Rockin' In Time

NINTH EDITION

David P. Szatmary

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A Social History of Rock and Roll

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To My Wife, Mary

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Preface

New to this Edition

I have used many new photos and images to make the text more relevant and to better show the connection of rock and roll to social history. I have added new material, including the following:

- New chapter on Delta blues
- New section on fusion jazz
- New chapter on the electronic dance movement
- Additional new material incorporated into each chapter

I have also corrected any errors in the text. I hope that you find this revision useful and would appreciate any comments as you read it.

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I owe a special debt to the late Bob "Wildman" Campbell, the king of psychedelia who spent many hours with me analyzing the lyrics of Larry Fischer, the nuances of Tibetan Buddhists chants, Bonzo Dog Band album covers, and the hidden meaning behind the grunts of Furious Pig. He shared with me his definitive psychedelic record

collection, mentored me about the beats, and suggested that we venture into CBGBs to see the Voidoids. Besides reading and commenting on this manuscript, he expanded my musical horizons with a series of demented tapes and letters, which twisted this book into shape. Such a debt can never be repaid, and he will be sorely missed.

Thanks to my late parents, Peter and Eunice, for instilling in me a love of music and the written word. A special appreciation goes to my mother who commented on the manuscript and gave me suggestions for a title.

A special thanks to my grandson, Alexander Fantl who constantly expands my musical boundaries.

My daughter Sara constantly brought me back to reality, when I became overly absorbed in the manuscript, and showed me that energy can be boundless. She provided needed guidance about music in the twenty-first century and gave me hope that rock and roll will never die. In the last several editions, she offered insightful editorial comments about the newest music on the charts and provided invaluable research.

Most of all, I want to thank my wonderful wife Mary for her love and companionship, her openness to all types of music, her editorial comments, her willingness to attend concerts when we were both too old for the venue, and her indulgence of my vinyl and rock-poster addictions. For this edition, she continually provided me rock-and-roll material for sources, which I would otherwise have not seen. I could never have completed nine editions of this book without her understanding, interest, encouragement, and love. I dedicate this book to her with all my heart.

Introduction

> "Rock and roll will be around for a long, long time. Rock and roll is like hot molten lava that erupts when an angry volcano explodes. It's scorching hot, burns fast and completely, leaving an eternal scar. Even when the echoes of the explosion subside, the ecstatic flames burn with vehement continuity."
>
> —Don Robey, owner of Peacock and Duke Records, in *Billboard*, March 1957

This book is a social history of rock and roll. It places an ever-changing rock music in the context of American and, to some extent, British history from the early blues to the present. *Rockin' in Time* explains how rock and roll both reflected and influenced major social changes during the last eight decades. As Ice-T explained in 1997, "albums are meant to be put in a time capsule, sealed up, and sent into space so that when you look back you can say that's the total reflection of that time."

Rockin' in Time deals with rock music within broad social and cultural settings. Rather than present an encyclopedic compilation of the thousands of well-known and obscure bands that have played throughout the years, it examines rock and rollers who have reflected and sometimes changed the social fabric at a certain point in history. It concentrates on rock musicians who most fully mirrored the world around them and helped define an era.

Rockin' in Time emphasizes several main themes, including the importance of African-American culture in the origins and development of rock music. The blues, emanating from American slaves, provided the foundation for rock and roll. During the early Fifties, African-Americans who migrated from the South to Chicago created an urbanized, electric rhythm and blues that preceded rock and roll and served as the breeding ground for pioneer rock and rollers such as Little Richard and Chuck Berry. African Americans continued to develop new styles such as the Motown sound, the soul explosion of the Sixties, fusion jazz, the disco beat, house music, techno, and hip-hop.

Many types of rock coincided with and reflected the African-American struggle for equality. The electric blues of Muddy Waters became popular amid the stirrings of the civil-rights movement. During the early Sixties, as the movement for civil rights gained momentum, folk protesters such as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez sang paeans about the cause. In 1964 and 1965, as Congress passed the most sweeping civil rights legislation since the Civil War, Motown artists topped the charts. When disgruntled, frustrated African Americans took to the streets later in the decade, soul artists such as Aretha Franklin gained respect. During the late Eighties and throughout the Nineties, hip-hoppers such as Public Enemy rapped about inequality and renewed an interest in an African-American identity.

White teenagers embraced rock and roll, when the civil-rights struggle cultivated an awareness of African-American culture. Youths such as Elvis Presley listened to late-night, rhythm-and-blues radio shows that challenged and broke down racial barriers. During the Sixties, white teens readily accepted African-American performers such as the Ronettes, the Temptations, and the Supremes who had been carefully groomed for success in a mainstream market. At the same time in Britain, teenagers such as the Rolling Stones became obsessed with Chicago blues and brought their version of the blues back to adoring fans in America. Later in the decade, white youth bought soul records and revered Jimi Hendrix as the ultimate guitar hero. By the Eighties, young white suburbanites wore baggy pants and chanted the lyrics of inner-city rappers. In the new

century, American teens danced at massive festivals to the African-American sounds of house music and techno. During the last eight decades, black and white Americans have been integrated through rock and roll.

Population shifts and generational changes, the second theme of this book, provided an audience for African-American-inspired rock and roll. During World War II, African Americans from the South streamed into large Northern cities such as Chicago in a Great Migration. Blues musicians such as Muddy Waters came north along with thousands of African-American migrants who provided a ready audience for the electrified blues.

When the war ended, soldiers came home to their wives and had children who as a group became the baby boom and represented one of the most populous generations of all time. By the mid-Fifties, an army of youngsters demanded their own music. Along with their older brothers and sisters who had been born during the war, they latched onto a young, virile Elvis Presley who attracted hordes of postwar youth.

