myself. I found my voice on account of Wolf fired me so many times, sometimes for two minutes, three minutes, five minutes, twenty minutes. But he hired me right back. Boy he didn't like it when nobody missed no notes. 'Go on find yourself' he would say, and I guess I did."[2]

Some scholars have asserted that in "Killing Floor," Howlin' Wolf was referring to the floors of the Chicago stockyards and slaughterhouses, where many southern blacks who had come North found employment during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. "No, not really," Sumlin responded. "What happened was…Wolf had seven wives. One was named Helen. She shot him with a double barrel shotgun with buckshot. Out the second floor window. This woman, oh man, he wrote that song about her! Reason I know it is every song he wrote, they was real."

"Down on the killing floor- that means a woman has you down," Sumlin continued. "She went out of her way to try to kill you. She at the peak of doing it, and you got away now." He paused, then added, "You know people have wished they was dead- you been treated so bad that sometimes you just say, 'Oh Lord have mercy.' You'd rather be six feet in the ground."

According to Sumlin, when Wolf arrived home in West Milford, Arkansas from a lengthy tour, Helen sent him to the corner store with a promise to cook him a welcome-home feast. While he was gone, though, she searched the tour bus for evidence that her husband had been fooling around on the road.

"She sent him to the store to get some food, about a half block up the road," Sumlin recalled. "Some potatoes, tomatoes, and all this stuff. Well, somebody left her underwear in this bus. Some woman. And she [Helen] went out and searched the bus before he gets back. One of the boys in his band messed up, you know. And she found these things in the bus and she thought it was Wolf.

"She did shoot him, too, full of buckshot. They picked shots out of him for a whole week. She got him from behind. He looked up in the window and she pulled the trigger. By the time he turned his back, oh boy, he was full of buckshot. Man if he'd been a little closer, she coulda killed him!"

According to Sumlin, it wasn't only problems with women that could drag the mighty Howlin' Wolf down. He was even more passionate about his music. "He did one album that he didn't like, and he went home and got in the bed and stayed three days before he would come back and finish it," Sumlin recalled. "They finally got him back there to do his voice and finish it."

Songs:

"Killing Floor"- Howlin' Wolf (Chester Burnett)

"Hard Time Killing Floor"- Skip James (Nehemiah Curtis James)

KINGSNAKE

The kingsnake is so named because even though it is non-venomous, it can eat rattlesnakes, copperheads, and coral snakes with no ill effect.

The kingsnake locates poisonous snakes with its acute sense of smell. A kingsnake will bite a rattlesnake and coil around it, constricting it slowly and swallowing it whole. The kingsnake shows up in blues songs such as "Crawling Kingsnake Blues"--sung to great effect by John Lee Hooker in 1959--as a metaphor for virility and domination:

You know I'm a crawling kingsnake, baby, and I rules my den
I don't want you hanging 'round my mate
Gonna use her for myself

Although harmless to humans, the kingsnake is at the top of the reptile food chain. Adults grow to between thirty and eight-five inches long and are typically chocolate brown or black, with white-to-yellowish bands. There are a wide variety of subspecies, including the scarlet kingsnake and the speckled kingsnake; they all share a high resistance to snake venom.

The Dahomey (Fon) people of Benin, West Africa practice the African religion *Vodun*, which includes in its mythology a snake named Dan that helped create the universe and supports it with 3500 coils above and 3500 coils below.[3] In Haitian *Voudou* and American **Voodoo** or "Vodou," which both evolved from *Vodun*, Dan is worshipped as Damballah, the Grand **Zombie**.

Songs:

“Crawlin’ Kingsnake”- Joe Williams
“Crawlin’ Kingsnake Blues”- Bernard Bessman, John Lee Hooker

John Lee Hooker performing at Fat City in Pittsburgh, 1979 *Photo ©* *Joseph A. Rosen*

L

LEMON

As noted in the entries for **cock**, and **rider**, sexual references in the blues freely switch genders. Lemon is another gender-shifting term; in blues songs, it may refer to female or male sexual organs. A woman may promise a male lover, “I’ll squeeze your lemon until the juice runs down your leg,” yet in “Dirty Mother for You,” Memphis Minnie sang:

You done squeezed my lemon
Now you done broke and run

In Cuba, where African ideograms called *nsibidi* developed into a rich sign-making tradition among black Cubans, the color yellow represents the life force. A cross may be drawn in yellow chalk on the forehead or the chest during an initiation rite to symbolize this, for example.[4]

Shango, the Yoruba thunder god, is often depicted squeezing his life-giving lemon, while pointing to the sky. When a devotee is possessed by Shango, he “charges three times, head leading, spinning like a ram, toward the drums. Then he opens his eyes to abnormal width and sticks out his tongue, to symbolize a fiery belch of flames, and raises his thunder-axe on high and clamps his other hand upon his scrotum.”[5] Now we know where Michael Jackson got that move.

The mythic third king of the Yoruba, Shango is the most energetic and powerfully sexual Yoruba deity. He is both warrior and lover, described in praise poems dedicated to him as “water by the side of fire at the center of the sky” and “I have an assassin as a lover.”[6] Like Obaluaiye, the smallpox god, Shango wreaks vengeance upon those who have committed moral transgressions (see **dust my broom** for more on Obaluaiye). He is Joe, the betrayed lover with a gun in his hand in the Jimi Hendrix song “Hey Joe.” He is embodied in the murderous rage of an enslaved man, expressed metaphorically in so many early blues songs about infidelity and revenge.

Songs:
“Dirty Mother for You”- Memphis Minnie (Lizzie Douglas)
“Traveling Riverside Blues”- Robert Johnson

“Let Me Squeeze Your Lemon”- Charlie Pickett

LEVEE

A levee is a man-made embankment that keeps a river from flooding lowlands. The numerous levees built around southern rivers after the Civil War protected millions of acres of rich farmland that would not have been usable otherwise, as Mattie Delaney pointed out in “Tallahatchie River Blues”:

Tallahatchie River rising Lord it’s mighty bad
Some peoples on the Tallahatchie lost everything they had
Some people in the Delta wondering what to do
They don't build some levees I don’t know what will become of you

The huge man-made levee holding back the Mississippi river is higher and longer than the Great Wall of China. It flanks the river from Cairo, Illinois to south of New Orleans, with thirty-foot-high earthen walls on either side. The levee was built with the hard manual labor of convicts and poor black and Irish laborers called “muleskinners.” Mules are known for being stubborn, but people who know mules say they are really just very smart. To train a mule, you have to outsmart it or “skin” it.

The levee was built by hauling dirt up its steep muddy slopes in wheelbarrows or in carts drawn by mule teams. Many men and mules were injured or killed when they lost their footing and tumbled down the embankment.

The Mississippi levee was begun piecemeal in the early 19th century when individual planters piled up small dykes to protect their fields from spring floods. By 1833, levee commissions had organized countywide efforts, but that all went to hell during the Civil War. After the war, levee boards coordinated efforts to build one huge levee and claim the fertile land of the Mississippi Delta for Southern farmers. Smaller levees were built to contain rivers in east Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

The levee camps, where workers lived in tents, drew thousands of freedmen looking for work. While they worked, they improvised levee camp hollers to spur on themselves and their mules. These work songs had the seeds of the blues in their calls and refrains.

Some researchers have noted that their melodies closely parallel the Muslim morning call to prayer. Sylviane Diouf, a researcher at New York's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, noticed that: “As in the [Muslim] call to prayer, ‘Levee Camp Holler’ emphasizes words that seem to quiver and shake in the reciter's vocal chords. Dramatic changes in musical scales punctuate both ‘Levee Camp Holler’ and the call to prayer, and a nasal intonation is evident in both.”[7] Scholars estimate that roughly thirty percent of the West Africans taken to the American colonies between the 1600s and mid-1800s were Muslim.

By the mid-1920s, working on the levee was the subject of numerous blues that expressed fear of the unsafe conditions on the levee and anger at being forced to work on it. Songs like Lonnie Johnson’s “Broken Levee Blues,” written after the great flood of 1927, told the story of African Americans threatened with jail if they refused the dangerous work:

They want me to work on the levee
They’re coming to take me down
I’m scared the levee may break and I might drown

Songs:
“Broken Levee Blues”- Lonnie Johnson (Alonzo Johnson)
“Levee Camp Moan”- Son House (Eddie James House, Jr.)
“Tallahatchie River Blues”- Mattie Delaney

LOVE COME DOWN

To have one’s love come down means to feel strong sexual desire for someone. By definition, this is not a rational experience. In “Please Help Me Get Him Off My Mind,” Bessie Smith admitted:

When I tried to kill him
That’s when my love for him come down

One’s love, or sexual energy, literally does move downward, according to the yogic concept of life force, or *prana*, which depicts it as flowing in *vayu*, or “winds,” throughout the body. Different vayu control different bodily functions and flow in different directions. The *apana vayu*, which controls ejaculation (as well as urination, defecation, giving birth, menstruation, and creative work) flows downward.

Controlling the flow of prana is a primary focus in all yogic practices. Yogis use such practices as *asana* (directing prana by practicing physical postures) and *pranayama* (restraining or controlling the breath in order to restrain or control prana) to reverse the flow of *apana vayu*. These practices get one’s love flowing upward, in essence- so that one’s personal

consciousness can merge with the universal consciousness that jazz musician John Coltrane called "a love supreme." [8]
Songs:
"Let Me Squeeze Your Lemon"- Charlie Pickett
"Please Help Me Get Him Off My Mind"- Bessie Smith

M

MAXWELL STREET MARKET

Maxwell Street Market was the Chicago neighborhood where blues musicians busked on the street from the 1940s until it was leveled in 1996 to make way for University of Chicago athletic fields and parking. Muddy Waters, Little Walter, Howlin' Wolf, Elmore James, "Maxwell Street" Jimmy Davis, and other legendary blues artists played their first performances in Chicago on Maxwell Street for spare change from passersby before graduating to the clubs.

The market had no formal boundaries, but its most active area was Maxwell Street between Newberry Avenue and Union Avenue, and Halsted Street between West Roosevelt Road and West Liberty Street. Maxwell Street performer Jimmie Lee Robinson told *Blues Revue* magazine that the blues musicians roamed Halsted as far north as Madison, while gospel singers dominated Newberry Avenue.[9]

"It was an adventure!" Chicago blues guitarist Jody Williams recalled, laughing. "Me and Bo Diddley played on street corners all around town- South side, West side. Put a hat down there or open up the guitar case and they'd throw money into the hat or the case. You'd be surprised how much money you can make out there just being a street musician. I was out there when I was about fourteen, fifteen. I left home at seventeen; called myself a professional."[10] Williams made good on that claim, joining the Howlin' Wolf band in 1954 and later Memphis Slim's band, and becoming a top-notch session player for Chess Records in the 1950s and 1960s.

On the South and West sides, "depending on the neighborhood, mainly it was mostly black folks," Williams said, "but in the Maxwell Street area, what they called Jewtown, it was a mix of everybody. It's no longer there, they moved the market sales to another street but they still call it Maxwell Street. It was a huge bazaar, like you might see in foreign countries."

Although pianist Henry Gray began playing **juke joints** near his family's farm in Alsen, Louisiana, when he was sixteen, he really wanted to get up to Chicago to the thriving Maxwell Street scene. "I was twenty-one when I moved to Chicago," Gray said. "After I got out the army in '46, I did go home to Louisiana, but I didn't stay for but two weeks then went on back to Chicago. That's where all the blues and all the musicians was, in Chicago, so that's where I wanted to be. I played on Maxwell Street with Little Walter. A whole lotta stuff used to be going on there, right on the streets. I played down there lots of times. I'd bring an electric piano--I had three or four of 'em. Everybody was down there and I played with them all. Little Walter, Homesick James, Elmore James, James Cotton."[11]

Gray graduated to the clubs when he began playing with Muddy Waters in 1947. The pianist joined Howlin' Wolf's band in 1956 and stayed with him until 1968. Gray stayed with relatives in Chicago, but was soon making enough money to get his own place. Other musicians, Gray recalled, stayed in houses owned by Leonard Chess, who cofounded Chess Records ("Home of the Electric Blues") with his brother, Phil, in 1950. "He had houses for all his musicians," Gray said. "He had eight houses. That made it easier to come up, if you wanted to stay there."

According to Williams, Leonard and Phil Chess' father may have actually owned the houses. "When I was playing with Wolf, I was staying at a building that was owned by Chess' father. His name was Jake," Williams said. "We did pay rent, and a lot of musicians lived there."
Songs:
"Maxwell Street Blues"- "Papa" Charlie Jackson
"Maxwell Street Jam"- Carey Bell

MEMPHIS

Like its namesake in ancient Egypt, Memphis is the gateway to a great river delta. Memphis, Tennessee, is where people from all over the Mississippi Delta gathered in the early-mid 1900s before heading south to find work in the ports of New Orleans or north to the stockyards and factories of Chicago and Detroit. In Memphis they heard each other's music, and where people from different regions collide, new music is born.

"Memphis is arguably the most musical city on the planet," Larry Nager wrote in *Memphis Beat*.[12] It's birthed the plain country blues of Memphis Minnie and Memphis Slim, the polished compositions of W.C. Handy, Elvis Presley's rock 'n' roll,

Bobby Bland's seductive soul, and the jazz of Phineas Newborn.

Memphis was also where people first realized that black music could be packaged and sold to white audiences. In 1909, a young African American professor and minstrel musician named W.C. Handy moved to Memphis as the musical director of a band called the Knights of Pythias. His first blues-style composition was "Mr. Crump," a campaign song for E.H. Crump, who was a mayoral candidate running on a reform platform. Reworked as "Memphis Blues," the song was Handy's first hit, followed by "St. Louis Blues." Before Elvis Presley and Col. Tom Parker did it, Handy took regional "race" music, polished it up, and sold it to black and white audiences nationwide.

W.C. Handy poses with his trumpet at Hooks Brothers Portrait Studio in Memphis, circa 1930.

While the Delta blues musicians who moved north to Chicago kept their rough edges, even when they went electric, a smoother style developed in Memphis around the singing of Johnny Ace, Gatemouth Moore, Roscoe Gordon, B.B. King, and Bobby "Blue" Bland. King and Bland nabbed their own show on WDIA in Memphis, where Riley B. King's handle was "the Beale Street Blues Boy," which was shortened to "Blues Boy," andeventually B.B. Johnny Ace joined up with B.B. King and the Beale Street Boys when he returned from serving in the navy during World War II and then took over their show when King and Bland moved on to pursue recording careers.

Ace had a string of hits on the Duke label and became a hard-partying teen idol to both black and white kids. He blew his head off Christmas Eve 1954 while indulging in one of his favorite games- scaring onlookers by playing Russian roulette with an empty revolver. Unfortunately, he had neglected to remove all the bullets from the gun. Dead at 25, Ace had a huge posthumous hit with "Pledging My Love," which is still in heavy rotation on today's "oldies" stations. One of the first tragedies of the rock 'n' roll era, Ace set the template that Elvis would later follow for the wild life and tragic death of a Memphis favorite son.

Songs:

"Jazzbo Brown from Memphis Town"- Bessie Smith
"North Memphis Blues"- Memphis Minnie
"South Memphis Blues"- Frank Stokes
"Wartime Blues"- Blind Lemon Jefferson (Lemon Jefferson)

MOJO, MOJO HAND

A mojo is a **hoodoo** charm, a "prayer in a bag." The mojo is an ineffectual bundle of twigs, nail clippings, and other junk, however, until a conjurer traps a spirit inside it. Over time, mojo has come to mean an individual's magnetism and sexual vitality.

The word "mojo" is probably related to *mojuba*, which means "a prayer of praise" and comes from the Yoruba *emi* (I) and *ajuba* (salute).[13] Each act of propitiation to the gods must begin with a libation (such as spit, alcohol, or water) and a mojuba. Mojo is also likely connected to the Fula word *moca*, which means to cast or activate a magic spell by spitting.[14] In the Gullah dialect of the Georgia Sea Islands, *moco* means witchcraft or magic. In Jamaican English, *majoe* is a plant with medicinal powers.[15]

Bakongo charms called *nkisi* (plural: *minkisi*) contain both herbal medicines (*bilong*) and a soul (*mooyo*) that empowers them.[16] The mojo is the vital spark within the medicine- the spirit of an ancestor, or a spirit-god captured by a root doctor.