Until the early Eighties, rock music reflected the interests of the baby-boom generation. The music of the Dick Clark era, Brill Building songwriters, the Beach Boys, Motown artists, and the early Beatles focused on dating, cars, high school, and teen love for young boomers. Catering to post-teen baby boomers during the Sixties, rock morphed into the serious protest music of Bob Dylan and psychedelic bands that questioned basic tenets of American society. When college-age boomers were threatened by the Vietnam War military draft and the prospect of fighting in an unpopular war, the music turned harsh and violent with heavy metal and then escapist after the student killings at Kent State. During the Seventies, after the war ended and when many college rebels landed lucrative jobs, glitter rock and disco exemplified the excessive, self-centered behavior of the boomers. During the Eighties, artists such as Bruce Springsteen reflected the baby-boom yearning for the Sixties spirit of social change.

The sons and daughters of the baby boom, born between 1965 and 1981 and called Generation X, carried forward the rock-and-roll banner. Disaffected youths born on the cusp of the new generation delivered a stinging British punk rock and an American hardcore to vent their anger. Other youth from Gen X watched and listened to British dance music, Michael Jackson and a pop-oriented version of heavy metal on the MTV television network. As they grew older, Generation X confronted sobering social conditions with thrash, grunge, death metal, and rap.

By the late Nineties, a third generation of youth, born between 1982 and 2001 and referred to as the Baby Boom Echo, Generation Y, or the Millenials, developed their own rock. Confronted by a plethora of economic, environmental and political problems, they flocked to socially conscious singer-songwriters and rappers. During the past decade, amid a conservative upheaval in the United States, many Millenials listened to the traditional message of a country rock and escaped their troubles by dancing to electronic beats.

The roller-coaster economic times of the post–World War II era serve as a third focus of this book. A favorable economic climate initially allowed rock to flourish by permitting baby boomers in the United States to live in relative affluence. During the Fifties and early Sixties, sizeable allowances enabled teens to purchase the latest rock records and buy tickets to see their favorite heartthrobs. During the next fifteen years, unparalleled prosperity allowed youth to consider the hippie counterculture and led to cultural excesses and booming record sales.

When the economic scene worsened during the mid-to-late Seventies in Britain, youth spat out the sneering protest of punk that reflected the harsh economic realities of the dole. Throughout the most of the Eighties and early Nineties, American youth coped with few career prospects and little family stability through shattering hardcore punk, pounding industrial music, a bleak grunge, growling death metal, and a confrontational rap. During the mid-Nineties, when the economy brightened for several years on both sides of the Atlantic, teens turned to a bouncy, danceable Britpop and

Sixties-style, eclectic jam bands. From 2007 to the present, as the worldwide economy settled into one of the worst recessions in one hundred years, youth listened to a conservative country rock and escaped reality through massive electronic-dance-music festivals, which featured fantastic Disneyland-like settings.

Advances in technology shaped the sound of rock and roll and provide another framework for *Rockin' in Time*. The solid-body electric guitar, invented and popularized during the Fifties by Les Paul and Leo Fender, gave rock its distinctive sound. Mass-produced electric guitars such as the Fender Telecaster, appearing in 1951, and the Stratocaster, first marketed three years later, enabled blues musicians and later white teens to capture the electric sound of the city and the passion of youth. During the late Sixties and early Seventies, guitar gods plugged into a wide array of electronic devices such as the distortion box and the wah-wah pedal to deliver slashing, menacing heavy metal. Later technologies such as the synthesizer, the sequencer, and the sampler allowed musicians to embellish and reshape rock and roll into different genres.

Several technological breakthroughs helped popularize rock and roll by making records easily and inexpensively accessible. The reasonably priced 45-rpm record, introduced in 1949 by RCA, prodded youths to purchase the latest hits and replaced the more brittle shellac 78-rpm record. Starting in the mid-Sixties, the extended format of the long-play, 12-inch, 33-1/3-rpm record, which Columbia had commercialized in 1948, perfectly fit such rock music as the experimental psychedelia. The LP remained the dominant medium for rock until the laser-powered compact disc became widely available in 1982. Advances in the quality of sound such as high fidelity, stereo, component stereo systems, and digital sound transferred the immediacy of the live performance to the home and enhanced the rock experience.

Television popularized rock by broadcasting it to teens in their homes. Elvis Presley and the Beatles leapt into American homes on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Dick Clark's offered the popular *American Bandstand*, and during the Sixties programs such as *Shindig* aired regularly. In Britain, television shows such as *Thank Your Lucky Stars, Ready Steady Go!*, and *Juke Box Jury* lured teens to rock and roll. In the early Eighties, MTV changed the way youth thought about music by making it visual as well as aural.

Several technological devices fundamentally transformed rock and roll. The portable cassette tape player-recorder, the portable CD player, and, most recently, the iPod gave teens an opportunity to listen to their favorite songs in the privacy of their rooms, at school, or on the streets. By the Nineties, the Internet enabled youths to listen, trade, download, and burn their favorite music and learn about new bands. It greatly enhanced the scope of music available to the rock fan.

Political events, another theme of this book, directly impacted rock and roll. During the late Sixties, the Vietnam War drew the ire of rock musicians from Jimi Hendrix to Black Sabbath. In 1994, the British Criminal Justice and Public Order Act specifically targeted the rave culture and evoked opposition from bands such as Prodigy and Orbital. The 2004 Presidential election united rockers from all genres in opposition to George W. Bush and his foreign policies and his stance on environmentalism.