Many blues songs tell of mojos that **fix** (tie or bind) a lover to be faithful. Mississippi Fred McDowell described this in "Louisiana Blues":

Lord I'm going down to Louisiana to buy me a mojo hand
I'm going to fix my baby so she won't have no other man

A mojo may bind not only the emotions, but also the sexual organs of the lover. If a woman who has been tied attempts to make love with another man, she may find herself defecating or menstruating during intercourse. A tied man will lose his erection if he attempts to be unfaithful.[17]

As Blind Willie McTell explained to a willing woman in "Talking to Myself":

Well I'd like to love you, baby
But your good man got me barred

A **mojo hand** is a bag, typically of red flannel, that contains items designed either to influence another person's behavior or to protect and bring good fortune to the wearer of the bag. There are many names for mojo hands, including **conjure bag**, **conjure hand**, lucky hand, **gris-gris** bag, **juju**, **nation sack** (worn only by women), **toby**, and **trick bag**.

According to American **hoodoo** expert Catherine Yronwode, "hand" means a combination of ingredients. "The term may derive from the use of finger and hand bones of the dead in mojo bags made for various purposes, from the use of a rare orchid root called Lucky Hand root as an ingredient in mojo bags for gamblers, or by an analogy between the mixed ingredients in the bag and the several cards that make up a 'hand' in card games," she theorized in her online book *Hoodoo in Theory and Practice: An Introduction to African American Rootwork*.[18]

Three factors determine what a mojo hand will accomplish: (1) the color of flannel chosen to make the bag, (2) the ingredients placed inside the bag, and (3) how the hand is "dressed" or "fed." Although mojo hands are typically red, some conjurers use different colors of fabric for different mojos, such as green flannel for a money mojo, white flannel to bless a baby, or light blue flannel for a peaceful home.

What goes inside the mojo varies with the purpose of the mojo and the proclivities of the hoodoo practitioner who is

preparing it. The mojo almost always includes something secretly collected from the body of the person being hoodoo'ed, such as a lock of hair, some pubic hair, fingernail clippings, or a piece of skin. The mojo maker combines the personal item with something that will have the desired effect on the person's behavior or will fulfill the desire of the person who plans to wear the bag. The most common ingredients are roots, such as pieces of **John the Conqueror**, and herbs. Other ingredients range from ash, bone, and insect parts to snakeskin or feathers, or symbolic items such as dice, a length of chain, or coins.

Once the conjurer has lured a spirit into the mojo, the mojo is anointed or "dressed" with oil. A bag may also be fed with whiskey, perfume, or bodily fluids such as spit, urine, or semen. This seals the spirit inside the mojo. While in West Africa, musicologist John Miller Chernoff took part in the creation of a juju that involved feeding the juju with gin, corn soup, and corn meal (*see* **juju**).

The mojo bag may be carried by the person casting the spell, or hidden in the home of the person on whom the spell is being cast. If you suspect you are the victim of a mojo, you can get a root doctor to help you break the spell, but your best bet is to find the mojo in its hiding place and destroy it. As long as the person who has hoodooed you can keep the mojo hidden, he or she can still control you. Of course, the real question is, Who done hoodooed the hoodoo man?

In "Low Down Mojo," Blind Lemon Jefferson's girlfriend (his **rider**) had a mojo hidden from him that kept him from making love to any other woman:

My rider's got a mojo, and she won't let me see
Every time I start to loving, she ease that thing on me

Songs:
"Little Queen of Spades"- Robert Johnson
"I Got My Mojo Working"- Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield)
"Mojo Hand"- Lightnin' Hopkins (Sam Hopkins)
"Low Down Mojo"- Blind Lemon Jefferson

MONKEY MAN

When a woman is in a marriage or committed relationship with a good man, but she keeps fooling around with someone else, that someone else is called her monkey man. Country blues singer Charley Lincoln made his feelings about this situation clear in "Hard Luck Blues":

Two kind of people in this world, mama, that I can't stand
That's a two-faced woman, baby, and a monkey-man

Songs:
"Chicago Monkey Man"- Ida Cox
"Wild Women Don't Have the Blues"- Ida Cox
"Big Feeling Blues"- Ma Rainey (Gertrude Pridgett Rainey)
"I'm a Steady Rollin' Man"- Robert Johnson

MOONSHINE

Moonshine is illegally distilled whiskey made by allowing a mash of sugar combined with fruit, potatoes, or grain to ferment. After fermentation, the mash is strained and the leftover liquid boiled. The vapor rising from the boiling mash liquid is distilled by forcing it through condenser cells, and the condensation is collected in bottles.

The distillation process creates a telltale trail of steam, so it was conducted at night, in complete darkness, with only moonlight for illumination. Moonshine is also called "hooch," a name borrowed from the Hoochinoo tribe of Alaska, known for its potent homemade brew.[19]

Most people associate moonshine with Prohibition (1920~1933), but moonshine actually first became popular during the Civil War, when the Federal government imposed stiff new taxes on whiskey to help finance the Union Army. The whiskey tax was raised to $1.10 per gallon in 1894. This created a lively market in moonshine.

After the Civil War, the whiskey tax was not repealed and the Revenue Bureau of the Treasury Department was formed to collect it. Under Commissioner Green B. Raum, the Bureau's feared "Revenue men" hunted down moonshiners, angering citizens by exercising national authority with no regard for state lines. Despite Raum's efforts, five to ten million gallons of moonshine were sold annually by the end of the 19th century.

Prohibition only increased the market for moonshine, and making moonshine became an important cottage industry in poor rural regions like Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, eastern Tennessee, northern Georgia, and North and South Carolina.

Moonshine is still produced today in Appalachia, mostly as clear, very potent corn or grain alcohol. To make sure a batch of moonshine is safe to drink, take a snort before buying.
Songs:
"Conversation with the Blues"- Big Bill Broonzy (Willie Lee Conley Broonzy)
"Barrel House Blues"- Ma Rainey (Gertrude Pridgett Rainey)
"Moonshine" - "Sonny Boy" Williamson (John Lee Williamson)

MOTHERFUCKER

The word "motherfucker" was used in English before African slaves arrived in the colonies, but much less frequently and casually than it came into use among African Americans. In the African American community, it morphed into bad motherfucker, mean motherfucker, dirty motherfucker, etc., and came to mean someone or something rotten and difficult, yet worthy of one's grudging respect.

This more relaxed attitude toward colorful language entered American English via the cities and villages of Africa. In Nigerian village squares, oral poets known as *ijala* still use obscene jokes and stories to get the crowd laughing and cheering.[20]

Certain fierce witches, meanwhile, are known as "the mothers." People who believe the mothers have cursed them seek help from healers who brandish iron staffs topped with sculpted birds. The bird represents both the mind of the healer and a warning to the mothers that he is wise to the shapes they can assume.[21] Perhaps this influenced the evolution of the word "motherfucker" to describe someone tough enough to disarm a dangerous opponent. This usage was in effect by 1890 in "The Ballad of Stagger Lee":

He said, "Well, bartender, it's plain to see
I'm that bad motherfucker named Stagger Lee"

Americans also picked up the African emphatic use of a negative term to describe something very positive. If something is bad, it may actually be very good- as in the rapper's boast, "I'm bad!" The Mandingo (Bambara) phrase *a ka nyi ko-jugu* literally translates to "It is good badly!" In Sierra Leone, the Bantu-derived word *baad*, means bad, as in really good.[22]
Songs:
"The Ballad of Stagger Lee"- traditional
"The Motherfuckers Ball"- traditional
"Mother Fuyer"- Dirty Red (Nelson Wilborn)

MR. CHARLIE

According to *The Land Where the Blues Began*, Charles was a popular name among Southern whites with "aristocratic pretensions," so "it was a safe bet to call the boss Mr. Charlie."[23] Boss Charlie and Mr. Charlie were acceptable ways for slaves to address plantation overseers. Southern white men in positions of authority, such as prison guards and levee camp bosses, still expected to be addressed by such names by African Americans for many years after Emancipation.

"Charlie" and "Mr. Charlie" were also used among African Americans to refer derogatorily to a white man, or to white people in general.
Songs:
"Black Brown and White"- Eddie Boyd
"Mr. Charlie"- Lightnin' Hopkins (Sam Hopkins)

N

NATION, NATION SACK

African Americans in the 1800s and early 1900s referred to Native American tribes as "nations" and called their territory or reservations "the nation." In "The Faking Blues," Papa Charlie Jackson declared:

Lord I'm going to the nation, buy me an Indian squaw
I'm going to raise me a family, got me an Indian ma

The familial relationships that developed between African Americans and Native Americans are celebrated in New Orleans every year. As percussionist "Big Chief" Smiley Ricks explained, "I'm a black Mardi Gras Indian chief. We make our own outfits. We celebrate the Indians and the Africans, because, you know, the black people ran away with Indians as slaves. We

make our suits. I sew my spirit in it."[24] One of Ricks's albums is titled *Chief Smiley Ricks and the Indians of the Nation*.

African American women adopted the nation sack **mojo** from the women of Native American "nations." This small cloth or leather bag dangled under a woman's skirt next to her pubic area and held her money and items she carried for their magical properties, such as a feather or a **toby**. Prostitutes who worked Memphis and other towns along the Mississippi River first picked up the custom, because the jingle of coins under their skirts was a subtle way to attract customers.

The connection between prostitutes and the nation sack may be what caused guitarist Robert Jr. Lockwood to bust out laughing when asked about it. The 90-year-old Lockwood, who spent part of his childhood in Memphis, said, once he caught his breath, "A nation sack? I mean, people been wearing that damn thing ever since I can remember! You know, a nation sack is when you got your money in something tied around your waist."[25]

If a woman was in a relationship, her nation sack might contain some personal items she'd taken from her man without his knowledge in order to tie him to her- such as a lock of hair, some fingernail clippings, or some pubic hair. A woman might also use a nation sack to get and keep a man, if she could get her hands on something from his body.

According to an interview that folklorist Henry Middleton Hyatt conducted with a female **hoodoo** practitioner in Memphis: "Yo' know, a man bettah not try tuh put dere han' on dat bag; yo' know, he betta not touch. He goin' have some trouble serious wit dat ole lady if he try tuh touch dat bag, 'cause when she pulls it off at night if she sleeps by herself, she sleeps wit it on; but if she got a husban', yo'll see her evah night go an' lock it up in dat trunk. Nex mawnin' yo' see her go dere an' git it. He never tetch it, she got her stuff in dere. She got her money in dere an' her snuffbox an' all dat othah stuff--yo' say 'tobies'-- dat's what's in dat bag. An' don't chew touch dat bag. If yo' [a man] prob'ly make him git sick."[26]

The prohibition against a man touching a nation sack was very strong. Robert Johnson was a master at using hoodoo language to express everything the listener needed to know about a situation in two lines. In "Come On In My Kitchen," Johnson bragged:

Oh, she's gone; I know she won't come back
I've taken the last nickel out of her nation sack

Songs:
"Come On In My Kitchen"- Robert Johnson
"The Faking Blues"- "Papa" Charlie Jackson

P

PASSAGREEN

Although Robert Johnson is presumed to have been poisoned by whiskey laced with strychnine by a jealous husband, the singer David "Honeyboy" Edwards has said Johnson could have been poisoned with passagreen, a tasteless, odorless backwoods poison extracted from mothballs.[27]

Johnson, harmonica player "Sonny Boy" Williamson (Aleck "Rice" Miller), and Honeyboy Edwards were entertaining at a Greenwood, Mississippi **juke** known as Three Forks one Saturday night in July 1938. Johnson had been a fixture at the joint for a few weeks, and had found himself some female company. Unfortunately for Johnson, she was the wife of the man who ran Three Forks. She pretended to come to Greenwood to see her sister, but was actually visiting Johnson on the sly.

That Saturday night, however, Johnson and the lady made their affection for each other a little too obvious. During a break in the music, Johnson and Williamson were standing outside when someone handed Johnson an open half-pint of whisky. Williamson purportedly knocked it out of his hand, saying "Man, don't never take a drink from an open bottle. You don't know what could be in it."[28]

Irritated, Johnson snapped, "Man, don't never knock a bottle of whiskey out of my hand." When a second open bottle was offered to Johnson, he took a swig.

Johnson and Williamson returned to the stage, but several minutes into their set, Johnson could no longer sing. Williamson covered for him on vocals but after a few songs, Johnson set down his guitar midsong.

By the time Honeyboy Edwards arrived around 10:30 p.m., Johnson was too weak to continue playing. He was laid across a bed in an anteroom and taken in the early hours of the morning to his room in "Baptist Town," an African American neighborhood in Greenwood.[29]

Passagreen would have made a healthy man temporarily very sick, but would not have typically killed him. If the juke owner gave Johnson passagreen, he was probably just trying to scare him off, not murder him. Inititally Johnson rallied, but over the

next two weeks he grew steadily weaker. By the time he was taken from Baptist Town to a private home on the "Star of the West" plantation, where he was nursed around the clock, he appeared to have contracted pneumonia. Johnson died on August 16, 1938.

Some scholars have speculated that Johnson had Marfan's syndrome. People with Marfan's tend to have unusually long thin limbs and fingers, like those seen in photos of Johnson. Because Marfan's weakens connective tissues in the body, it can make sufferers more vulnerable to heart and lung complications, including pneumothorax--a condition in which air escapes from a lung and becomes trapped between the chest wall and lung. This can cause the lung to collapse, leading to pain, shortness of breath and, eventually, death.

POLICY GAME

Policy game was an illegal daily lottery introduced in Chicago in 1885, supposedly by a bookie nicknamed Policy Sam. Players bet that certain numbers would be picked from a wheel that was spun each evening, which is why policy was also called "playing the numbers."

The name "policy" came from the coded question bookies or "numbers runners" asked when collecting bets: "Would you like to take out an insurance policy?" *Bolita*, Spanish for "little ball," was a variation popular in Cuba and among Florida's Hispanic, Italian, and African American population. It involved pulling numbered balls from a bag of 100 balls.

By 1901, illegal gambling had spread throughout the United States and laws were on the books prohibiting it. The games flourished, nonetheless, until states decided it was smarter to join 'em if you can't beat 'em, and set up legal daily number lotteries of their own. The first state lottery was established in New Hampshire in 1964.

Policy and *bolita* were a cheap gamble. Shops took bets as low as one cent and people from all walks of life would regularly select a three-digit number, or **gig**, and place a bet with a their bookie. Since just spinning a wheel or pulling balls out of a bag left the bookies open to charges of fraud, the winning numbers came to be selected in a wide variety of fashions—some were based on horse races, some on the Cuban lottery. In New York during the 1920s, bets were made on the last three numbers of the daily Federal Reserve Clearing House Report. This offered the further advantage that the bettor did not need to contact the bookie to learn if he or she had won - because the numbers were printed in the daily newspapers.[30]

In the South another "on-the-level" policy game, The Cotton Exchange, derived its winning numbers from the daily spot prices for cotton on the Chicago Board of Trade.[31] In Florida in the 1940s, a game paid off on the last two numbers of the daily Cuban lottery. The payoff in 1948 for that game was $65 for a $1 bet.[32] Regardless of how the winning number was selected, the next day winners could collect from their bookies.

Players searched their dreams for signs they looked up in "dream books" like *Aunt Sally's Policy Players Dream Book* to try to predict the winning numbers. Dream books link dream images, such as a dream of a train, to numbers. The dream images are listed in alphabetical order, with numbers beside each item. A cat represented the number 14, for example.

Dream books and policy gaming appear in many blues songs written from the 1920s to the 1950s. Blues songwriters used the numbers from the dream books as code in some of their lyrics. A player could decode the song by using a dream book. Blind (Arthur) Blake sang in "Policy Blues":

I begged my baby to let me in her door
Wanted to put my 25, 50, 75 in her 7, 17, 24

Blues and hoodoo expert Catherine Yronwode noted that 25, 50, and 75 are all numbers that represent phallic imagery in the dreambooks- a vine, a cucumber, and an elephant trunk, respectively- while 7, 17, and 24 relate to feminine images, along with "digging" or "churning."

"The implications seem clearly 'dirty,'" Yronwode wrote in her article, "Aunt Sally's Policy Players Dream Book"; however, "Blake gets the last laugh on the listener, because an entirely different set of ascriptions shows that these numbers are demonstrably 'clean': The male numerals 25 and 50 can also be interpreted as 'underclothes' (25), 'washing,' 'scrubbing,' and 'washboard' (all 50), while the female numbers 17 and 24 can also refer to a 'river' (17) and 'a washtub' (24)- -and so Blake might just as well be saying that he would like to put his wash-board in her tub of river-water and scrub his underwear clean."[33]

Songs:
"I Ain't Got You"- Jimmy Reed
"Policy Blues"- Blind Blake (Arthur Blake)
"Hand Reader"- Washboard Sam (Robert Brown)

R

RAMBLING

To ramble is to move from place to place, never settling down. Rambling is also used to describe sexual voraciousness; this usage may stem from the late-night live-sex shows at **buffet flats**, sometimes called "midnight rambles."

The phrase "midnight rambles" was borrowed from after-hours clubs to describe the midnight screenings of movies for "blacks only" at segregated movie theaters in the United States. Between 1910 and World War II, Hollywood produced almost 500 "race movies" for these audiences.

Most popular were the forty-plus films written and directed by African American novelist and South Dakota homesteader Oscar Micheaux. His movies starred all-black casts and were mostly produced by black filmmakers. Some directly addressed racial issues, while others were simply mysteries, musicals, or Westerns, yet counteracted the predominant image of African Americans in the movies as fit for little else beyond scrubbing floors, polishing shoes, or tap dancing.

Although rambling is associated with fecklessness and avoidance of work and family responsibility, for many African Americans- including blues musicians- traveling to look for work became a way of life after the Civil War. Determined to get back on their feet after the Civil War, southern white farmers began clearing the Delta, and a **levee** was built to hold back the river and protect the new fields of rich river soil from spring floods. "Thousands of black freedmen migrated to the Delta to clear and farm its fields…recruited by labor agents who promised higher wages and civil rights which had been lost in other parts of the state," William Ferris reported in *Blues from the Delta*.[34]

A **sharecropper** in the hill country beyond the Delta region could earn about a quarter a day, whereas in the Delta he could make a dollar or more a day. Sharecropping took hold in the Delta during that time, but it soon became clear to the croppers that some planters were shortchanging their weight when totaling up the season's cotton harvest, or were paying them less than the cotton's actual market value. Sharecroppers who were heavily in debt to the planters, or were sick of being treated cruelly or unfairly, simply left, taking highways 51 and 61 north to St. Louis and Chicago to look for work.

Meanwhile, thousands of hoe-boys or **hobos** rode the newly laid railroad tracks with their hoes slung over their shoulders as they followed the harvest seasons- bailing hay in Colorado, picking apples in Washington and potatoes in Idaho, and heading South for cotton harvests in the fall. The amount of track in the United States grew from 30,000 miles to 230,000 miles between 1860 and 1890. Riding the rails to search for work became a way of life for many people during the economic depression of the 1870s and 1880s.

By the 1900s, one of the best jobs an African-American man could get was to be a porter on a Pullman train. Although porters made better money than most African Americans at the time, they were constantly traveling, which made it difficult for them to visit banks. They often kept their earnings at local buffet flats, instead.

Blues musicians stayed on the road and the rails, too, traveling an early circuit of **juke joints** and **barrelhouses**. In the 1920s, Bessie Smith, one of the highest paid entertainers in the country, criss-crossed the United States with her troupe in her custom-built rail car, dazzling critics at packed engagements and raising hell after hours at the aforementioned buffet flats.

Understandably, rambling became the subject of many blues songs…and it wasn't confined to men. In "J.C. Holmes Blues," Bessie Smith told the story of a rail-riding mama:

I ain't good-looking and I don't dress fine
But I'm a rambling woman with a rambling mind

Songs:
"Good Night Irene"- Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter)
"Rambling Kid"- Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield)
"Rambling on My Mind"- Robert Johnson
"Midnight Rambler"—Eugene "Buddy" Moss

RAP

Since the 1700s, to rap has meant to con, fool, or win a game of wordplay in the Krio (Creole) dialect of Sierra Leone, which is on the west coast of Africa.[35] By the 1870s, "to rap" was in use in the United States, where it meant to converse, tease, or taunt. It also meant to steal a purse. By 1916 a police informant or witness to a crime was called a "rapper" and a "rap" was an arrest or criminal conviction (the "rap sheet" was a list of a criminal's convictions).[36]

Rapping as braggadocio about one's accomplishments- criminal or otherwise- dates "all the way back to the motherland, where tribes would use the call-and-response chants," according to hip-hop godfather Afrika Bambaata. "In the 1930s you had Cab Calloway pioneering his style of jazz rhyming," Bambaata explained, and "In the 1960s you had the love style of rapping, with Isaac Hayes, Barry White, and the poetry style of rapping with The Last Poets, The Watts Poets, and the militant style of

rapping with brothers like Malcolm X and Minister Louis Farrakhan. In the sixties you also had 'The Name Game,' a funny rap by Shirley Ellis, and radio DJs who would rhyme and rap before a song came on."[37]

By 1971, party DJs like Kool Herc were rapping over vinyl as they spun it, manipulating the vinyl itself with scratching and other techniques to create a new sound called hip-hop. Russell Simmons was a sociology student at the City University of New York when he heard his first rapper--Eddie Cheeba at the Charles Gallery on 125th Street--in 1977. Simmons and his younger brother Joey, who became Run of the rap group Run DMC, started promoting rap shows on campus. Simmons named his promotion venture "Rush" after his teenage nickname.

In 1979 Ford, Simmons, and a friend wrote the song "Christmas Rappin'" for rap artist Kurtis Blow, whom Simmons was managing. The song was a club hit, and Mercury Records began distributing the single to record stores around the country.

This was the first rap single to be distributed by a major record company, but like "race records" sixty years earlier, rap records were considered a passing fad by most people...except Simmons. While still in school, he put most of his energy into promoting his records and shows.

In 1983, Simmons befriended Rick Rubin, another rap-obsessed student promoter. Rubin was a white, longhaired, bearded former heavy metal fan, who lived in dark wraparound shades and a black overcoat. He had released a local dance hit by T La Rock and Jazzy Jay called "It's Yours" from his dorm room at New York University that was one of Simmons' favorite records.

Simmons and Rubin formed Def Jam Records with $5,000.00 and put out a single by an unknown fifteen-year-old rapper named LL Cool J. While Rubin concentrated on producing the music, Simmons worked on getting LL Cool J out of his favorite cowboy boots and into the Kangol hat and sneakers that were to become his trademark. The single sold 50,000 copies. By the following year Def Jam had sold more than 300,000 units of seven different twelve-inch singles.

Their success attracted CBS Records, which offered to help them promote and market four new acts a year. In two years with CBS, Def Jam scored three monster hits: the first crossover rap/rock single, "Walk This Way," with Run DMC and Aerosmith; LL Cool J's two-million-seller *Bigger and Deffer*; and the Beastie Boys' quadruple platinum album *Licensed to Ill*.

Simmons accomplished this because he didn't assume that only African Americans would be interested in hip hop. Just as W.C. Handy had marketed the blues to whites back in the early 1900s, Simmons marketed rap to both African- American and white audiences. "We don't make records, music, or television for black people, but for people who consume black culture," Simmons said in an interview in *Worth* magazine in 1992.

Like the blues, rap has been criticized from within its own community for violent imagery, crude language, and misogynistic lyrics. Like the blues, rap has lifted some artists out of poverty and has given them major careers and legendary status. And, like the blues, rap is an art form that accurately reports on the struggles, strategies, and subterfuges in the ghetto, but with fortitude of heart and soul that touches people of all races from Tuscaloosa to Tokyo.

Songs:

"Big Leg Emma's"- Champion Jack Dupree

"Long John Dean, the Bold Banker Robber from Bowling Green"

- W.C. Handy

"Pinetop's Boogie Woogie"- Pinetop Smith

RIDER

A rider is a sexual partner, or a steady lover. Riding is probably the most common metaphor for sexual intercourse in blues. Riding is also used metaphorically in the **Voodoo**, or *Vodou*, religion to describe divine possession.

Riding as a euphemism for sexual intercourse was common in English for centuries, according to *Lexicon of Black English*; however, "there is in non-Black usage a strong tendency for the 'rider' to be masculine…. In Black usage, on the other hand, it refers with approximately equal frequency to either sex."[38] Both male and female singers sing the traditional "C.C. Rider," for example; they just change the gender of the rider. (See **cock** and **lemon** for examples of other sexual terms that shift genders in the blues.)

C.C. Rider, see what you have done

You made me love you now your man [woman] done come

Using a condom is "riding with the saddle on." If a woman has sex with several men in a row, she is "riding the train" and her last partner is "the caboose." Riding the train can also mean to use cocaine. The riding metaphor in the blues has kept up with technology, with the best "rides" compared to the sharpest cars, as in "Scarey Day Blues" by "Blind" Willie McTell:

When my baby go to bed, it shines like a morning star

When I crawl in the middle, it rides me like a Cadillac car

At Vodou ceremonies, the priest or priestess attempts to invoke spirit-gods called *loa* to possess or "mount" members of the

congregation. Prayer, dancing, and offerings, such as rum or roosters, summon the spirits. A loa will descend to ride the body of the worshipper who has succeeded in reaching a state of readiness for ecstatic union with the divine. The morality implicit in this is stated in the Haitian proverb, "Great gods cannot ride little horses."[39]

The characteristics of an individual loa appear in the behavior of the possessed person during the ride. The possessed person is the *chwal*, or horse, of the spirit.[40] The god is the rider, the person is the horse, and they come together in the dance. When the god speaks through the possessed person about that person, almost every sentence is prefaced with the phrase, "Tell my horse..."- because the "horse" will have no memory of the ride when it is over, and will have to learn of it from others.

The concept of a deity "riding" a worshipper transferred from African ceremonies to African American Christian churches, where the cry "Drop down chariot and let me ride!" was often heard, as well as "Ride on!" and "Ride on, King Jesus!", which led to the use of "Right on!" as a statement of approval or enthusiasm.[41]

Songs:
"Banty Rooster Blues"- Charlie Patton
"Hellhound on My Trail"- Robert Johnson

RIDING THE BLINDS

Riding the blinds refers to the dangerous **hobo** practice of riding between cars on a moving freight train, so as to be out of sight of the train crew or police. On a passenger train, this spot was the walkway between the cars, typically covered with canvas or leather folded like an accordion's bellows.

On freight cars, hobos sometimes rode holding onto the ladder running up to the top of the car. That was also called riding the blinds. Hobos also rode in the spaces between the baggage or mail cars near the coal tender.[42]

Songs:
"Chickasaw Train Blues"- Memphis Minnie (Lizzie Douglas)
"Walkin' Blues"- Robert Johnson
"Cool Drink of Water Blues"- Tommy Johnson

ROADHOUSE

A roadhouse is a drinking establishment that is outside town or city limits and is therefore beyond any municipality's jurisdiction. Roadhouses can get away with providing unregulated entertainment, such as gambling and prostitution. Most roadhouses also provide liquor, music, and dancing.

The Texas "roadhouse blues" sound is exemplified by the blistering uptempo blues of guitarists Albert Collins, Freddie King, and Stevie Ray Vaughan, and the rough-edged blues of Austin singer Lou Ann Barton.

Song:
"Roadhouse Blues"- Albert King

ROCK

The roots of rock are in a West African etymon for dance--*rak*. An etymon is an original root word from which other words have developed, hence "etymology." In the West African language Bidyogo, *rak* means "dance," as in *yirak* (I dance) or *a irak* (I don't dance).[43]

Descriptions of African American church services in the late 1800s and early 1900s depict the congregation dancing in a circle around a center table, in a "rock" or "ring shout." (*See also* **shout**.) They moved with "a rhythmic, hopping, shuffling step, as they follow the deacon, who bears a standard."[44]

The deacon's job was to whip parishioners into a frenzy. When the congregation reached that peak, "when the songs were yelled and sung and the hands were clapped and the sweat was pouring and people were testifying, fainting, speaking in tongues, being at least transported and often saved, which meant to be overwhelmed by the Holy Ghost- that was called 'rockin' the church,' " Michael Ventura wrote in his seminal essay on rock and **Voodoo** "Hear That Long Snake Moan."[45]

"Rocking" also meant to get a steady rhythm going to make manual labor easier. An African American convict told Bruce Jackson for his work songs collection, *Wake Up Dead Man*, "They call it rockin', rockin' dead easy. That's what they call it when they start singin' the river songs. We have a steady rock. Everybody raise their axe up and come down at the same time, just rock."[46]

Elderly roustabouts who had worked loading and unloading ships on the Mississippi River in the 1920s and 1930s showed Alan Lomax how they would rock a load on their "totin' machine," a rope sling with two loops hanging between two heavy bars. They explained that they would place a load in the sling and rock it back and forth to keep it light on their shoulders while

they carried it down the plank toward the ship. "By rocking from side to side, the pressure was shifted from leg to leg and, at the same time, the body rocked forward with a surge of energy, which propelled the mover ahead. Rocking, then seems to be… the way to move heavy loads in the heat, when all you have is manpower," Lomax reported.[47]

A sexy body-to-body dance called the **slow drag** mimicked the movements of rocking a heavy load, and was popular in the **juke joints** Delta laborers frequented on Saturday nights. The dancers dragged their feet flat across the floor, letting their hips rock slowly side to side with their pelvises pressed together. By shuffling, rather than lifting and crossing their feet, the dancers circumvented the prohibition African American preachers had set down against dancing outside the church.

Because people in Africa danced far more often in groups than in mixed couples, some African slaves were initially mortified by partnered courtship dances, such as reels and quadrilles, that they saw people of European descent perform on the plantations. Among slaves and their descendants, group dances like the shuffling **ring shout** were deemed acceptable because they didn't involve crossing the feet the way that European partner dances did. By that logic, "rocking" wasn't really dancing, because the feet didn't cross.

By the 1940s, gospel singers in the South still used "rocking" to mean reaching spiritual rapture, but it had taken on a sexual connotation as well. To rock meant for lovers to keep the rhythmic action of intercourse steady, slow, and under control, so that the man could make love for a long time without ejaculating. As Frank Stokes sang in "Blues in D" in 1927:

Take me in your arms and rock me good and slow
So I can take my time and do my work everywhere I go

Songs:
"Blues in D"- Frank Stokes
"Everybody Rockin'"- John Lee Hooker
"West Virginia Blues"- Edward Thompson

ROCK 'N' ROLL

By the 1940s, the term "rock'n'roll" was well established in Southern **juke joints** as meaning "to have sex" (*see also* **rock, roll**). Rock 'n' roll didn't emerge as a distinct American musical style until the 1950s, although elements of rock'n'roll appeared in R&B records as early as the 1920s.

Early rock'n'roll combined the raw vocals of country blues and the rollicking rhythms of boogie woogie with influences from Appalachian mountain music, gospel, and country and western. Some ethnomusicologists also include connections to the African **shuffle** and sand dances and Irish jigs. And some people share guitarist Robert Jr. Lockwood's opinion that "Rock 'n' roll ain't nothing but the blues played fast."[48]

According to pianist Dr. John, who was an A&R (artist and repertoire) man in New Orleans during the dawn of rock'n'roll, "It [rock'n'roll] became a national thing but it came from a regional sound. For example, Stax was mixin' New Orleans stuff with some Texas stuff and some Chicago stuff, but it was still their sound."[49]

"It was against the [musician union] rules to mix the bands," recalled saxophonist Alvin "Red" Tyler, who led the session band in Cosimo Matassa's famous, secretly desegregated New Orleans studio, J&M. Tyler helped create the rock'n'roll sound by playing sax and arranging horns for all Little Richard's songs, starting with "Tutti Frutti." Tyler did the same for many other important artists in the 1950s and '60s, including Fats Domino, Earl King, Shirley Lee, and Etta James. "I'll tell you something," Tyler added, "when we first started recording there, we recorded on acetate disks. Oh yes. One take."[50]

Inside J&M, away from prying eyes, black and white musicians played together on many early R&B, rock, and soul hits. "In New Orleans," Tyler said, "you couldn't play on the bandstand together and they [the musicians unions] didn't want us to play in the studio together. But we did. We may have the only musicians union today that has two numbers; 174, which was the white union, and 496 for the black union." Tyler added, "The first time that Mac [Dr. John] used a mixed band the unions raised hell. I think they fined him and it really caused a stir."

Dr. John's mentor, legendary R&B piano player Professor Longhair (Henry Roeland Byrd) was actually banned from performing in white clubs in town for many years, which consigned him to barely being able to make a living. "You have to realize that it was segregated in the clubs, so many whites didn't know about him," Tyler explained. "As he got older, then whites started picking up on what he was doing, so he started making a little money just before he died. There wasn't much money to be made in the black clubs."

Segregated as "race music," regional hits like Roy Brown's "Good Rocking Tonight" weren't played on white radio until 1951, when Cleveland DJ Alan Freed brought this revved-up R&B to a white audience and called it "rock'n'roll." Freed produced the first rock'n'roll concert in 1952 in Cleveland. A near-riot broke out as people tried to get into the sold-out concert. It was no coincidence that the separate-but-equal doctrine was overturned two years later.