Gender serves as another focus of this book. Initially, hormonally motivated girls served as screaming fans for male rock stars such as Elvis, Fabian and the Beatles. During the early Sixties, women emerged as performers in singing groups such as Ronettes and the Supremes. Women similarly contributed to rock as Seventies singer-songwriters such as Carole King and country–rock singers such as Linda Ronstadt. In a largely male-dominated rock field, females first strapped on guitars and sat behind drum sets in great numbers during the punk era with Siouxsie and the Banshees, the Slits and Chrissie Hynde. Riot grrrls bands such as Bikini Kill continued the role of women as performing musicians. In hip hop, several women such as Queen Latifah joined male rappers, and the Spice Girls swept the international charts with their slogan of "girl power." The changing role of women in rock reflected the increasing acceptance of females in the workplace and as equals in American society.

Rock music has been entwined with the development of the music industry, another feature of this book. Rock and roll has always been a business. It started with small, independent companies such as Chess, Sun, Modern, and King, which delivered a new sound to the public. As it became more popular among teens, rock and roll sparked the interest of major record labels such as RCA, Decca, and Capitol, which in the Sixties dominated the field. By the Seventies, major companies aggressively marketed their product and consolidated ranks to increase profits and successfully build an industry more profitable than network television and professional sports. In 1978, as the majors experienced a decline in sales, independent labels again arose to release new rock styles such as punk, rap, grunge, and techno. Within a decade, the majors reasserted their dominance of the record industry, by the signing new acts that had been nurtured by the independents and by introducing the compact disc that enticed many record buyers to purchase their favorite music in a different, more expensive format. As the new century unfolded, major record labels confronted and protested against the Internet, which created a fundamentally new business model for the music industry by allowing musicians to release and distribute their music inexpensively to a worldwide audience without an intermediary.

Though a business, rock music has engendered and has been defined by rebellion, which manifested itself through a series of overlapping subcultures. Youths used rock and roll as a way to band together and feel part of a shared experience. As Bruce Springsteen mentioned about his own background, rock music "provided me with a community, filled with people, and brothers and sisters who I didn't know, but who I knew were out there. We had this enormous thing in common, this 'thing' that initially felt like a secret. Music always provided that home for me." "Rock provides a family life that is missing in America and England," agreed David Bowie. "It provides a sense of community."

During the last eight decades, identifiable rock-and-roll communities assumed specific characteristics, fashion, and styles. Fueled by uncontrolled hormones during the Fifties and early Sixties, rockabilly greasers challenged their parents by wearing sideburns and long greased-back hair and driving fast hot rods. Their girlfriends sported tight sweaters, ratted hair, pedal-pusher slacks. During the 1960s, serious clean-cut, smartly dressed, college-aged folkniks directed their frustration and anger at racial and social injustice by taking freedom rides to the South and protesting against nuclear arms. A few years later, hippies flaunted wild, vibrant clothing, the mind-expanding possibilities of LSD, sexual freedom, and a disdain for a warmongering capitalism that they expressed in their swirling psychedelic poster art. In the next decade, baby boomers attended stadium concerts to collectively celebrate sexually ambiguous, theatrical, and extravagant superstars. A few years later, women wore flowing, revealing dresses and men favored gold medallions and unbuttoned silk shirts as they discoed to the steady beats of deejays.

During the late 1970s, angry rock subcultures emerged. Sneering British punks grew spiked hair, wore ripped, safety-pinned T-shirts, and pogoed straight up and down to lash out against economic, gender, and racial inequities. In America, Mohawked youths congregated in small clubs and slam danced to hardcore punk. Around the same time, a hip-hop subculture of rap music, graffiti and break dancing unabashedly assaulted racial prejudice and its effects on African Americans in the inner cities to highlight the racial injustice that the civil-rights movement of the Sixties had not erased. Within a decade and into the new century, the inner-city b-boy subculture spread to white suburbs, where gun-toting teens looked for ho's and wore Adidas, sagging pants, baseball caps (preferably New York Yankees) turned backward, loose T-shirts, and, depending upon the year, gold chains.

In the Eighties and Nineties, Generation X youth voiced frustration and despair through a series of subcultures that included a gothic-looking industrial style; a long-haired, leather-jacketed thrash and death metal; and the self-described "loser" com-

munity of grunge, which adopted the idealized look of the working class: longish, uncombed hair, faded blue jeans, Doc Marten boots, and T-shirts. Until subverted and incorporated into the mainstream by fashion designers, Hollywood, and big business, these subcultures knit together distinct groups of youth with common ways of looking at the world.

By the start of the new century, rock and roll splintered into a variety of subcultures. Black metal adherents wore corpse paint on their faces, studded black leather outfits, and long hair to demonstrate their disgust with current society. Young suburban country fans sported cowboy hats and cowboy boots and swing danced to a largely conservative version of country rock. During the past several years, youth danced all night in furry boots, underwear as outerwear and tutus to party with thousands of others at electronic-dance-music festivals such as the Electric Daisy Carnival.

History seldom can be separated into neat packages. Many of the different rock genres and their accompanying subcultures overlapped with one another. From 1961 to the advent of the British invasion in 1964, Brill Building songwriters, surf music, and Bob Dylan coexisted on the charts. Motown, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and soul music occurred approximately at the same time. Most recently, rap, country rock and electronic dance music coincided with one another. Though sometimes intersecting with one another, the different subcultures of rock and roll have been divided into distinct chapters in this book to clearly distinguish the motivating factors behind each one.

Rockin' in Time attempts to be as impartial as possible. Even though a book cannot be wrenched from the biases of its cultural setting, I have tried to present the music in a historical rather than a personal context and to avoid effusive praise or disparaging remarks about any type of rock. To paraphrase Sting, lead singer of the Police, there is no bad music, only bad musicians.

These pages explore the social history of rock and roll. During the last eight decades that it has been an important part of American and British culture, rock and roll has reflected and sometimes changed the lives of several generations. It has morphed into a plethora of creative forms and will continue to amaze, shock, entertain, and inform fans in the future.

Chapter 1
The Birth of the Blues

"The blues can't die because spirituals won't die. Blues—a steal from spirituals."

—Big Bill Broonzy

In 1912, Blind Lemon Jefferson and his companion, Leadbelly, rode the T & NV railroad line through Texas. They needed no fare because they carried guitars with them. "We didn't have to pay no money in them times. We get on the train, the driver takes us anywhere we want to go," Leadbelly recalled. "The conductor says, 'Boys, sit down. You going to play music?' We tell him, 'Yes.' We just out collecting money."

When stopping at a small town, the two guitar players left the train and entertained people at the station. Blind Lemon picked out tunes and Leadbelly accompanied him with rhythm to marvel listeners. They smiled when someone threw a nickel on the ground near their feet.

Sometimes, the two men stayed in town to continue their makeshift concert and then traveled dusty roads toward adjoining towns. Every Saturday, Jefferson played in Wortham, Texas, in front of Jake Lee's barbershop, where residents gathered to hear him. "Lemon started out playing his guitar on these streets," reminisced Quince Cox, a resident of Wortham. "I pitched quarters and nickels to him, and he'd play his guitar." When evening came, Jefferson and his sidekick walked seven or eight miles to Kirvin, Texas. The next night, they headed toward Streetman and Groesbeck to other appreciative audiences. The wandering Blind Lemon and Leadbelly played a new style, which applied secular themes to African-American spirituals. They called it the blues.

The blues formed the foundation of rock and roll. It provided the necessary elements and inspiration for rock and rollers from Elvis to Nirvana. Born in slavery, the music combined African and European elements in a unique way. It first surfaced in African-American church music and gradually transitioned to a secular context, when inexpensive acoustic guitars became readily available at the end of the nineteenth century. By the mid-1920s, rural country blues appeared on record to set the stage for the development of rock and roll.

Born in Slavery

American slaves guarded and repurposed musical traits from Africa to create work songs, field hollers, and spirituals that predated and shaped the blues. Wrenched from their kin, enduring an inhuman journey from their homes in West Africa to the American South on slave ships, and forced into slavery, Africans retained continuity with their past in a variety of ways, including music. They sang between the lines of the more rigid diatonic European music scale by using a pentatonic scale and flattening or bending 3rd, 7th, and sometimes 5th notes, which became known as "blue notes." To plantation owners and overseers, the slave songs of seemingly sliding notes or glissando appeared to make the music rise and fall and sound off-key. One observer found the music of slaves "to strike sounds that cannot be precisely represented by the gamut, and abound in 'slides' from one note to another."

Slaves patting juba, 1841.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZC4-5950].

Slave songs involved calculated repetitions in a call-and-response pattern. Often used to decrease the monotony of work in the fields, one slave called or played a lead part, and another slave followed with the same phrase or a variant of it until another took the lead. As Sir Charles Lyell, a British geologist traveling in America, wrote of his African-American oarsmen in 1845, "One of them, taking the lead, first improvised a verse, paying compliments to his master's family, and to a celebrated black beauty." "The other five then joined in the chorus, always repeating the same words," he explained. In 1853, Frederick Law Olmstead, a journalist, conservationist, and a pioneer in landscape architecture traveled through South Carolina, when "suddenly one slave raised such a sound as I have never heard before, a long, loud musical shout, rising and falling, and breaking into falsetto." "As he finished," continued Olmstead, "the melody was caught up by another, and then, another, and then, by several in chorus." Some slaves, especially those originally from the Bantu tribe, whooped or jumped octaves during the call-and-response, which served as a basis for field hollers.

Slaves concentrated on rhythm. They had been accustomed to dancing and singing to the beat of drums in Africa but had been barred from using percussion instruments in the American South by plantation owners who feared that drums would be used to coordinate slave insurrections. To offset anti-drum laws, slaves focused on rhythm in other ways. In a single song, they clapped, danced, and slapped their bodies in several different rhythms to compensate for the absence of drums. Solomon Northup, an ex-slave writing in 1853, called the practice "patting juba." Slaves performed it by "striking the right shoulder with one hand, the left with the other—all the while keeping time with the feet and singing." In contrast, noted President John Adams, whites "droned out [Protestant hymns] ... like the braying of asses in one steady beat."

Many times, slaves laced rhythm on top of rhythm to create a polyrhythmic music. The editors of *Slave Songs* noticed the "effect of a marvelous complication and variety [of rhythm], and yet with the most perfect time, and rarely with any discord."

They heard "the curious rhythmic effect produced by single voices chiming in at irregular intervals."

Slaves accented different beats of the melody to create syncopation. The editors of *Slave Songs* noticed the "apparent irregularities in the time" of the songs that they collected. A few years later, Georgia-born poet Sidney Lanier insisted that syncopations "are characteristic of Negro music. I have heard Negroes change a well-known melody by adroitly syncopating it."