Rock 'n' roll brought a distinctly African experience to American teenagers--possession. As Michael Ventura wrote in his important essay on rock music, "Hear that Long Snake Moan," "The Voodoo rite of possession by the god became the standard of American performance in rock'n'roll. Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, James Brown, Janis Joplin, Tina Turner, Jim Morrison, Johnny Rotten, Prince- they let themselves be possessed not by any god they could name but by the spirit they felt in the music. Their behavior in this possession was something Western society had never before tolerated."[51]

Songs:

"Crazy Mixed Up World"- Willie Dixon

"The Blues Had a Baby and They Named It Rock and Roll"- Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield)

ROLL

Like **rock**, "roll" was also originally associated with manual labor, specifically the rolling of heavy bales of cotton onto a ship- a job that took three men per bale. Like other expressions connected with manual labor, such as rock and "hauling ashes" (*see* **ashes hauled**), rolling eventually took on a sexual connotation.

Sexually, to roll meant to heat things up and get caught in the inexorable march toward orgasm. In 1936's "Rolling Blues," Bo Chatman sang:

She don't roll it too high or either too low
She roll it good and easy and it ain't too slow

Songs:

"Preachin' Blues"- Son House (Eddie James House, Jr.);

"Skinny Woman"- "Sonny Boy" Williamson (John Lee Williamson)

"Let the Good Times Roll"- B.B. King (Riley King)

ROUNDER

A rounder is a professional gambler who travels around looking for high-stakes poker games. A rounder takes big risks for big money--and sometimes loses big.

Gambling poker games weren't allowed in the United States until the 1970s, so many legendary poker players honed their skills as rounders. Noted rounders include Doyle Brunson- winner of the first million-dollar poker tournament- -Amarillo Slim, and Sailor Roberts.[52]

When a rounder is in town, hold onto your money extra tight, as Blind Blake warned in "Hookworm Blues":

Hookworm in your body, food don't do you no good
Same way with a rounder, come in a nice neighborhood

Songs:

"Bukka's Jitterbug Swing"- Bukka White (Booker T. Washington White)

"Hookworm Blues"- Blind Blake (Arthur Blake)

S

SALTY DOG

In French Creole, *salté* means "dirty." To *jouer en salté* means to play a dirty trick on someone. In Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary*, salty appears to have an Old English meaning similar to "horny." It was used to describe "of a bitch," meaning a female dog that was *maris appetens*- "in heat," or wanting to have relations with a male.[53]

In blues songs like "Salty Dog," and "Candy Man," the salty dog is someone who wants to have sex without taking on the responsibility or restraints of a love relationship. In "Candy Man," the Reverend Gary Davis sang about a woman who told him, "If you can't be my candy man, you can't be my salty dog."

In the "slang gets grosser over time" department, *Urban Dictionary* reported in 2005 that a salty dog is "the act of having sex with one girl and then meeting up with another shortly after and having her perform oral sex."[54]

Songs:

"Candy Man"- Rev. Gary Davis

"Salty Dog"- Mississippi John Hurt (John Smith Hurt)

SALTWATER

Saltwater is slang for alcohol. It shows up in the Charlie Patton song "Revenue Man Blues":

*My **doney** loves saltwater, she always wants a drink*

If they see you with a bottle, they'll almost break your neck

The "they" to which Patton referred were "Revenue men," the feared Treasury Department agents known for their brutality who hunted down moonshiners during Prohibition.

Song:

"Revenue Man Blues"- Charlie Patton

SECOND LINE

Second line is the famously funky marching groove that musicians call "the big four," because it has a bass drum accent on the four. It originated in New Orleans, where the second line refers to the people dancing behind the band after a New Orleans funeral.

"When we have funerals in New Orleans," R& B pianist Dr. John explained, "the people marchin' in respect to the graveyard--that is the second line. When they put the body down and the band strikes up a lively tune to bring the people home, the dance the people are doing behind the band--that is also the second line. The people that follows the funeral is the second line. It grew to mean the people that follows the parade, the band that follows the float. But when we put people down, we have a good time about it."[55]

In Banjul, the capital of Gambia, musicologist Sam Charters witnessed a similar procession, beginning with boys and young men who were singing and dancing, and beating on boxes, tin cans, sticks, and tambourines. In the center of each group of dancers and drummers was a costumed spirit dancer. Charters compared the scene to Mardi Gras morning in the early 1950s: "Suddenly a group of boys came toward me from a corner. Boys and young men, singing and dancing the old New Orleans street dance steps…only in New Orleans the spirit had become a Mardi Gras Indian." The boys on the streets of Banjul," Charters added, "were descendants of those who did not become slaves, and the boys I'd seen on the streets in New Orleans were also descendants of the same people who, as slaves, had made the journey on to the United States and passed on the memory of an African celebration."[56]

The second line beat helped R&B evolve into rock 'n' roll, according to Dr. John: "There was a string of drummers that came out from New Orleans, starting with Paul Baldwin, who played Dixieland with a fonky second-line beat. His nephew, Earl Palmer--maybe they weren't kin but I like to think of him as Paul's nephew, spiritually- started putting it in records. When Earl started putting it in Little Richard's recordings it became rock 'n' roll. Before Little Richard came to New Orleans to cut 'Tutti Frutti,' his records sounded like everyone else, but after that everything changed. With one record."

Second line drumming is a polyrhythmic **shuffle**, as opposed to the two-four backbeat typical of straight blues. "It's more or less a one and three beat, if you're counting," explained Herman Ernest, III, the drummer who put the swing in Lady Marmalade's skirts for LaBelle and the shuffle on Lee Dorsey's *Night People* album. "I would tell [a drummer] to think polyrhythms in a marching cadence with more of a shuffle, with a press roll.[57]

"The Dixieland I came up on was more or less a raw groove," Ernest added. "People used to play on metal or a box with this kind of shuffle rhythm. It was done so manually back then that people looked at it as a Dixieland jazz thing, but it's not just that. If you listen to it real hard, you can hear shuffles--single shuffles, double shuffles- you can hear swing. It's all coming off the snare drum. And, if you accent real hard on the four, that is considered a New Orleans groove.

"Chicago had their own blues thing happening from Mississippi and Alabama," Ernest continued, "but Memphis and Detroit had a real connection with New Orleans because many New Orleans drummers were on the early sessions. The groove on [the Supremes hit] 'Baby Love' is based on New Orleans feel."

"It's hard to explain to people not from New Orleans," added saxophonist Red Tyler. "We were raised with a second line kind of beat. At funerals and social occasions, we would dance to this music. What happened was that we always heard that beat in the back of our minds. That's what it is about New Orleans music. We're always tying in from that second line feeling, even when we're not playing it….Even playing bebop, New Orleans drummers have that feel."[58]

"You can't separate nothin' in New Orleans, you see," Dr. John agreed, "You can go into the spiritual [*gris-gris*] church and see the Mardi Gras Indians sittin' in church in their sequins and finery. You see, the music played in the spiritual church is different than the music played in the sanctified church and Pentecostal church. In the spiritual church there'll be a band playing. They'll play some of the same tunes as gospel, but with a different beat. They'll play 'When the Saints Come Marching In,' but with this beat [Dr. John played a 4/4 shuffle over a 6/8 vamp on his knees]. Now, when you hear a whole church playing- Taka taka taka taka taka taka…it sounds very African.

"The ninth ward of New Orleans is probably less mixed than any area in any city in the United States, at least coming from back to slavery day," Dr. John added. "In fact, if you go to Nigeria today, and you ever meet the Istekiri tribe people they look just like people from the lower ninth [ward]. Certain features—like, their fingernails are shaped different.

"I've met different tribes of cats [in Africa] but none of the other tribes have these certain features that you'll see in the Lastie family, in Professor Longhair. Lots of people in that ward of New Orleans, even though they don't speak the same language anymore, they've kept some of the music somehow over hundreds of years. It still got the original African thing. Even if it's an organ in the church, when you hear the groove, it's nothing but fonky second line."

Howard "Smiley" Ricks, Dr. John's percussionist and a Mardi Gras Indian chief, captured the essence of second line when he said, "When I was a little boy, you hear that big four and you run out the door. You leave the pots and pans and everything, the second line was running down the street. Everybody just having fun. If you lived in the neighborhood with all that going, you would catch onto it with ease. That's an exciting beat. I heard that, I could leave everything. I'd be shooting marbles or whatever and just leave the game."[59]

For fine examples of second-line drumming, listen to music by The Meters, Dirty Dozen Brass Band, The Wild Magnolias and The Neville Brothers

SHAKE

There are disparate meanings for shake, including a rent party (1920s), an erotic dance (1930s), or to extort (1940s).[60] Shake is also slang for poor-quality marijuana that is mostly stems and seeds.

The cry "Shake it!" was shouted to encourage dancers at juke joints and rent parties--not to mention women walking down the street. Guitarist Hubert Sumlin recalled how he and Howlin' Wolf came up with the title for the song "Shake It for Me": "You know womens is the thing. They all look good to you. Although some you gonna find looks better than others. We used to sit, and your eyes gonna look. Wolf, he'd say, 'You see that woman's booty? Shake it for me, oh man.' And I said, 'Let's record it!' And that's what we did."[61]

Songs:

"Shake It for Me"- Howlin' Wolf (Chester Burnett)

"Shake Your Moneymaker"- Elmore James

SHANK, SHANKING

A shank is a knife, especially a handmade one, such as those made by inmates in prisons from harmless objects like a toothbrush or a comb. A shank can be made by melting the end of a toothbrush and inserting a razor blade into the plastic while it is still soft, for example, or by filing the handle of a spoon to a sharp point. A company called Securitas sells a line of No-Shank products for prisons, including the No-Shank Mirror and the No-Shank Toothbrush.

In the 1800s, shank referred to the long shaft of the keys available at the time. When sharpened to a point, the key shank made a nasty weapon, so perhaps this is the origin of the slang use of shank.

Shankings, or stabbings, were fairly common incidents in some of the rougher **gutbucket** joints a person might wander into for a drink and some cheap entertainment, hence the nickname "bucket of blood," for these types of establishments.

SHARECROPPING

Sharecropping is the working of a piece of land by a tenant in exchange for a share of the revenue that the tenant's crops earn when the landowner sells them. It took hold in the United States after the Civil War ended in 1865 and plantation owners, as well as their freed slaves, had to come up with a new economic system.

The Civil War ended slavery in the United States and put southern landowners in a pickle. Without slaves, how would the plantation owners farm their vast tracts of land? By the end of the war, the South's economy was so decimated that most landowners couldn't afford to buy seeds and fertilizer, let alone hire workers. Meanwhile, the freed slaves had no work and nowhere to go. Many were living in their old slave quarters, or in shacks they'd thrown up, and were trying to grow enough food in their gardens to keep from starving to death.

A bargain was struck. White landowners mortgaged their properties or convinced local banks to extend them credit to buy seeds and plantings, tools, and basic provisions for the freed slaves. Ex-slaves, in turn, agreed to stay on the plantations and plant and harvest the crops in exchange for half their value.

Unfortunately, because the landowners sold their tenants seeds, fertilizer, tools, food, and other supplies on credit, the owners set both prices and interest rates as they wished. Although some landowners were fair, many took advantage by overcharging tenants so that, come harvest time, a tenant's share of the revenue after expenses would come out to zero, or even leave the cropper in debt to the landlord.

Sharecropping was not exclusive to the post-Civil War United States. Peasants around the world have been stuck in this feudalistic system for generations. Many immigrants to the United States, such as sharecroppers from Sicily, came in hopes of one day owning, rather than renting, a patch of land. Resentment of the *patron*, or landowner, fueled Fidel Castro's overthrow of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959, the election of socialist president Salvador Allende in Chile in 1970, and ongoing struggles between landowners and peasants around the world.

Although in the United States sharecropping began as mutual cooperation born of desperation, it developed into modern-day feudalism. Once the system got going, the larger plantations printed their own money and minted their own coins for sharecroppers to use at the plantation store. These stores were in a position to charge exorbitant prices for necessities.

Plantation money was usually accepted in the nearest town, but was useless anywhere else. This situation kept many African Americans tied to plantations long after Emancipation. Son House described the problem succinctly in "Dry Spell Blues":

Pork chops forty-five cents a pound
Cotton is only ten

"Little" Milton Campbell, Jr. was born in Inverness, Mississippi, in 1934 to sharecropper parents, and grew up working the fields. "Back when I was a kid, that was what most people had to do," he recalled.

"Some black people by then had their own land, but unfortunately we were not one of those families. It was hard, working in the fields in the hot sun, sometimes in the rain. You'd go out so early, before the sun came up, and stay there just about 'til the sun was going down. It was very hard and you got very little pay for the hard work that you did.[62]

"Little" Milton Campbell, Jr. demonstrates the polish and power of four decades of performing; Tramps, New York CIty, 1990. *Photo ©Joseph A. Rosen*

"He [the landowner] furnished everything and we did the work," Campbell, Jr. continued, "and at the end of the year-- it all depends on how fair-minded he was – you would come out with a little money. And if he was one of those guys that wanted to keep you down, then you didn't come out with anything. Maybe you still owe! A lot of folks were not educated bookwise, so they were just kept in debt, year after year."

Plantation owners hired salaried white overseers to enforce rigid rules and drive the tenants to work as hard as possible. Along with being threatened and punished, sharecroppers were routinely cheated, and a second definition for sharecropping emerged as a sour joke: "Sharecropping- getting less than half of what you've got coming to you."

Some plantation owners were fair, and their tenants were able to work their way off the land and into better lives. The

majority, unfortunately, kept their tenants tied to them through debt. The crop never seemed to pay off the cost of the land rental, the mules, and the supplies. The plantation owner would offer to lend the sharecropper money at high interest rates to get through the next year, perpetuating a vicious cycle.

"My parents did get off," Campbell, Jr. said, adding, "You know, if you got determination, you deal with a situation as long as you have to 'til you can get your head above water. Then you move on to something different. That's what happened."

There were white sharecroppers in the Delta, too. As musicologist and Mississippi native Gayle Dean Wardlow noted, "Johnny Cash's daddy made a living in the thirties and forties and mid-fifties in Arkansas as a sharecropper. A lot of people forget that there was ever a white man in the Delta but it was the best place to go and work. If you was a black person you could go and make a little money."[63]

According to Campbell, Jr., "Yes, there were a lot of white sharecroppers most certainly. You know, poor people come in all creeds and races and colors. Just because you're white doesn't mean you're gonna be rich."

What finally crashed the sharecropping system was the plantation owners' over-reliance on King Cotton. As the supply of cotton increased, its price fell, resulting in a spiral of debt for both owners and sharecroppers in the 1880s and 1890s. The poverty among sharecropping families became very severe. The typical sharecropping woman kept house with only a straw broom, a laundry tub, a cooking kettle, and a water pail.

Desperate to make ends meet, African American men took to the rails as hoe-boys or **hobos**, hitting harvest time in different regions of the country to earn money. The women sold chickens, eggs, milk, and cheese. Through hard work and sacrifice, many families freed themselves from sharecropping.

Guitarist Robert Jr. Lockwood was born in 1915 in Turkey Scratch, Arkansas, an African American community of "croppers"--farmers who had worked themselves out of the sharecropping system and bought land. "In the South there was prejudice and it wasn't too good," said Lockwood, "But my people on both sides of my family owned farms and we was on no plantations except our own. Where I came from a whole lot of black people owned their own everything. Everybody out there in Turkey Scratch had their own property."[64]

Songs:

"Big Apple Blues"- John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson
"Dry Spell Blues, Part I"- Son House (Eddie James House, Jr.)
"Welfare Blues"- Joshua White

A Sharecrop Contract (1882)[65]

To every one applying to rent land upon shares, the following conditions must be read, and agreed to.

To every 30 and 35 acres, I agree to furnish the team, plow, and farming implements, except cotton planters, and I do not agree to furnish a cart to every cropper. The croppers are to have half of the cotton, corn, and fodder (and peas and pumpkins and potatoes if any are planted) if the following conditions are complied with, but-if not-they are to have only two-fifths (2/5). Croppers are to have no part or interest in the cotton seed raised from the crop planted and worked by them. No vine crops of any description, that is, no watermelons, muskmelons, . . . squashes or anything of that kind, except peas and pumpkins, and potatoes, are to be planted in the cotton or corn. All must work under my direction. All plantation work to be done by the croppers. My part of the crop to be housed by them, and the fodder and oats to be hauled and put in the house. All the cotton must be topped about 1st August. If any cropper fails from any cause to save all the fodder from his crop, I am to have enough fodder to make it equal to one-half of the whole if the whole amount of fodder had been saved.