The African-American Church

African Americans used their African musical traits in religious ceremonies. One writer in the *New York Nation* described a "praise-meeting" held in May 1867: "At regular intervals one hears the elder 'deaconing' a hymn-book hymn which is sung two lines at a time, and whose wailing cadences, borne on the night air, are indescribably melancholy." The response from the congregation to the bluesy call of the minister resulted in a call-and-response, a rhythmic complexity, and the minor-key sound common in African music.

The religious ceremonies featured the ring shout. According to the *Nation*, this rite took place on Sundays or at a special praise day in a room in which the benches had been pushed against the wall to allow maximum floor space for the congregation. The participants first walked and then began "shuffling round, one after the other, in a ring. The foot is hardly taken from the floor, and the progression is mainly due to a jerking, hitching motion." As the ring shout progressed over four or five hours, some of the congregation fell from the ring and lined the walls of the building. They shouted praise and slapped their knees and sides to create multiple rhythms.

African-American religious ceremonies combined European elements with African musical traits. The parishioners sang songs from *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns* (1801), which ex-slave Reverend Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), had assiduously compiled from the official Methodist songbook. The songs generally used a centuries-old, twelve-bar, European harmonic progression in a standard 4/4 time. Grafting African elements onto the white Protestant hymns, the congregation created a call-and-response effect by reiterating a line three times before embellishing it with a third line in a pattern called AAAB. They employed flatted notes in the songs and focused on a three-note, bass riff for a dominant rhythm sometimes called a "groove" or a "shuffle." The resulting music, commented the compilers of *Slave Songs*, became "imbued with the mode and spirit of European music—often, nevertheless, retaining a distinct tinge of their native Africa."

The Birth of the Blues

African-inspired, Protestant-based church music, known as spirituals by the 1860s, served as a basis for blues, when singers applied the religious music to secular themes. Blues players adopted the twelve-bar format, blue notes, syncopated polyrhythms, and call-and-response to chronicle their personal situations or recent natural disasters such as a flood. Following the example of African griots who relayed oral traditions by telling stories to the beat of music, bluesmen chronicled everyday events by adapting spirituals, work songs, and field hollers.

Many bluesmen equated the blues with spirituals. "Some of the church songs, you can't hardly tell them from the blues," insisted Jack Owens (b. 1904), a farmer from Bentonia, Mississippi, who played guitar and operated a juke joint on the weekends. "Some of us sang the church songs, some of us sang the blues, some of us sang both." Charlie Patton, a Delta blues guitar innovator who launched his career around

1906, sandwiched church songs in his performances. "Right in the middle of a dance, it didn't make him no difference," his protégé Booker Miller recalled. "If it hit him he'd just go to playing church songs right there." "He could have preached if he a-wanted to," added Eddie "Son" House about Patton. Bluesman Big Bill Broonzy, who recorded nearly 200 songs from 1925 to 1952, maintained that "the blues can't die because spirituals won't die. Blues—a steal from spirituals."

The Baptist church assumed an especially prominent role in the lives of some bluesmen who both played guitar and served as itinerant ministers. Skip James both ministered and played the blues. "I didn't like the way he was doing it, preaching a while, then playing the blues a while," groused his friend Jack Owens. "I'd play the blues with him Saturday night, and the next morning he'd be preaching church." Big Bill Broonzy began playing music, then "started to preaching and I preached for four years, and then I went back to playing again," when he realized that music could be more lucrative. Son House embarked a similar split career by serving as a minister in Northern Mississippi. "If Son House couldn't make enough playing the guitar, he gonna pick up a [church] collection," sniffed blues guitar player Willie Brown. "He'd preach a year, somethin' like that six months again. He could *preach*, you know." "I was trying to hold the blues in one hand and God in the other," admitted House.

Blues musicians generally performed on the acoustic guitar. Many poor aspirants started with a one-string instrument called a diddley bow, which they built by unraveling the wire that had been wrapped around the straw of a broom and then attaching one end of the wire to a stationary object like a barn. They placed a bottle underneath it as a bridge. To get a sound, they plucked the instrument or ran a knife or bottleneck across the wire. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, few slaves and sharecroppers owned a manufactured guitar. In a survey of ex-slaves, 205 mentioned fiddles, another hundred spoke about banjos on the plantation, and only fifteen referred to guitars.

During the 1890s, inexpensive guitars could more easily be bought. Manufactured by the Oscar Schmidt Company starting in 1899, Stella guitars could be purchased. Itinerant bluesman Ishmon Bracey bought one for eleven dollars in Memphis, and Huddie Ledbetter, popularly known as Leadbelly, who started performing on guitar before 1900, played a Stella. Charlie Patton favored a Stella as his "favorite box" as did Blind Lemon Jefferson (b. 1893), a guitarist from Coutchman, Texas.

The prices of the guitars dropped even further, when retailers Montgomery Ward and Sears, Roebuck & Company mass marketed them through mail-order catalogs. First selling mail-order goods in 1875 to farmers in rural areas, in 1894 Montgomery Ward introduced American-made guitars in their catalogs. In 1899, when Sears overtook Montgomery Ward in total mail-order sales, it offered relatively inexpensive Harmony and Stella guitars to its national customer base. Sears sold the Troubadour for $2.95; the Encore for $3.60; the Oakwood for $4.95; the Columbian, designed to honor the Columbian Exposition, for $7.95; and the Magnolia, "the handsomest guitar made," for $8.95. High-end consumers could buy the more expensive Washburn models, which were crafted by the Lyon & Healy Company in Chicago from rosewood with a cedar neck and an ebony finger board for more than $20. By the turn of the century, companies sold 78,500 guitars annually.