For every mule or horse furnished by me there must be 1000 good sized rails. . . hauled, and the fence repaired as far as they will go, the fence to be torn down and put up from the bottom if I so direct. All croppers to haul rails and work on fence whenever I may order. Rails to be split when I may say. Each cropper to clean out every ditch in his crop, and where a ditch runs between two croppers, the cleaning out of that ditch is to be divided equally between them.

Every ditch bank in the crop must be shrubbed down and cleaned off before the crop is planted and must be cut down every time the land is worked with his hoe and when the crop is "laid by," the ditch banks must be left clean of bushes, weeds, and seeds. The cleaning out of all ditches must be done by the first of October. The rails must be split and the fence repaired before corn is planted.

Each cropper must keep in good repair all bridges in his crop or over ditches that he has to clean out and when a bridge needs repairing that is outside of all their crops, then any one that I call on must repair it.

Fence jams to be done as ditch banks. If any cotton is planted on the land outside of the plantation fence, I am to have

three-fourths of all the cotton made in those patches, that is to say, no cotton must be planted by croppers in their home patches.

All croppers must clean out stable and fill them with straw, and haul straw in front of stable whenever I direct. All the cotton must be manured, and enough fertilizer must be brought to manure each crop highly, the croppers to pay for one-half of all manure bought, the quantity to be purchased for each crop must be left to me.

No cropper is to work off the plantation when there is any work to be done on the land he has rented, or when his work is needed by me or other croppers. Trees to be cut down on Orchard, house field, & Evanson fences, leaving such as I may designate.

Road field is to be planted from the very edge of the ditch to the fence, and all the land to be planted close up to the ditches and fences. No stock of any kind belonging to croppers to run in the plantation after crops are gathered.

If the fence should be blown down, or if trees should fall on the fence outside of the land planted by any of the croppers, any one or all that I may call upon must put it up and repair it. Every cropper must feed or have fed, the team he works, Saturday nights, Sundays, and every morning before going to work, beginning to feed his team (morning, noon, and night every day in the week) on the day he rents and feeding it to including the 31st day of December. If any cropper shall from any cause fail to repair his fence as far as 1000 rails will go, or shall fail to clean out any part of his ditches, or shall fail to leave his ditch banks, any part of them, well shrubbed and clean when his crop is laid by, or shall fail to clean out stables, fill them up and haul straw in front of them whenever he is told, he shall have only two-fifths (2/5) of the cotton, corn, fodder, peas, and pumpkins made on the land he cultivates.

If any cropper shall fail to feed his team Saturday nights, all day Sunday and all the rest of the week, morning/noon, and night, for every time he so fails he must pay me five cents.

No corn or cotton stalks must be burned, but must be cut down, cut up and plowed in. Nothing must be burned off the land except when it is impossible to plow it in.

Every cropper must be responsible for all gear and farming implements placed in his hands, and if not returned must be paid for unless it is worn out by use.

Croppers must sow & plow in oats and haul them to the crib, but must have no part of them. Nothing to be sold from their crops, nor fodder nor corn to be carried out of the fields until my rent is all paid, and all amounts they owe me and for which I am responsible are paid in full. I am to gin & pack all the cotton and charge every cropper an eighteenth of his part, the cropper to furnish his part of the bagging, ties, & twine.

The sale of every cropper's part of the cotton to be made by me when and where I choose to sell, and after deducting all they owe me and all sums that I may be responsible for on their accounts, to pay them their half of the net proceeds. Work of every description, particularly the work on fences and ditches, to be done to my satisfaction, and must be done over until I am satisfied that it is done as it should be.

No wood to burn, nor light wood, nor poles, nor timber for boards, nor wood for any purpose whatever must be gotten above the house occupied by Henry Beasley-nor must any trees be cut down nor any wood used for any purpose, except for firewood, without my permission.

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[1] From the author's interview with Elliott Sharp.
[2] All quotes from Hubert Sumlin in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Sumlin.
[3] "Dahomey Mythology," Wikipedia.com.
[4] Thompson, p. 252.
[5] *Los Bailes y el Teatro de los Negros en el Folklore de Cuba*, by Fernando Ortiz, p. 235 (Havana: Ediciones Cardenas y Cia, 1951), quoted in Thomson, p. 93.
[6] Thompson, p. 90.
[7] "Muslim Roots of the Blues: The Music of Famous American Blues Singers Reaches Back Through The South To The Culture Of West Africa," by Jonathon Curiel, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Aug. 15, 2004.
[8] Explanation of *vayu* from *Jivamukti Yoga: Practices For Liberating Body And Soul* by Sharon Gannon and David Life, (New York: Ballantine, 2002).
[9] "Move Over Maxwell Street," by D. Thomas Moon and Al Fijal, February/March 1996 edition of *Blues Revue*.
[10] All quotes from Jody Williams in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Williams.
[11] All quotes from Henry Gray in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Gray.
[12] *Memphis Beat: The Lives And Times Of America's Musical Crossroads* by Larry Nagler, (New York: St. Martins Press,

1998).
[13] "Mojuba: Sacred Luku mi Invocation," excerpt from *Didá Obí. . .Adivinación a Traves del Coco*, by Miguel Ramos (Carolina: El Impresor, 1980).
[14] Yronwode.
[15] Holloway and Vass, p. 145.
[16] Thompson, p. 117.
[17] Dillard, p. 122.
[18] Yronwode.
[19] "Moonshine," Wikipedia.com.
[20] Dillard, p. 43.
[21] Thompson, p. 47.
[22] Holloway and Vass, p. 137.
[23] Lomax, p. 226.
[24] From the author's interview with Smiley Ricks.
[25] From the author's interview with Robert Jr. Lockwood.
[26] From an interview with Informant No. 1517, Memphis, Tennessee, Hyatt, quoted in Yronwode.
[27] *The History of the Blues* by Frances Davis, p. 127 (New York: Hyperion, 1995), quoted in "The Devil in Robert Johnson" by Adam Campagna, *Loyola University History Journal*, Nov. 2001.
[28] From Robert Johnson biography on Deltahaze.com; Delta Haze Corporation (licensors for the works of Robert Johnson).
[29] Thanks to Delta Haze Corporation owner Steve LaVere for clarifying this story.
[30] *From Darkness and Daylight; or, Lights and Shadows of New York Life*, by Helen Campbell, Thomas Knox, and Thomas Byrnes (A. D. Worthington & Co., 1892); pp. 639-640.
[31] *Ibid*.
[32] From previously cited private autobiography.
[33] "Players Dream Book" by Catherine Yronwode, published online at Lucky Mojo.com.
[34] Ferris, p. 3.
[35] Major, p. 377.
[36] *Ibid*.
[37] From interview with Afrika Bambaata, 1993, from *Droppin Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, edited by William Perkins (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1996).
[38] Dillard, p. 30.
[39] "Hear That Long Snake Moan," from *Shadow Dancing in the USA*, by Michael Ventura (New York: St. Martins Press, 1985).
[40] Dillard, p. 113.
[41] Dillard, p. 114.
[42] From ClassicTrains.com.
[43] Dillard, p. 39, from *Polyglotta Africana* by Sigismund Wilhelm Koelle (London: Church Missionary House, 1854).
[44] Dillard, p. 39, from "Easter Rock Revisited: A Study in Acculturation," by Harry Oster, *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, May 1958, pp. 21-43.
[45] Ventura, "Hear That Long Snake Moan."
[46] Dillard, p. 38, from liner notes by Bruce Jackson for *Wake Up Dead Man*.
[47] Lomax, p. 155.
[48] From the author's interview with Robert Jr. Lockwood.
[49] From the author's interview with Dr. John.
[50] All quotes from Alvin "Red" Tyler in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Tyler.
[51] Ventura, "Hear That Long Snake Moan."
[52] "Rounder" entry, Wikipedia.com.
[53] *English Dialect Dictionary*, ed. Joseph Wright (London: H. Frowde, 1905; reprinted by Hacker Art Books 1962).
[54] "Salty dog" entry, Urban Dictionary.com.
[55] All quotes from Dr. John in this entry are from the author's interview with Dr. John.
[56] Charters, p. 69.
[57] All quotes from Herman Ernest, III in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Ernest.
[58] From the author's interview with Red Tyler.
[59] From the author's interview with Smiley Ricks.
[60] Major, p. 407.

[61] From the author's interview with Hubert Sumlin.
[62] All quotes from Milton Campbell, Jr. in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Campbell.
[63] From "Gayle Dean Wardlow: The Blues World Interview" by Joel Slotnikoff, BluesWorld.com.
[64] From the author's interview with Robert Jr. Lockwood.
[65] From *Afro-American Almanac of Historical Documents*, Toptags.com/AAMA.

SHIMMY

The shimmy is a dance that was popular in the Cotton Club in Harlem in the 1920s, although it was performed in juke joints as early as the mid-to-late 1800s. It was named after the silky chemises that women often wore out in the evenings.

To dance the shimmy, women wiggled their shoulders back and forth to get their breasts moving from side to side. This move was called "shimmying" after the way the chemise covering the chest would shake to the rhythm of the music.[1] According to Dance History Archives, slaves likely brought over a Yoruba dance called the *shika* that involved shaking the shoulders in this fashion.[2]

By 1908, sheet music existed for a dance called the shimmy sha-wobble and in 1909 Perry Bradford wrote "The Bullfrog Hop," a song that included the shimmy in lyrics about African American dances of the day. Like several other African American dances, the shimmy entered mainstream white American culture once it was featured in the Ziegfeld Follies (*see also* **balling the jack**). A flapper named Gilda Gray was a huge hit with her hyperactive shimmy, which she claimed to have invented to calm her nerves when she forgot the words to "The Star Spangled Banner" during a performance.

Although the shimmy was already somewhat popular by then, Gilda's version was so scandalous (she always managed to shake the straps of her silk chemise right off her shoulders) that she caused a sensation when she appeared in the 1922 Ziefield Follies. This pissed off Mae West to no end, who claimed she had created the shimmy sha wobble for her burlesque act as the "Baby Vamp" in 1905, when West was twelve, before Gilda Gray had developed anything to shake.

Songs:

"Gimme a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer"- Bessie Smith
"Kind Mama"- Blind Willie McTell (Willie McTear)
"Flamin' Mamie"- Willie Dixon

SHOUT

The shout, or ring shout, was a shuffling circle dance around a centerpiece of some kind- usually a table- performed by singing and clapping worshippers in the black Sanctified and Pentecostal churches of the South. This use of "shout" has been traced to the Bambara word *saut*.[3] The Bambara came from what is now The Republic of Mali (formerly French Sudan), in West Africa.

Scholars believe the Bambara saut is identical to the Arabic *saut*, which describes the circumambulations pilgrims make around the Kaaba (or Ka'abah), the large granite cube in the center of the Sacred Mosque of Mecca (Al Masjid Al-Haram).[4] The Kaaba is the most holy site in Islam. When Muslims kneel and face East to pray, they are turning toward the Kaaba.

In *The Land Where the Blues Began*, Alan Lomax pointed out that for many years church was the only place in the **Delta** where African Americans were allowed to congregate. The long worship meetings were the community's main social events, and they were full of singing, dancing, and "shouting." The latter is what worshippers called "being filled with the Holy Spirit." Lomax quoted a retired maid named Miss Fannie Cotrell, eighty-nine, of Lula, Mississippi, who told him that shouting was "getting happy." "The body can be used as a trumpet by the spirit," Miss Cotrell declared.[5]

Blues singers in Kansas City used their shout muscles to belt over their bands, bearing down into their diaphragms the way gospel soloists do to be heard over the choir. Blues singers like Joe Turner and Jimmy Rushing "first were heard literally screaming over the crashing rhythm sections and blaring brass sections that were characteristic of the southwestern bands," Le Roi Jones (Amiri Baraka) wrote in *Blues People*.[6]

The radio beamed the new shouting blues all over black America. The style was taken up by country blues singers like Muddy Waters and T-Bone Walker, who had moved to Chicago and were leading electrified bands. Meanwhile, sophisticated shouters like B.B. King and Jimmy Witherspoon emerged to lead the charge toward R&B and rock 'n' roll.

Songs:

"Crazy Mixed Up World"- Willie Dixon
"Flyin' Airplane Blues"- Blind Boy Fuller (Fulton Allen)

SHUCK

To shuck means to exaggerate, lie, or clown around. It may be derived from the Bantu word *shikuka*, which means to lie, bluff, or fake,[7] although in *From Juba to Jive*, author and professor of African -American literature Clarence Major described it as "a variant of shit."[8]

The gifted young Chicago blues guitarist Mike Bloomfield loved to share a story about the time he was hanging out in a bar on Chicago's South Side when a pissed-off man came in toting a paper bag. He slammed it down on the bar, snarling "Buy this bitch a drink." Whereupon the patrons realized there was a woman's head in the bag.

"That guy wasn't shucking," Bloomfield would say.[9]

SHUFFLE

The famous blues shuffle beat is based on swinging eighth-note triplets, and should sound something like four sets of train wheels bumping along the rails. Triplets are notes tied together in sets of three—the 1-2-3-4 of a blues bar becomes one two three, two two three, three two three, four two three.

To play a shuffle, give the triplets a swing feel by hanging a little longer on every first eighth note and delaying or "swinging" every second eighth note—ONE two-three, TWO two-three, THREE two-three, FOUR two-three.

"People used to play on metal or a box with this kind of shuffle rhythm," recalled New Orleans drummer Herman Ernest, III (Etta James, Dr. John, Lee Dorsey, Patti LaBelle.). "It was done so manually back then that people looked at it as a total Dixieland jazz thing, but it's not just that."

The shuffle stems from early slave dances. Because African slaves were barred in the American colonies from drumming and dancing after the South Carolina slave rebellion of 1739, they began shuffling or dragging the feet in rhythmic "non-dances," such as the ring shout, the calenda, the chica, and the juba. These dances were the forerunners of juke joint dances like the **slow drag** (also called the **blues**), in which dancers beat out a rhythm by shuffling their feet along the floorboards.

Shuffle nuances vary from region to region. "You can be soft with it and swing it with a backbeat or you can keep that same little groove just off the snare drum," Ernest explained, adding, "I played with Fats Domino for awhile and if you watch his left hand, that is the bass drum pattern. He don't want you to do no more, no less. And he wants you to swing on the snare accenting in the left hand, with a flam, with a swing."[10]

The two most common forms are the Chicago shuffle**,** which emphasizes the second and fourth beat (1-**2**-3-**4**) and the Texas shuffle, which emphasizes the first and third beat (**1**-2-**3**-4). For the Chicago shuffle, listen to Freddie King's versions of "Key To The Highway" or "Sweet Home Chicago." For the Texas Shuffle, check out tunes by Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble.

"Chicago had their own blues thing happening from [players who had migrated north from] Mississippi, Alabama," according to Ernest, while "Memphis and Detroit had a real connection with New Orleans because many New Orleans drummers were on the early [recording] sessions." Other types of shuffles include the swing shuffle of "Kansas City" and the driving shuffle of B.B. King's version of "Everyday I Have The Blues."

The greatest Chicago shuffle player is Sam Lay, whom Bob Dylan praised as "flawless musicianship and unsurpassed timing, maestro with the sticks and brushes."[11] Listen to "Got My Mojo Working" to hear Lay driving the Muddy Waters Blues Band with his fast and furious double-shuffle. Lay began his career in 1957 with The Original Thunderbirds, and soon became the beat behind harmonica genius Little Walter. Lay played with Howlin' Wolf for six years and said, "I owe Wolf so much. That man taught me how to keep from starving to death."[12]

Building on Wolf's lessons, Lay toured and recorded with the Paul Butterfield Band until Butterfield accidentally shot himself, and backed up Dylan when he introduced electric-folk-rock to the shocked crowd at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival and on *Highway 61 Revisited*.

Songs:

"Macon Cut-Out"- Bobby Lecann

"Guitar Shuffle"- Big Bill Broonzy (Willie Lee Conley Broonzy)

"Shuffle"- Earl Hooker

SIGNIFYING

Signifying is the use of language to affirm one's cultural identity in the face of oppression. How does one speak to one's "master" and retain any shred of dignity? By insulting or manipulating "the man" to his face without him realizing it.

By using innuendo and doubletalk that is fully understood only by members of one's community, signifying allows the speaker to express bold opinions or feelings without fear of repercussion. One may convey abject obeisance while a listener from one's own community is trying not to laugh because the master is actually being ridiculed to his face. If the person who is signifying is confronted about what was said, he or she can easily pretend to have no idea what the accuser is talking about.

Countless blues lyrics use metaphor and innuendo to allow the singer to brag about physical attributes and sexual prowess, and state all kinds of desires, without uttering a single profane or off-color word. Lyrics like "I need a little hot dog on my roll" or "move your finger, drop something in my bowl" from "I Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl" (1931) allowed Bessie Smith to be outrageously salacious, while retaining a front of perfect innocence. That's good signifying.

In *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., defined signifying as "an encoded intention to say one thing but mean quite the opposite." [13]As anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston

explained in her folklore study *Mules and Men*: "The Indian resists curiosity by a stony silence. The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries. The theory behind our tactics: 'The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song.'"[14]

African American tales of the signifying monkey are all about signifying as a form of indirect taunting and manipulation. These tales include three stock characters: the monkey, the lion, and the elephant. The monkey gets the lion riled up by telling him that their pal the elephant has been insulting him, or a member of the lion's family, behind his back. The outraged lion demands an apology from the elephant, who refuses and soundly trounces the duped lion while the monkey chortles in the trees.

There are countless variations on this theme. Here's an example folklorist Roger Abrahams recorded in *Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia*:[15]

Deep down in the jungle so they say
There's a signifying motherfucker down the way
There hadn't been no disturbin' the jungle for quite a bit
For up jumped the monkey in the tree one day and laughed
"I guess I'll start some shit."
Now the lion come through the jungle one peaceful day
When the signifying monkey stopped him and this is what he started to say
He said, "Mr. Lion," he said, "a bad-assed motherfucker down your way."
He said, "Yeah! The way he talks about your folks is a certain shame.
I even heard him curse when he mentioned your grandmother's name."

In "Don't Start Me to Talkin'," "Sonny Boy" Williamson (a.k.a. Aleck "Rice" Miller) expressed his distaste for some lying and cheating going on in his neighborhood:

Don't start me to talkin', I'll tell everything I know
I'm gonna break up this signifying, 'cause somebody's got to go

Songs:
"Don't Start Me to Talkin'"- "Sonny Boy" Williamson (Aleck "Rice" Miller)
"Getting Dirty Just Shaking That Thing"- Romeo Nelson
"The Signifying Monkey"- Smokey Joe (Joseph E. Baugh)
"Walking Dr. Bill"- B.B. King (Riley King)

SLOW DRAG

In *The Land Where the Blues Began*, musicologist and producer Alan Lomax described being taken to a party in the **Delta** countryside late one sultry summer night. The party was in a little wooden shack and "from it came a deep, powerful rhythm, as if someone were beating a huge drum yonder in the moonlit cotton patch."

Once inside, Lomax realized the rhythm was coming from the shuffling feet of dancing couples glued together belly to belly, thigh to thigh, their arms wrapped tightly around each other's necks. They were grinding their hips together slowly as they dragged their feet along the floor, doing a dance called the slow drag. There were other juke-joint dances like struttin' (a more upbeat slow drag), the snake hips, the **shimmy**, and the funky butt, but after midnight it was all about the slow drag.

"Slowly, with bent knees and with the whole shoe soles flat to the floor, they dragged their feet along its surface, emphasizing the off beat, so that the whole house vibrated like a drum," Lomax wrote.[16] The dancers were moving to the music of a man playing guitar and singing the blues. At his side was a young boy dragging the head of a broom over the rough wooden floorboards in time to the bluesman's beat.

"The blues," was another name for this intensely sensual couples dance. The slow drag is the earliest known blues partner dance, dating from the early 1900s. Dragging the feet along the floor was a response to the dire warnings of Sanctified preachers against dancing outside church walls.

Originally, slave owners barred African dances from being performed on the plantations. Africans worked around these prohibitions by shuffling or dragging the feet in rhythmic "non-dances," such as the ring shout, the calenda, the chica, and the juba. African American preachers determined to keep their flock from the devilish temptation of European-style courtship dances perpetuated the ban. Services in Sanctified and Pentecostal churches often included the high-spirited **shuffle** dance called a ring shout, but it was danced in a group and involved shuffling in a circle while praising the Lord and clapping out

complex rhythms.

African American ministers set down a simple rule to keep their flocks from straying into the immoral waters of partner dancing- they forbade any dancing that involved crossing the feet in the style of such licentious European dances as reels and quadrilles. By gluing their feet to the floor, Saturday night slow drag dancers kept to the letter of the preachers' edict, if not the spirit, while incorporating the undulating pelvic movements of West African dance to dangerous effect.

Songs:

"Slow Drag"- Charles "Cow Cow" Davenport
"Slow Drag Blues"- Jay McShann
"Sunflower Slow Drag"- Scott Joplin

SPOONFUL

In 1960, Willie Dixon wrote the powerful tune "Spoonful" for his friend and fellow Chess Records artist Chester Burnett, a.k.a. Howlin' Wolf. who lent his earthshaking roar to many songs that Dixon wrote expressly for him, including "Little Red Rooster," "Back Door Man" and "I Ain't Superstitious."

According to Wolf's guitarist Hubert Sumlin, Wolf would inspire Dixon by telling him stories or talking about certain ideas that Wolf thought were important. Although, as Sumlin noted, Wolf "couldn't read or write in the beginning, he had motherwit. God gave him something he didn't give to a lot of people."[17] Wolf was an intimidating physical presence- six feet five inches and powerfully built--but according to Sumlin he was an exceptionally kind and gentle person, with a philosophical bent.

Generosity was one concept that Wolf returned to over and over, Sumlin recalled. "A spoonful was a thing Wolf had been talking about from way back," Sumlin explained. "He grew up in a very stricted [sic] family where people used to come over and borrow food…a spoonful of this, spoonful of that. He got to thinking about it- a spoonful of this, spoonful of that, spoonful of this. Like he sings, 'It could be a spoonful of coffee, it could be a spoonful of tea.' And he put love in there!"

Some critics, as well as other artists who have covered "Spoonful," have interpreted the song as being about drug addiction, given that heroin users heat dope in spoons to liquefy it for injection. Sumlin disagreed, saying, "No, it's not about drugs. Well, they can take it that way. It can be the same thing, but he meant [being kind to] people coming over and borrowing things. Wolf believed in giving not just a half-inch, but the whole inch. He believed in giving everything you have."

The word "spoonful" appears in several other important blues songs. Charlie Patton's "Spoonful Blues" is unambiguously about drug addiction. Patton sang that he would kill a man, go to jail, or leave town to find the spoonful that he needed.

In "Coffee Blues," Mississippi John Hurt described his need to see his girlfriend about "a lovin' spoonful, my lovin' spoonful." The 1960s pop group The Lovin' Spoonful took its name from this metaphor for ejaculate.

Songs:

"Coffee Blues"- "Mississippi" John Hurt (John Smith Hurt)
"Spoonful"- Willie Dixon
"Spoonful Blues"- Charlie Patton

STAVIN' CHAIN

Stavin' Chain was a 19th-century railworker of legendary strength and stamina. According to Lil Johnson's 1937 recording of "Stavin' Chain," he was the chief engineer on a train, and a big, strong man who could make love all night:

Stavin' Chain was a man of might
He'd save up his money just to ride all night

No wonder Stavin' Chain was a popular nickname among bluesmen in the 1930s. When John and Ruby Lomax were recording songs by prisoners at Ramsey State Farm, Camp #4, in Brazoria County, Texas in 1939, they noted that "two boys claimed the nickname of the famous 'Stavin' Chain'; they compromised by accepting the amended names Big Stavin' Chain and Little Stavin' Chain."[18]

The term "staving chain," may come from the chains used by barrel manufacturers to hold barrel staves together until an iron band could be fitted around the end of the barrel. Another theory is that staving chain was the name for the chain used to chain prisoners together by their ankles in a chain gang. Stavin' chain may also be a corruption of "stave and chain."

Songs:

"Stavin' Chain"- Lil Johnson
"Windin' Boy"- Jelly Roll Morton (Ferdinand Joseph Lematt)
"Stavin' Chain Blues"- "Big" Joe Williams

STINGAREE

In “The Ins and Outs of My Girl,” Bo Carter sang, “she got something like a stingaree” that “ain’t in her stocking, man, you know it’s just above.”

The stingaree is related to the stingray, and has a small dorsal fin, one or two venomous spines on its quick-lashing tail, and a caudal fin shaped like a leaf. That caudal fin is what separates the stingarees from the stingrays and the skates.

The stingaree that appears in blues songs as a metaphor for female genitalia, however, is probably a variation of “stingray.” In San Diego, the wharf district is still called the Stingaree, because when San Diego boomed during the Gold Rush of the 1880s, it was said that one could get stung just as badly by the hookers in the district as by the stingrays in Mission Bay.

At the height of San Diego’s boom, there were around 350 prostitutes working the Stingaree. The Stingaree's seventy-one saloons boasted such names as Old Tub of Blood and Legal Tender. In 1912, police arrested 138 prostitutes in the first of several Stingaree raids conducted to clean up the district.[19]

“Blind” Willie Reynolds made the connection between the stingaree and prostitution clear in his song about his hooker girlfriend, “Third Street Woman,” who had “something that the men call a stingaree”:

Mmm, where my Third Street woman gone?
Believe to my soul, she will hustle everywhere but home

Songs:
“The Ins and Outs of My Girl”- Bo Carter (Armenter Chatmon)
“Stingaree”- Charlie Musselwhite
“Third Street Woman”- “Blind” Willie Reynolds

STONES IN PASSWAY

A passway is a path frequented by an intended **hoodoo** victim, such as the path to the person’s doorstep. Spreading **goofer dust** or something similarly noxious on the passway places a curse on the person who steps in it. Laying stones down in the passway in a certain configuration is another way to **jinx** someone. These are methods of working **foot track magic**.

One traditional method of working foot track magic is probably similar to what Robert Johnson was referring to in the song “Stones in My Passway.” It involves laying stones on the ground in a cross pattern, sometimes with a button from the person’s clothing in the center. The stones need to be placed in a passway because the person has to walk over the cross in order to be cursed. This is called “crossing the line.”[20]

The effects of being jinxed in this manner- sickness and possibly death- were eloquently described by Johnson in “Stones in My Passway,” recorded in Dallas, Texas on June 19th, 1937:

I got stones in my passway and my road seems dark at night
I have pains in my heart, they have taken my appetite

Song:
“Stones in My Passway”- Robert Johnson

SWEETBACK PAPA

According to Big Bill Broonzy, a sweetback papa was a man who avoided manual labor by playing the blues and sponging off of women. “These musicians was not seen in the day,” Broonzy said in *Blues from the Delta*. “They came out at night. His meal was brought out to him from the white man’s house in a pan by his woman. We called them kind of men ‘sweet back papas.’”

According to Broonzy, “Them men didn’t know how cotton and corn and rice was grown and they didn’t care. They went out, dressed up every night and some of them had three and four women. One fed him and the other bought his clothes and shoes. These is the men that wear ten-dollar Stetson hats and twenty-dollar gold pieces at their watch and diamonds in their teeth and on their fingers.”[21]

Sharp-dressed men who lived off women were also just called sweetbacks, as in Frankie “Half Pint” Jaxon’s portrayal of the 1929 Chicago street scene in “It’s Heated”:

Well I went down to Michigan, came up Grant
Saw the sweetbacks and the strutters all raising sand

“Black Boy Shine” (a.k.a. Harold Holiday) warned in “Sugarland Blues” that sometimes a man might find himself working not only to support his wife or girlfriend, but the sweetback papa she was secretly helping out on the side:

You never have nothing, long as you live in Sugarland
Because you working for a woman and a sweetback man

The term sweetback survived to become the name of the protagonist in the first blaxploitation film, 1971's *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*. The X-rated film starred Melvin Van Peebles as the sexually irresistible Sweetback (Peebles reportedly contracted a venereal disease during one of the film's more explicit scenes), and was financed by Bill Cosby.
Songs:
"It's Heated"- Frankie "Half Pint" Jaxon
"Sugarland Blues"- "Black Boy Shine" (Harold Holiday)

T

TERRAPLANE

Robert Johnson was only twenty-seven when he died in 1938, but he left behind twenty-nine amazing songs, including many that became not only blues standards, but formidable rock songs. "Cross Road Blues," "Sweet Home Chicago," "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom," "Rambling on My Mind," and "Come On In My Kitchen" are just a few of the Johnson classics that are regularly covered by major recording artists, as well as hammered out by amateurs at blues jams around the world.

During his lifetime, though, Johnson had only one minor hit, "Terraplane Blues." Johnson recorded that song along with the more enduring "Sweet Home Chicago," "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom," and "Come On In My Kitchen" in a San Antonio, Texas hotel on November 23, 1936. Johnson's recordings scarcely made a dent in the sales of the far more popular blues artists of the day, such as **hokum** star Tampa Red, Leroy Carr, and Lonnie Johnson- three giants largely forgotten today.

Although "Terraplane Blues" was not the sort of uptempo tune that was popular in Johnson's day, it sold modestly well, because it referred to a very popular car made by the Hudson Motor Company. Produced between 1932 and 1938, first as the Essex-Terraplane and then simply as the Terraplane, it was affordable, yet sleek and powerful.

Fifty-eight years after the release of "Terraplane Blues," composer/multi-instrumentalist Elliott Sharp released an instrumental blues album called *Terraplane*. "When I first heard the Robert Johnson song 'Terraplane Blues' back in 1969," Sharp explained, "the combination of the power of the music and the strange title compelled me to find out what a Terraplane was. This name also appealed to my longstanding interest in science fiction. The combination was unbeatable: fast car, futuristic vibe, sexual metaphor, and a killing song. I held the name in my mental reserve for years for the time when I would finally form a blues band."[22]

Elliott Sharp and Hubert Sumlin at Studio zOaR recording Terraplane album *Do The Don't*, 2002. *Photo Toni Ann Mamary*

Although Sharp is known for a wildly creative approach to music that includes experiments like tuning his guitars to Fibonacci sequences, he had listened closely to blues greats like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Lightnin' Hopkins, and Sonny Boy Williamson. "The blues is a universal feeling," Sharp observed. "I find that even if I'm working on a computer-processed

string quartet, I like it to have some of that feeling. I've been playing guitar for almost thirty years, now, and I played blues since I first began playing the guitar."

After releasing *Terraplane*, Sharp added blues/gospel singer Queen Esther to the group. When Sharp learned that she had sung with blues guitarist Hubert Sumlin in Texas, Sharp arranged for Sumlin to perform with the Terraplane band at the Knitting Factory. This began a fruitful partnership that led to Sumlin playing on additional Terraplane CDs, and being introduced to a slew of admirers among New York City's downtown music scene.

At a benefit for injured rock and jazz drummer Sim Cain at the downtown jazz club Tonic on New York's Lower East Side, the seventy-three-year-old Sumlin commented, "That feels good to me [to have the respect of younger artists]. I like to play with other people. Music has no bars. All music sound good. I listen to every kind of music in the world and I done been all over the world. I done played with everybody in this nation that play an instrument. We set down and get this stuff together. The blues does this 'cause it's saying something. What people talk about in it is true. Muddy Waters and Wolf- lemme tell you something, them guys lived what they sung about. They lived the life, and told it like it was. Long as it's true, people can get it."[23]

Song:

"Terraplane Blues"- Robert Johnson

TOBY

A toby is a good-luck charm or amulet. In *Flash of the Spirit*, art historian Robert Farris Thompson speculated that the word toby was probably derived from "the tobe charms of Kongo: earth from a grave plus palm wine to bring luck."[24]

In "Spider's Nest Blues" in 1930, Hatti Hart sang about a "jet black spider" that had fallen in her tea. To counteract this sign of bad luck, she resolved:

I'm goin to New Orleans to get this toby fixed of mine
I am havin' trouble, trouble; I can't keep from cryin'

Unlike a **mojo**, which is usually in a flannel or leather bag, a toby is kept in a bottle or metal container. In an article called "Charms and Charm-Medicines" published in *Catholic World* magazine in 1886, Mrs. L.D. Morgan recounted that Maryland police had found a toby on the person of an African American man arrested for wife beating. This was "a spherical metal case about the size of a goose-egg, covered first with yellow, then with black leather. One end being open, the contents were seen to be composed, to all appearance, of hair, quicksilver, pins, and a greasy substance."[25]

Songs:

"Cut Out Blues"- Peetie Wheatstraw
"Spider's Nest Blues"- Hatti Hart with the Memphis Jug Band

TRICK, TRICK BAG

To trick someone is to put a spell on him or her. A trick bag is used to curse someone, although the phrase "trick bag" has come to mean any unpleasant situation one has been placed into by another person. **Mojos** and **gris-gris** bags can be used either for protection or to put a curse on someone, but trick bags are always used to get someone's business "in a trick."