With instruments available at somewhat affordable prices, blues guitarists appeared in rural areas of the South. Booker Miller (b. 1910) asserted that his grandfather, Jim Brown, "was a guitar player." Charleston resident Stanford Bennett entertained at local joints before the dawn of the twentieth century. By 1905, Mississippian Rich Dickson had been regarded an accomplished guitar player, when he taught Henry Stuckey the instrument. Henry Thomas (b. 1874) played the blues before 1900. Leadbelly (b. 1888) remembered his uncles Bob and Terrell playing guitar to him as a young child. Uncle Bob sang "The Cleveland Campaign Song" about the election

African-American man playing guitar, 1909.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZC4-5950].

of Grover Cleveland as president in the 1884 election, perhaps indicating that he played his guitar by then. Before 1900, Leadbelly himself played guitar at local dances. Together with his cousin Edmond Ledbetter, they "used to make music. Sometimes I played a mandolin and I'd second him [by chording] with a guitar and sometimes we played the guitar together."

Guitarists who performed publicly played a variety of music for their audiences. Initially, they favored versions of sixteen-bar rags, popular songs such as "My Bucket's Got a Hole in It" and four-bar, up-tempo breakdowns that consisted of chord changes at the beginning of each measure. "We'd play whatever the people request," informed Booker Miller, a protégé of Charlie Patton, who performed with his mentor in the Mississippi Delta. "Lemon could play anything he had to play," recalled a Wortham, Texas, resident about Blind Lemon Jefferson. Texas bluesman Mance Lipscomb likewise performed a variety of material for his listeners and called himself a "songster."

Around 1900, a few musicians transformed a sixteen-bar rag into a twelve-bar blues by repeating the four-bar phrases of spirituals three times and substituting secular themes for religious topics. Big Bill first heard the blues "Cryin' Joe Turner'" about the disastrous flood of 1893. Booker Miller dated the first blues to "a little before 1900." Sam Chatmon (b. 1899), speaking about his early boyhood, indicated: "Never heard nobody pick no blues till my brother Bud and Charlie Patton, they're about the first." Nehemiah "Skip" James (b. 1902), raised in Bentonia, Mississippi, "hadn't heard of blues" as a child, "but after a little period of time, I heard my mother and them speak about 'singin' the blues." The "Reverend" Robert Wilkins, born six years before James, heard the twelve-bar blues version of such rags as "Spoonful" in his hometown about the same time. "They started in Hernando, [Mississippi], about 1904, something like that," he recalled. Whatever the exact date of the birth of the secular blues, by 1910 Charlie Patton had written a series of now classic blues such as "Pony Blues," "Banty Rooster Blues," and "Mississippi Bo Weevil Blues" to add to his repertoire.

Most of the budding bluesmen toiled in the fields during part of the year and rambled with their guitar for the remainder of it. Charlie Patton who "dressed like a ploughhand" "picked cotton in the fall, but long in the former part of the year he'd be here and

yonder," remembered Tom Cannon, Patton's nephew. "He never did settle down for no farmin'." Bluesman Ishmon Bracey worked in the fields during the spring and summer and then traveled throughout the South during the fall to earn money with his guitar.

Given their wandering ways, the bluesmen earned poor reputations. Charlie Patton "didn't want to do nothin' but run all over the country and play guitars and pick up every woman he sees," sniffed fellow Mississippi guitarist Eddie "Son" House. "A man that was singin' the blues," observed Henry C. Speir, the white music-store owner who discovered and helped many of the bluesmen land record contracts, "couldn't intermix with the people too much. He didn't have too much education, he was what we call a 'meat barrel type.' Smell a little bit, you see." "These people," added Speir, "they're not stable."

Train Stations, Frolics, and Juke Joints

Itinerant blues guitarists entertained black and sometimes white Southerners in a variety of places. Some traveled by rail to play their songs. W.C. Handy regularly observed "blind singers and footloose bards that were forever coming and going." "Some came sauntering down the railroad tracks, others dropped from freight cars, while still others caught rides on the big road and entered town on top of cotton bales." Using railroad stations as their concert halls, they performed to "crowds of country folk" who ate fish, bread, and other staples while they waited for their trains.

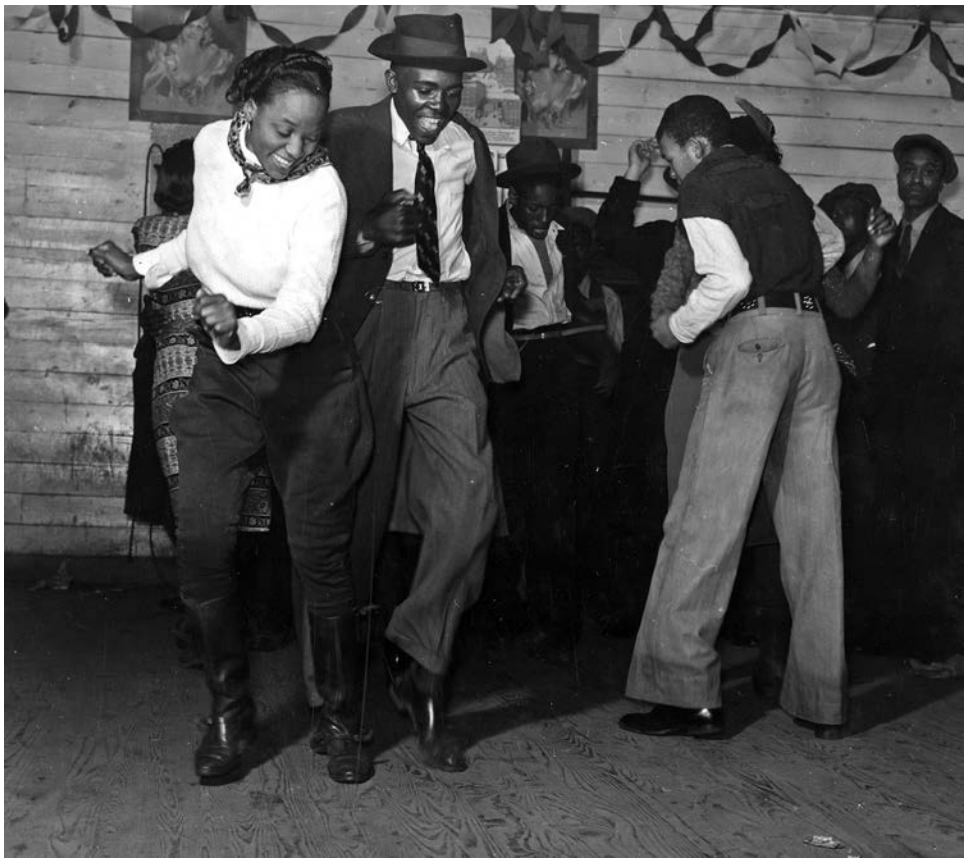
In small Southern towns, some bluesmen played on the street corners for spare change. In 1903, a young Leadbelly performed on the streets for storeowners to attract business. By 1910, a thirteen-year-old Memphis Minnie (b. Lizzie Douglas) had run away from home and supported herself by roaming from town to town between her home in Walls, Mississippi, and Jackson to entertain passersby on the streets.