Casting spells is called laying tricks, while performing a trick is a euphemism for prostitution. A prostitute's client is also called a trick, although in New Orleans, according to pianist Dr. John, taxi drivers would call a trick being dropped off at a whorehouse a "Vidalia." After puzzling over this, Dr. John figured out that the cabbies had made up this nickname because a popular madam in New Orleans named Norma Wallace always had her dog, Vidalia, by her side.[26]

Earl King , a key figure in New Orleans blues and R&B, wrote an ode to a cheating girlfriend, "Trick Bag," that was a huge hit in 1962 and is still one of the most frequently covered R&B tunes ever. King was inspired to write "Trick Bag" by a story his grandmother told him about King's father, a blues pianist who died when King was a child.

"My grandmother told me a story about my father's temper once," King told *Offbeat Magazine* in 1983. "Every night my dad went by his girlfriend's house to eat supper. One night, she just hands him a plate of food over the fence. My dad thinks about this, goes back to her place, kicks the door in, and there was another guy in there!" The lyrics told the story:

The way you been actin' is such a drag
You done put me in a trick bag

Everyone from Robert Palmer to The Meters has recorded "Trick Bag." "Big Chief" Earl King also wrote the Mardi Gras theme songs "Big Chief" and "Street Parade" and the party anthem "Come on Baby, Let The Good Times Roll," covered by Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Songs:

"Alimony Blues"- T-Bone Walker (Aaron Thibeaux Walker)

“Sweet Home Chicago”- Robert Johnson
“Trick Bag”- Earl King (Earl Silas Johnson, IV)

TRIM

Trim is slang for female genitalia. It’s usually used by a man to express a need or an intention, as in “I’m gonna get me some trim tonight.” This usage has been around since the 1920s. It showed up in the 1982 film *48 hours*, when Eddie Murphy’s character announced, “I’ve got to get me some trim, man!”

Robert Johnson used “trimmin’” in “Little Queen of Spades” in 1937 to describe a girlfriend’s performance in bed:

Mmmm, mmmm, everybody says she got a mojo
’cause she been usin’ that stuff
But she got a way trimmin’ down, hoo, fair brown
and I mean it’s most too tough

Song:
“Little Queen of Spades”- Robert Johnson

V

VESTAPOL

Vestapol is an open D Major tuning for the guitar. If a guitar tuned in Vestapol is strummed without fretting any notes, it will sound a D Major chord (D A D F# A D).

Vestapol tuning was used quite often in the parlor guitar music that was popular from the mid-1800s to the turn of the century. It got its name from the publication in 1854 of an instrumental called “The Siege of Sevastopol,” named after the eleven-month siege of a Russian naval base at Sevastopol in the Ukraine during the Crimean War.

“The Siege of Sevastopol” being something of a mouthful, the tune became known as “Vastapol” and then “Vestapol.” While Victorians were enjoying “Vestapol” in their parlors, blues guitarists were also performing it.

Acoustic blues historian Stefan Grossman reports first hearing Elizabeth Cotton play it in the 1960s; he then discovered different versions, as well as use of the song’s open D Major tuning, in recordings by Mississippi John Hurt, Furry Lewis, and other blues guitarists. Slide master Elmore James used the Vestapol tuning to rock out on “Dust My Broom,” his electrified cover of Robert Johnson’s “I Believe I’ll Dust My Broom.” Guitarist Robert Jr. Lockwood noted of Johnson,that “he tuned it [the guitar] in Spanish [open G Major] and in Vestapol.”[27]

Blues players sometimes also call open E Major tuning (E B E G# B E) Vestapol. Chicago blues guitarist Jody Williams learned how to tune his guitar to Vestapol in E from Bo Diddley. As a child, Williams played harmonica in a group called The Harmonicats that played standards like “Stardust” and “Peg of My Heart” on radio and amateur shows.

Williams met Bo Diddley, also a youngster at the time, at an amateur show. “He had one guitar and a washtub bass,” Williams recalled. “That’s the first time I paid attention to the sound of a guitar. We got together backstage then and we played a little bit and I asked him, if I got a guitar, would he teach me to play a little something on it. He said he would and the next week I spied a guitar in a pawnshop for thirty-two dollars and fifty cents. So he taught me how to tune it to his tuning. It was E, open-E. He called it Vestapol.”[28]

Williams never did learn to play guitar in standard tuning (E A D G B E). He taught himself to play the blues by imitating players he admired, such as T-Bone Walker and B.B. King, and created his own chord voicings. By the 1950s, Williams was a top session player for Chess Records, and a member of Howlin’ Wolf’s band.

Jody Williams, Pocono Blues Festival 2003 *Photo ©* *Joseph A. Rosen*

"I was one of the first guitar players around Chicago that could play B.B. King's style," Williams said. "If somebody was

onstage listening, and they don't see me, they don't know if it's me or him playing. So, when I worked for Howlin' Wolf, one day in 1954 we were in Chess studio playing, and I was playing some B.B. King style stuff. And this guy comes in the studio and sits down. I didn't know who he was. I notice he's watching me. Watching my hands, watching my fingers, you know. Watching my guitar work.

"So I say to myself, 'This dude trying to steal my stuff!' And I'm sitting there just ripping off B.B. King, playing B.B. King style. So I get up, and I move my chair to where he couldn't see my hands. I say to myself, 'He's sitting there trying to steal my stuff. I am not going to teach this dude anything!' I figured he was a guitar player, the way he was watching me. I said to myself, 'If he know his guitar, if he know his instrument well enough, he can learn what I'm playing just by listening.'

"It went on like this for a few more songs with him sitting there trying to watch me. Then Leonard Chess said we gonna take a break and play the songs back that we had recorded. So I put my guitar down and go over to the piano and start talking to Otis Spann. Wolf called me over to him and he said, 'Jody, I want you to meet a friend of mine. This is B.B. King.' Oh man! I looked around and I said to myself, 'The studio is too small for me to hide in!' He was trying to see what I was doing 'cause he didn't know how the guitar was tuned."

That day B.B. King, Jody Williams, and Otis Spann recorded "Must Have Been the Devil" and the great instrumental, "Five Spot."

Songs:

"Dust My Broom"- Elmore James cover of Robert Johnson song

Elizabeth Cotton: Freight Train and Other North Carolina Folk Songs and Tunes, Smithsonian Folkways

Furry Lewis in His Prime 1927~1928, Yazoo.

VIBRATO

Vibrato is the raising and lowering of a note's pitch by moving the string producing the note back and forth against an instrument's fret- or fingerboard. Texas blues guitarist Johnny Winter once said, "I can tell if I like a man's style after listening to his vibrato for ten seconds." Putting aside Winter's inadvertent declaration that only men play electric guitar, he makes an excellent point. Vibrato tells you everything you need to know about a guitarist's strength, taste, and musicality.

It's not surprising that some of the widest and strongest vibratos among guitar players belong to blues guitarists. Blues guitar, like blues singing, was influenced by the fact that African slaves spoke tonal languages. When singing, they used variations of pitch and timbre to convey many shades of meaning, resulting in vibrato, tremolo, overtones, and hoarse-voiced and shouting techniques.

Although vibrato is a prominent feature of European classical music performances today, this was not always the case. Prior to the 19th century, vibrato was used sparingly, as ornamentation; in fact, Leopold Mozart criticized "performers there are who tremble consistently on each note as if they had the palsy" and recommended that players use vibrato only on sustained notes and at the end of phrases.

Early blues guitarists, in contrast, developed an unusually expressive, improvisational use of vibrato, not only to sustain notes on acoustic guitars, but also to mimic African singing.

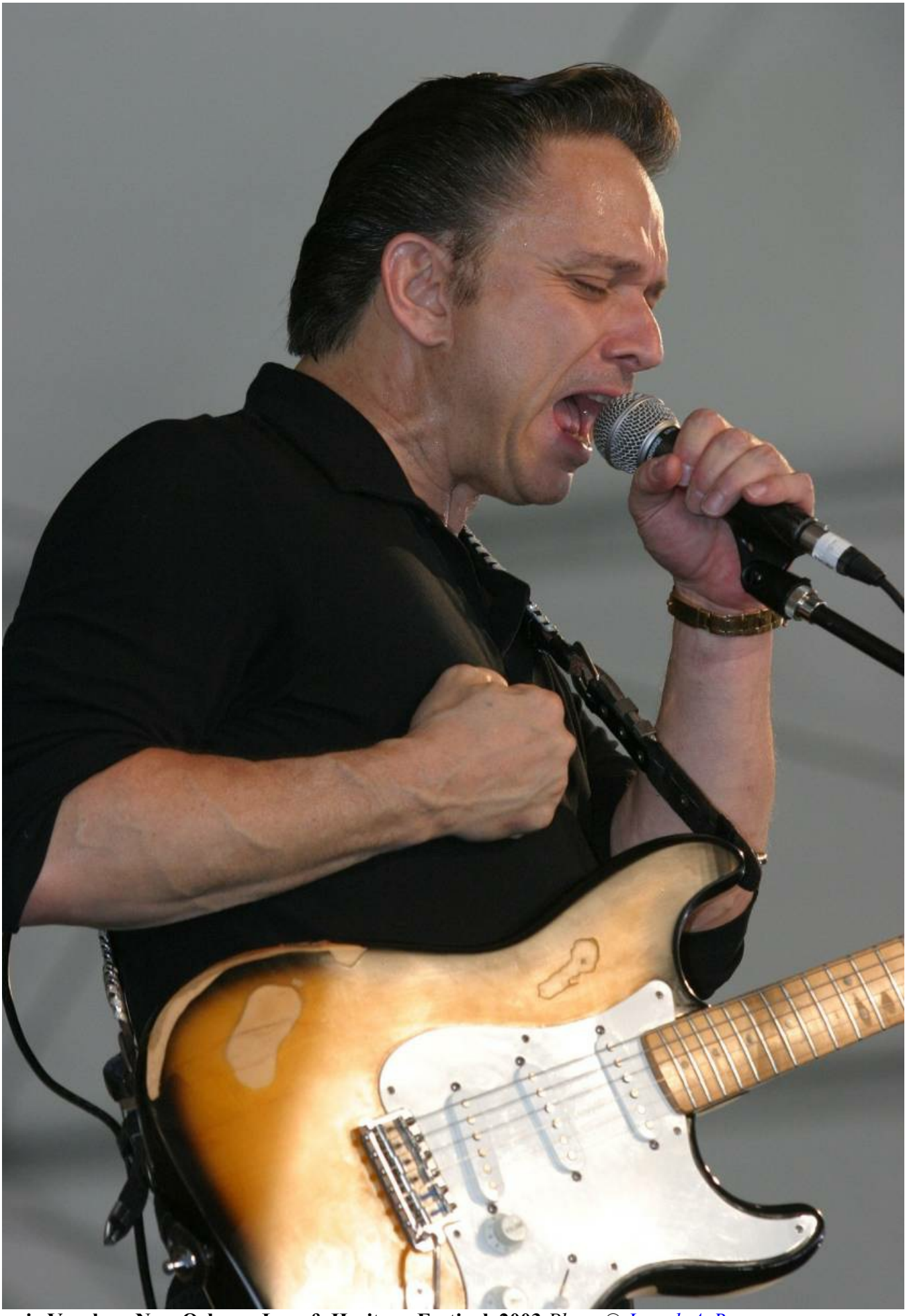
Listen to the slow back-and-forth moan of B.B. King's vibrato. It is very challenging for guitarists to duplicate properly. King steadily bends the string back and forth an entire half step to create a smooth wide vibrato. If you watch King play, you'll see him shake his entire hand to create this vibrato. The fingers that aren't pressing down the note are relaxed, and his hand flutters like a butterfly. This technique is called "butterfly vibrato."

Electric rock guitarists, blessed with loads of sustain from distortion and dense heavy guitar bodies, don't need vibrato to keep their notes alive, so this technique can go underdeveloped among guitarists who have not studied the blues. True vibrato requires significant hand strength. Listen to the opening lick from Stevie Ray Vaughan's solo for "Mary Had a Little Lamb." Not only does he bend the note a whole step, he then moves it back and forth an entire half step to create vibrato at the top of the bend. This takes enough hand strength to crush a Volkswagen, plus a finely attenuated sense of pitch.

Sometimes a guitarist makes a conscious choice to use less or no vibrato. Stevie Ray Vaughan's brother Jimmie Vaughan, also a great Texas blues guitarist, distinguished himself both with The Fabulous Thunderbirds and in his solo career by developing a spare style with minimal vibrato. Vaughan said, "When I was very young I tried to play exactly like B.B. King. I'm pretty good at imitating him. But one day I realized that if I got in a room with Eric Clapton, B.B. King, and Buddy Guy and each guy played a solo, well, when they got to me what the hell was I gonna do? You get on the stage with B.B. King, Buddy Guy, and Eric Clapton and when it comes your turn, you can't do what they do. If you do, you're an idiot."[29]

"I realized," Vaughan explained, "that you got to start listening to what *you* want to do. They're playing what they wanna hear and what they feel. What do you feel? What do you hear? At that point I started really playing different."

Playing "different" made Jimmie worthy of his little brother Stevie's oft-voiced idolatry. "You should see Jimmie play," Stevie Ray Vaughan used to say when complimented.



Jimmie Vaughan, New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, 2003 *Photo ©Joseph A. Rosen*

VOODOO, VODOU

Voodoo (the correct Haitian Creole or "Kreyol" spelling is *Vodou*) is a religion that evolved in the Americas from African *Vodun*, one of the world's most ancient religions. This West African ancestor~based tradition originated among the Fon-Ewe people of the former Kingdom of Dahomey, a country known now as Benin. The Fon term *vodu* meant spirit, or deity. *Vodun* means God or Great Spirit. [30]

The defining experience of Vodou- possession- is the source for the idea in the blues (and later, in rock 'n' roll) that the musician's highest attainment is to connect with the soul beyond the body and the mind, and be so possessed by this connection that it animates and drives the artist's performance.

The practice of Vodun among African slaves was forcibly and successfully repressed in the American colonies, yet its essence survived in the spiritual and aesthetic values of its people, and fueled the creation of the blues.[31]

Vodun posits a supreme creator who is an all-powerful, yet unknowable, creative force. The Dahomey (Fon) people of Benin represent this creator as a giant snake named Dan that supports the universe with its coils. Today, in Haiti and in American Vodou strongholds such as New Orleans, Dan is worshipped as Damballah, the Grand **Zombie**.

Below this almighty God, spirit-gods called *loa* (or *lwa*) rule over such matters as family, love, happiness, justice, health, wealth, work, the harvest, and the hunt. "Offerings are made to the appropriate loa to ensure success in those areas,"[32] Severine Singh explained in *Voodoo Crossroads*. One's ancestors also exist in the realm of the loa, and, like the loa, may also be called upon for assistance and counsel. The collective term for "the pantheon of Lwa" is Vodoun, "which can [also] refer to the whole Vodoun universe, as in 'The initiate is welcomed into the Vodoun,'" according to Sallie Ann Glassman, Vodou priestess author of *Vodou Visions: An Encounter With Divine Mystery*."[33]

Propitiating the loa is a daily spiritual practice for adherents to the Vodou faith. Families keep representations of favorite loa in the home and make offerings to them. When Vodou practitioners gather to perform ceremonies, however, the goal is no longer simply to propitiate the loa. The goal is to experience possession by a loa, in order to bridge the gap between one's self and God.

Vodou possession is not the demon-possession that has been portrayed by Hollywood movies, but rather the same state of union with the divine that is the goal of most spiritual practices. It is akin to becoming "filled with the Holy Ghost" in the Pentacostal Christian tradition, reaching the Buddhist state of nirvana, or attaining the yogi's state of divine bliss, *samadhi*.

The chanting, drumming, singing, and dancing of Vodou ceremonies are efforts to reach higher levels of consciousness. The priest or priestess attempts to invoke the loa to descend the centerpost of the *hounfour*(temple) and possess or "mount" members of the congregation. A god will descend to **ride** the body of the worshipper prepared to attain a state of ecstatic union with the divine. The morality implicit in this is stated in the Haitian proverb, "Great gods cannot ride little horses."[34]

Vodun was transplanted to the Americas and the Caribbean when the Dahomey conquered their neighbors, the Ewe, in 1729 and sold prisoners to the slave ships, in trade for European goods. Many people from Dahomey were also kidnapped and traded into slavery. Some of the captured were priests who found themselves en route to French and Spanish colonies in the Caribbean.[35]

Although barred on penalty of death from practicing their religion, enslaved priests in the largely Catholic West Indies quickly grasped the similarity between their tradition of appealing to loa to intercede in their favor with God, and Catholics praying to their saints for similar intercession. By superimposing Catholic saints over their loa, they created a hybrid religion, known as *Santeria* (saint worship) in the Spanish Islands and Vodou in Haiti.