Blues performers many times appeared at country frolics. Bluesmen ventured to a country plantation on Saturday nights to play a frolic in someone's house. Sometimes, the guitarist appeared as a solo act. Other times, two guitar players accompanied one another: one picking on single strings and the other chording behind him. During the day before the frolic, they played in the town center to advertise the upcoming event. By evening, the musicians made their way toward a two-room house with a bonfire in front to denote to nearby sharecroppers that a frolic would be held that evening. The guitarists played for a crowd assembled in the ramshackle house, where the furniture had been pushed aside so two or three dozen tightly packed neighbors could dance to the music and purchase peanuts, candy, apples, fish as well as chicken and ham.

A few of the guitar players entertained their clientele with a wild stage act. Charlie Patton "loved to 'clown' with his guitar, just puttin' it all under his legs and back behind him, takin' a hand and puttin' it all back his head," remembered Sam Chatmon. Patton's neighbor Frank Howard saw him put his guitar "'round his head, than change hands with it, play off with his feet and all that kinda stuff."

At times, the frenzied atmosphere at the plantation frolics turned violent. As early as 1881 on a visit to an Alabama plantation during Christmas week, Booker T. Washington attended a frolic. "This meant a kind of rough dance, where there was likely to be a good deal of whiskey used, and where there might be some shooting or cutting up with razors," he remembered. When Willie Morris and Charlie Patton played for revelers at a frolic on the Red Gun Plantation near Leland, Mississippi, "this guy starts shooting, and they all runned out and got in them cotton fields and corn fields, man," Mance Lipscomb described typical violence at frolics. When Mance played at the frolic in Brazos, "long about twelve or one o'clock, you'd hear a gun somewhere, in the house or the outhouse. 'Boom,' Somebody died."

Some of the violence did not escape punishment. Son House shot a man at a frolic in Lyon, Mississippi, and for the next two years labored at the notorious



Dancers at a juke joint, 1930s.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZC4-5950].

maximum-security Mississippi State Penitentiary, also known as Parchman Farm, which was memorialized by the song, "Parchman Farm," by bluesman Bukka White, who also served time there for killing two men. Leadbelly shot and killed a man and ended in the Shaw State Prison Farm and then the Central State Prison Farm, referred to as "Sugarland." After seven years of incarceration, Leadbelly received a pardon from Texas Governor Pat Neff after the governor heard him sing on a visit to Sugarland.

Juke joints or barrelhouses, where proprietors generally required clientele to check their weapons before entering, offered a somewhat safer venue for the blues guitarists. Located near a train station in the town center or a saw mill, turpentine camp or another type of work camp, the juke joints usually included rooms for gambling, drinking, prostitution, and dancing, and sometimes served as a makeshift boarding house. They opened on Friday night to provide a recreational outlet to their sharecropping and laboring customers until Sunday. Usually, fifty to seventy-five people crammed the barrelhouses at one time. "They'd stay alla night long," recalled Elizabeth Moore, who operated a Mississippi juke with her husband. A barrelhouse generated as much as $1,500 a weekend.

The jukes attracted an unsavory crowd. "They called 'em 'juke house people,' or otherwise they just didn't like em'," contended barrelhouse proprietor Elizabeth Moore. "Them there Saturday night folks, good people don't be out with 'em, that's a bad class of people, bad *type* of people, bad *character*." Son House referred to Saturday night at the barrelhouse as "the devil's night," establishing the connection between the blues and the devil's music.

Blues guitarists competed with pianists for audiences at the dangerous saw mills and turpentine camps, located near juke joints, which invested in cheap upright pianos. Charles "Cow Cow" Davenport, the son of a Baptist minister born in Anniston, Alabama, incorporated blues songs into his act, including his signature tune, "Cow Cow Blues," and moved from camp to camp with his music. Clarence "Pine Top"

Listening to the blues, 1930s.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USF34-031941-D].

Smith, heralding from Alabama, played "Pine Top's Boogie Woogie" for camp laborers. Tennessean "Cripple" Clarence Lofton (b. 1887) did the same throughout the South.

More commonly, pianists with blues material performed in the cities, especially in Louisiana. "You couldn't fool with no piano too much, not for the country gang or goin' to have a ball here, yonder, and like that," explained Son House. "They couldn't fool with the piano much, you know, 'cause they'd be too much to move all the time." In contrast, many barrooms in Southern cities such as New Orleans owned pianos and regularly hired pianists to entertain customers.

The Rural Blues Explosion

By the mid-1920s, records offered rural Southerners a way to hear rural bluesmen without braving the sometimes dangerous frolics and juke joints. During and after World War I, the fledgling record and phonograph industries expanded dramatically. From 1914 to 1919, phonograph sales exploded from $27.1 million to $158.7 million. In 1917, record companies sold 25 million discs and just four years later increased sales to 100 million, more than half of them sold by record giant, the Victor Company.

A proliferation of record companies, including labels that focused on the blues, accompanied the dizzying growth. Paramount, a subsidiary of the Wisconsin Chair Company located in Grafton, Wisconsin, played a pivotal role in the dissemination of the blues. Started in December 1915 as part of a couch subsidiary, the recording arm of the diversified company burgeoned after the parent group experimented with the manufacture of phonographs and decided to stock records for their phonograph cabinets. Initially, the company pressed German, Scandinavian, and Mexican music; popular dance bands; and vaudeville comedians. In 1922 amid fiscal troubles, general manager Maurice Supper and chief executive Otto Moeser decided to offer "race" selections. "We could not compete for high-class talent with Edison, Columbia and Victor, and we had inferior records: so we went with race records," explained Moeser.

In early 1926, Paramount ignited an interest in rural, male blues guitarists, when it recorded Blind Lemon Jefferson. The label received a tip from Dallas record retailer

Juke joint, 1930s.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZC4-5950].

R.T. Ashford about Texas guitarist/singer Jefferson, who he had played near Ashford's shop on Elm Street and Central Avenue. Beginning in March 1926, Paramount achieved commercial success with Jefferson, who recorded a series of now classic guitar blues, including the 1926 hit "Long Lonesome Blues." "Blind Lemon sent out a record about 'Catch my pony, saddle up my black mare," recalled Booker Miller about Jefferson's "Black Horse Blues" (1926). "Man, you oughta been there! That thing went like *wildfire* all over the country."

Paramount, emboldened by their success with Jefferson, signed other male bluesmen. The company hired talent scouts such as Henry Speir who auditioned countless blues guitarists at his music store on Farish Street in the black section of Jackson, Mississippi. Through Speir's tips, Paramount snagged Charlie Patton who recorded his bevy of blues for the label. The company recorded such Son House titles as "Preachin' the Blues" and "Mississippi County Farm Blues." By the end of the 1920s, Paramount had become one of the preeminent blues labels in the country with a recording studio, fifty-two record presses that could produce 35,000 records a day and subsidiary labels.

Vocalion Records helped popularize the blues. Launched in 1915 and acquired by Brunswick records ten years later, in 1926 the company developed a "race" series that included blues. Most notably, the label signed Robert Johnson who generated only moderate interest at the time but became the model for many rock-and-roll guitarists with his "Cross Roads Blues," "Love in Vain," and "Come On in My Kitchen." Johnson released the timely "Sweet Home Chicago," which detailed a mass migration of Southern Blacks to the North.

The Great Migration

Many African Americans, disgusted with discrimination and sharecropping, migrated to Northern cities for better lives. As World War I progressed in Europe after 1914, the demand for industrial workers grew acute in the United States, which supplied manufactured goods for the conflict. Steel mills and other manufacturing companies desperately needed laborers to fulfill orders that poured in from across the Atlantic as well

as at home after 1917, when the United States entered the war and severely restricted immigration into the country.

African Americans from the American South provided an alternative workforce to Northern manufacturers who no longer could rely on inexpensive labor from Eastern Europe. They had been anxious to leave the harsh conditions of a Jim Crow South, which implicitly condoned regular lynching and overt discrimination of African Americans during the post-Civil War era. One woman in New Orleans dreamed about the "great chance that a colored person has in Chicago of making a living with all the privilege that whites have, and it makes me the most anxious to go." "They said it was a place of freedom," echoed "Georgia" Tom Dorsey, a bluesman and later the father of gospel music. "I was looking for that." "Take some of the sections from which the Negro is departing and he can hardly be blamed when the facts are known," reported the Houston *Observer* on October 21, 1916. "He is kicked around, cuffed, lynched, burned, homes destroyed, daughters insulted and oft times raped, has no vote nor voice, is underpaid, and in some instances when he asks for pay received a 2 × 4 [board] over his head."

As well as constant fear of death and racial discrimination, natural disasters plagued African-American sharecroppers. First hitting the cotton fields of Mississippi in 1907, by 1914 boll weevils caused general devastation in the state. Two years later, the insects ruined fields in Alabama. Creating uncertainty in the cotton market by 1916–1917, the pests created a credit crisis throughout the South by making it more difficult for poor farmers to get money in advance to plant their crops. To add to the troubles of sharecroppers, in 1912 and 1913 crippling floods of the Mississippi River wiped out entire crops. In 1915, drought followed the floods.

Pushed from their land by racism and natural disasters, African Americans flooded into Chicago and other Northern cities. Thousands saved cash for the trip to the Windy City that cost two cents a mile for fare. Some rode for free with tickets from agents employed by major Northern manufacturing companies, which sent representatives to the South to recruit cheap labor. In Decatur, Alabama, during 1917, a

African-American sharecroppers working the field in Georgia, 1937.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-DIG-fsa-8b32081].