On August 22, 1791, Haitian slaves revolted after Vodou priests consulted their oracle and determined with what strategies a revolution would succeed. The revolutionaries defeated an army sent by Napoléon Bonaparte. They declared independence on January 1, 1804, and established Haiti as the world's first black republic.

Threatened by the Haitian slave revolt, the United States and Western Europe slapped economic sanctions on Haiti, turning the prosperous colony into an impoverished state unable to sell the products of its fields. In addition, in 1852 France demanded that reparations of 90 million gold francs ($21.7 billion today) be made to former slave owners.[36] Haiti has yet to recover.

In the North American colonies, meanwhile, slave owners were successful in using corporal and capital punishment to strip African slaves of their religious traditions, characterized by whites as barbaric, primitive, and sexually licentious.

The sensationalistic book *Haiti or the Black Republic*, written in 1884 by S. St. John, spread this characterization by portraying Vodou as an evil devil-worshipping cult. The book contained gruesome descriptions of human sacrifice, cannibalism, and black magic; some were extracted from Vodou priests by torture à la the Spanish Inquisition. It was a great source for Hollywood screenwriters, who began churning out voodoo horror flicks in the 1930s.

Meanwhile, the herbal knowledge, myths, and **conjure** traditions that did manage to survive in the American colonies mingled with European and Native American medicines and traditions to become **hoodoo**.

Marie Laveau was a Haitian who had played an important role in the Haitian revolution. She arrived in Louisiana in 1800, and in 1809 Vodou arrived in New Orleans en masse when Haitian slave owners who had escaped to Cuba with their slaves

during the revolution were expelled from Cuba. Many came to the French- and Spanish-speaking port city of New Orleans with their slaves.[37] Laveau's granddaughter became the legendary Voodoo Queen of New Orleans in 1890.

Today an estimated fifteen percent of New Orleans citizens practice Vodou. It is also popular in other North American cities with significant African and Haitian communities.

Vodou is practiced by roughly 60 million people worldwide, not only in Benin and Haiti, where it was officially sanctioned as a religion in 2003, but in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Brazil, Ghana, and Togo. In Brazil, Vodou is called *Candomblé*. In the English-speaking Caribbean, it is *Obeah*.

In the United States, Vodou has exerted a powerful influence on what Michael Ventura called "the metaphysics of American music." The twentieth century would, Ventura wrote in "Hear that Long Snake Moan," "dance as no other had, and, through that dance, secrets would be passed. First North America, and then the whole world, would- like the old blues says- 'hear that long snake moan.'"[38]

Songs:
"Annie Lou Blues"- Tampa Red (Hudson Whittaker)
"Prescription for the Blues"- Clara Smith
"Voodoo Chile"- Jimi Hendrix

W

WASHBOARD

A washboard is a wooden or metal board played as a percussion instrument with thimbles, spoons, knitting needles, or metal finger picks. Also called a rub board, it's a staple of zydeco, the accordian-based dance music of southern Louisiana Creoles.

In *The Roots of the Blues*, musicographer Samuel Charters described seeing "four men rattling on dried calabashes with metal finger rings" during a Fula dance near the River Gambia[39] in the same fashion that African American percussionists in the 1920s played washboards with metal strips wrapped over their knuckles.

The most popular blues washboard player was **hokum** artist Washboard Sam, who recorded hundreds of records in the late 1930s and 1940s, most with Big Bill Broonzy. Washboard Sam (born Robert Brown) was actually the illegitimate son of Frank Broonzy, who also fathered Big Bill Broonzy. Sam was raised on a farm in Arkansas and moved to Memphis in the early 1920s. There he met Sleepy John Estes and Hammie Nixon. The trio busked on street corners, collecting tips from passersby.

In 1932, Washboard Sam moved to Chicago. At first he played on the streets for tips but soon he began performing regularly with Broonzy. Within a few years Sam was supporting Broonzy on the guitarist's Bluebird recordings. Washboard Sam went on to accompany many different musicians on their recording sessions, including pianist Memphis Slim, bassist Ransom Knowling, Bukka White, Willie Lacey, and Jazz Gillum.

Songs:
"Grievin' Me Blues"- "Georgia" Tom Dorsey
"Let's Get Drunk Again"- Bo Carter (Armenter Chatmon)

WHOOPIE, WHOOPING

"Making whoopee," like "having a ball," started off as a euphemism for having sex and crossed over into polite society as a term for general merriment and carousing. "Making whoopee" came from "whooping," which showed up in the late 1920s in Lil Johnson's "You'll Never Miss Your Jelly Til Your Jelly Roller's Gone," in which she sang:

Whooping I've been whooping, whooping all night long
Whooping I've been whooping ever since my man been gone

Etymologists have traced whooping back to the old French *houper*, which meant "to cry out."

Songs:
"Whoopee Blues"- King Solomon Hill (Joe Holmes)
"She's Making Whoopee in Hell Tonight"- Lonnie Johnson
"You'll Never Miss Your Jelly Til Your Jelly Roller's Gone"- Lil Johnson

WOOFING, WOOF TICKET, WOLF TICKET

Woofing is verbally nimble teasing and name-calling; although in rap today it's used more often to mean bragging. It's competitive but not rough, like poking fun at someone.There are many verbal games in African American culture--from displays of virtuosity and tale-telling such as **rapping**, **shucking**, and **jiving** to taunts like **playing the dozens** and woofing.

Author and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston depicted her experience with woofing in her folklore study *Mules and Men*. Huston described attending a Saturday night house party in Polk County, Florida, as an outsider and how a little woofing made her feel more at home.

"A group can always be found outside about the fire, standing around and woofing and occasionally telling stories," Huston wrote. She sensed that the people there didn't know what to make of her proper speech and nice dress. No one talked to her or asked her to dance until one man finally approached her and began woofing- making fun of her speech and her uptight posture. "I laughed and the crowd laughed and Pitts laughed," Huston reported. "Very successful woofing." Because she took the woofing with good-natured grace, she was asked to dance and join the party.[40]

Woofing is also be a method for "calling someone out," or challenging an opponent, as in the Bessie Smith song "Aggravatin' Papa." It tells the story of a girl named Mandy Brown who gets so mad at her man for cheating on her that she threatens to shoot him with her handgun:

Just treat me pretty, be nice and sweet
I got a darn forty-four that don't repeat

Mandy Brown was handing her man a woof ticket (sometimes misunderstood as "wolf ticket"), which is an invitation to fight with fists or weapons. A person who is "selling woof tickets" is engaging in verbal threats without necessarily planning to follow through. To buy a woof ticket is to call a bluff, to take the verbal instigator up on his or her threats.[41]

In West Africa, verbal sparring and displays of physical feats were traditionally used as proxies for physical violence to settle disputes. Similar verbal jousts called "flyting," a term derived from Scottish, were used in medieval Europe to resolve quarrels that "normally insist on a military resolution."[42] As English professor Ward Parks wrote in *Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative: The Homeric and Old English Traditions*, "Man, whatever else he might be, is a rhetorical creature. And, in many of his moods, a belligerent one as well. Rhetoric and belligerence meet in the verbal contest."[43] Playful or "ludic" flyting was carried out as entertainment in the Middle Ages.

The West African tradition survived in African American culture in street corner games like the dozens, and in the freestyle rap battles that surfaced in the South Bronx in the late 1970s and early 1980s as alternatives to deadly gang fights.

"Woofin' " shows up in rap songs meaning to brag without backup. In "High Powered," for example, Dr. Dre called out "a lot of niggas out there woofin' all that bullshit talkin' 'bout they got this and got that."

Songs:
"Aggravatin' Papa"- Britt, Robinson, and Roy Turk
"Cat You Been Messin' Around"- Lonnie Johnson

Y

YAS YAS

Used as a rhyming substitute for "ass," "yas yas" and "yas yas yas" appear in **hokum** blues from the 1920s such as Tampa Red's big hit, "The Duck Yas-Yas-Yas." In "Get Yer Yas Yas Out," Blind Boy Fuller sang "get yer yas yas out the door." Memphis Minnie had the best lyric, though, in "New Dirty Dozen":

Now the funniest thing I ever seen, tom cat jumping on a sewing machine
Sewing machine run so fast, took ninety-nine stitches in his yas yas yas

Songs:
"Get Yer Yas Yas Out"- Blind Boy Fuller (Fulton Allen)
"New Dirty Dozen"- Memphis Minnie (Lizzie Douglas)
"The Duck Yas-Yas-Yas"- Tampa Red (Hudson Whittaker)

Z

ZOMBIE, JUJU ZOMBIE, ZUVEMBIE

The Vodou practitioner seeks the holy experience of union with *nzambi*, or God. A priest who can call a spirit into a person's body for this high purpose, however, could also conceivably do it for a more evil reason. This is where the concept of a controllable dead or comatose person--the zombie of Hollywood movies--originated.

In the Tshiluba language, the word *nzambi* means God and *mujangi* means the spirit of an ancestor. There is also *nzumbi*, from the Kimbundu of Northern Angola, which means a ghost or a supernatural force that can bring a corpse back to life. [44]

There are two types of zombies: the common zombie and the more dangerous **juju** zombie, also called "zuvembie." Common zombies are people who are alive but have been rendered comatose by a finely ground dust of poisonous powder that is blown into their nostrils or touches their skin. Depending on locale, the powder may include gland secretions of the bouga toad, tarantula venom, the powdered skins of poisonous tree frogs, or seeds and leaves from poisonous plants. The active ingredient is probably tetrodotoxin, which can be derived from four different varieties of puffer fish.[45]

Within minutes of touching the skin or mucous membranes, tetrodotoxin renders the victim unable to move a muscle. He or she falls into a coma-like state that strongly resembles death. Presumed dead, the person is buried alive. Once dug up and "brought back to life" as the drug wears off, the victim can be easily manipulated, and controlled by more drugging.

The juju zombie, in contrast, is a human corpse brought to life by ritual magic and animated by a loa, or spirit-god, that a *bokor*, or evil priest, controls. Juju zombification is a corrupt form of Vodou possession. The bokor may use juju zombies as bodyguards, to carry out murders and other evil deeds, or as slave labor.[46]

Sometimes it's the bokor who has killed the person in the first place, in order to use him or her as a zuvembie. The juju zombie is much more powerful and cunning than the common zombie because it is animated by a spirit-god. With that added power, comes more risk for the bokor, who has to be very skilled to keep the loa from regaining the upper hand.

Finally, there's the Grand Zombie (or Zombi)--another name for the Great Snake Damballah, the serpent who represents the supreme creator in the *Vodou* religion (*see also* **Voodoo**). In "I Walk on Guilded Splinters," Dr. John sang:

Some people think they jive me
but I know they must be crazy
Don't see their misfortune
I guess they're just too lazy
Je suie le grand zombie *[I am the grand zombie]*

Marie Laveau became the leader of New Orleans Vodou practitioners in 1820 when she was elected the human representative of the Grand Zombie. Laveau was extremely intelligent and insightful, and widely believed to be clairvoyant. She kept a python named Zombi, and danced with it on her shoulders during the ceremonies over which she presided.

Dr. John gets some love from Kiki Anderson and her snake Flash Fearless at the Municipal Auditorium in New Orleans,

1992. *Photo ©Joseph A. Rosen*

Zombie horror imagery figured prominently in the wildly theatrical performances of Screamin' Jay Hawkins (born Jalacy Hawkins in Cleveland in 1929), who would arise from a coffin onstage in a cloud of dry ice fog. Hawkins had originally intended to record his huge hit "I Put A Spell On You" as a soulful blues ballad.

Once the producer "brought in ribs and chicken and got everybody drunk we came out with this weird version," Hawkins admitted, adding "I found out I could do more destroying a song and screaming it to death."[47] Hawkins kicked off the craze among rock 'n' roll performers from Alice Cooper to Marilyn Manson for imitating the undead.

Songs:
"I Walk on Guilded Splinters"- Dr. John (Mac Rebennack)
"Love Zombie"- John Németh
"Zombie Song"- Eric Hughes Band

ZUZU

Zuzu is southern slang for a cookie, as in "Can I have some more zuzus, Mama?" The original zuzus were ginger snaps made by Nabisco. The earliest mention of them in print is an A&P ad in *The New York Times* in 1932: "ZuZus, Lemon Snaps, Cheese Tidbits, Vanilla Wafers, Chocolate Snaps, or Marshmallow Sandwich, package 4 cents; regular price 5 cents."[48]

Texas blues guitarist A.D. "Zuzu" Bollin got his nickname from his passion for the Nabisco ginger snaps. Bollin formed a band with sax player David "Fathead" Newman in 1949, and later played with Percy Mayfield before packing it all in to go into the dry cleaning business.

Bollin was rediscovered in 1987 when the Dallas Blues Society convinced him to do some shows. He cut an excellent album in 1989 called *Texas Bluesman* that showcased his T-Bone Walker-style guitar playing. Zuzu Bollin passed away in 1990.[49]

Song:
"Zuzu Man"- Dr. John (Mac Rebennack)

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[1] Major, p. 410.
[2] From "Dance History Archives" on Street Swing.com.
[3] Oliver, p. 93.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 57.
[5] Lomax, p. 70
[6] Jones, p. 168
[7] Holloway and Vass, p. 147.
[8] Major, p. 415.
[9] The author thanks former *Blues Revue* editor-in-chief Andrew M. Robble for this anecdote.
[10] All quotes from Herman Ernest, III in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Ernest.
[11] From telegram sent to Sam Lay by Bob Dylan when Lay was honored by the Recording Academy with the "Hero's Award" in 2001, Chamber Blues.com.
[12] From "Profile of Sam Lay" on Chamber Blues.com.
[13] *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., pg. 69 (Oxford University Press, 1989).
[14] *Mules and Men* by Zora Neale Hurston, Introduction, p. 1, (New York: Harper Collins reissue 1990).
[15] *Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia*, by Roger D. Abrahams, p. 113, (Hatboro, PA: Folklore, 1964.)
[16] Lomax, p. 364.
[17] All quotes from Hubert Sumlin in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Sumlin.
[18] From the Card Catalog entry for this song, located in the American Folklife Center's Reading Room "The two stavin' chains," 1940.
[19] Prostitutes, Progressives, and Police: The Viability of Vice in San Diego 1900-1930," by Clare V. McKanna, Jr., *The Journal of San Diego History*, Winter 1989, Volume 35, Number 1.
[20] Yronwode.
[21] Ferris, p. 35.
[22] All quotes from Elliott Sharp are from the author's interview with Mr. Sharp.

[23] From the author's interview with Hubert Sumlin.
[24] Thompson, p. 109.
[25] "Charms and Charm-Medicines," by Mrs. L.D. Morgan, *Catholic World* magazine, June 1886, Southern Spirits.com.
[26] From the author's interview with Dr. John.
[27] From the author's interview with Robert Jr. Lockwood.
[28] All quotes from Jody Williams in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Williams.
[29] All quotes from Jimmie Vaughan in this entry are from the author's interview with Mr. Vaughan.
[30] Holloway, pg. 148.
[31] For a fascinating discussion of the relationship between Voodoo and rock 'n' roll, read Michael Ventura's essay "Hear That Long Snake Moan," from his book *Shadow Dancing In The USA*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1985).
[32] "A Brief History of Voodoo," *New Orleans Voodoo Crossroads*, by Severine Singh, (Cincinnati: Black Moon Publishing, 1994), New Orleans Voodoo Crossroads.com.
[33] From the author's correspondence with Sallie Ann Glassman.
[34] Ventura.
[35] Singh.
[36] "Haiti" entry on Information.com.
[37] Singh.
[38] Ventura.
[39] Charters, p. 74.
[40] *Mules and Men* by Zora Neale Hurston, Chapter 4 (New York: Harper Collins reissue 1990).
[41] Major, p. 76.
[42] Essays in Medieval Studies, Vol 13, 1996, "Flytes of Fancy: Boasting and Boasters from Beowulf to Gangsta Rap," by Alta Cools Halama, in *Essays in Medieval Studies*, Vol 13, 1996.
[43] Ward Parks quoted by Halama
[44] *Dr. Mordred's Fiendish Field Guide*, Laughing Sage.com.
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] *Ibid*.
[47] "Screamin' Jay Hawkins," Wikipedia.com.
[48] *New York Times*, July 1, 1932, p. 10, according to The Food Timeline.org.
[49] Biographical information for A.D. Bollin from Bill Dahl's biography of Bollin for *All Music Guide* online.

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