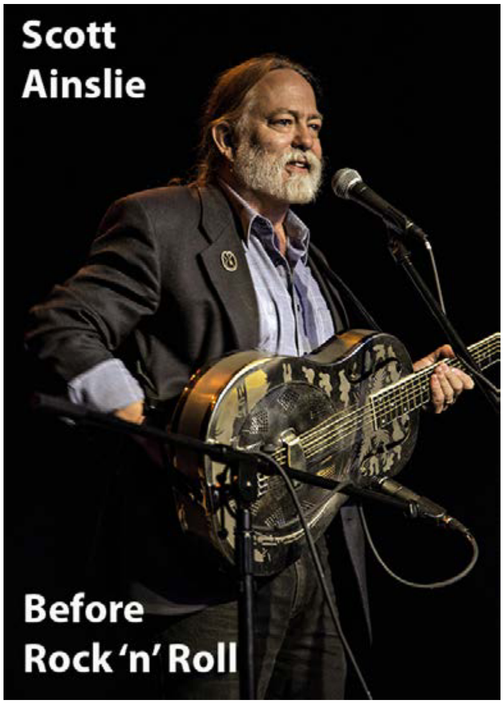


Scott Ainslie:
Before Rock 'n' Roll

Available only through Loyd Artists
info@LoydArtists.com
http://www.LoydArtists.com

Before Rock 'n' Roll is a teaching concert scalable for specific grade levels and suitable for families. In this engaging combination of history, stories and music, respected Blues musician and historian Scott Ainslie leads the audience back in time to the rhythms and music that influenced the rise of Rock 'n' Roll.

Ainslie introduces audiences to work and slave songs, spirituals, Delta and Ragtime Blues using guitars and African-derived American instruments – the fretless gourd banjo and one-stringed cigar box guitar.

Inviting audiences to join in call-and-response singing and back beat clapping, Ainslie presents a tour de force of American roots music while teaching and demonstrating a few of the African *retentions* that continue to have a vibrant place in contemporary American society and pop music today.

Introduction to the Study Guide

Every new fact can be a source for a question. Learning to fashion a good question is critically important to our continuing education.

The material in this study guide was chosen to help classroom teachers prepare students prior to the performance, or to extend the learning experience and help the school community pursue follow-up questions prompted by the program.

Contacting the Artist

If you or your students have specific questions that you do not find answered here (or if you are interested in finding resources to address a specific subject area of concern that my work touches on), please feel free to contact me by email.

A pertinent subject for your email will help assure that your message gets to me (school name + "Blues assembly," or something similar). On the order of 80% of email traffic is now junk, much of it malicious. We all have to take precautions about opening email, whether we recognize the sender or not. A pertinent subject line with your message will help assure that your message will be received rather than deleted.

I answer and acknowledge email in a timely fashion, if briefly, when pressed for time. I look forward to your responses to my work and to being useful after the assembly as you and your students reflect on the information and music presented. You may send messages with germane subject lines to me at: *scott@cattailmusic.com*.

The First Rock 'n' Roll Song

As you might expect, this is hard to pin down.

Ignoring the little known earlier recordings that presaged the dawning of the Rock era, the leading contenders for the title of First Rock 'n' Roll Song are commonly considered to be:

- Sister Rosetta Tharpe, *Strange Things Happen Every Day* (1944)
- Roy Brown, *Good Rockin' Tonight* (1947)
- Jackie Brenston, *Rocket 88* (1951)
- Bill Haley, *Rock Around The Clock* (1955)

All of these recordings show the marked influence of Black musical choices and tastes and they all have significant African retentions: parts of traditional African culture and music that survived the slave trade's dreaded 'Middle Passage' and flourished in the New World.

Of these, it is the 1951 hit *Rocket 88* that generally takes the prize. It is a 12-bar Blues influenced by several earlier paeans to this particular model of Oldsmobile.

Rocket 88 went to the Number One slot on the newly minted Rhythm & Blues Charts in 1951.

The song is credited to *Jackie Brenston & His Delta Cats*, a band thrown together in Clarksdale, Mississippi by the 19-year old Ike Turner. The *Delta Cats* rehearsed right in the heart of the Delta in Clarksdale's Riverside Hotel.

The Riverside Hotel backs up on the Sun River and was formerly the old Negro Hospital on the Black side of Clarksdale. It is there that the great Blues Diva and entertainer Bessie Smith bled to death in 1937 after being badly injured in a traffic accident just outside town.

Rocket 88 was recorded by Sam Phillips in the studio that would soon become famous as Sun Records. Phillips discovered and recorded Howlin' Wolf, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash.

Sister
Rosetta Tharpe

88
ROCKET 88
JACKIE
BRENSTON

Bill Haley & The Comets

In his newly christened Sun Records studio in 1952, Phillips declared, "If I could find a white man who sings with the Negro feel, I'll make a million dollars."

He did.

Elvis Presley, walked into Phillips's Memphis studio for Sun Records in 1954.

> ***"If I could find a white man who sings with the Negro feel, I'll make a million dollars."***
>
> *– Sam Phillips, Founder of Sun Records*

Time Lines for Rock 'n' Roll History

There are many timelines for the development of Rock 'n' Roll available on line, some stretching from the earliest years of sound recording to the present. But the style became commercially viable and then dominant starting in the mid-1950s.

Here are a few points of reference.

1950s – Early Rock 'n' Roll

Sam Phillips founds Sun Records in Memphis.

- Fats Domino, Little Richard, Big Mama Thornton, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddly
- Elvis, Buddy Holly, The Everly Brothers, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash
- Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Jerry Lee Lewis

Early 1960s – Rock 'n' Roll

Berry Gordy starts Motown Records in Detroit, MI.

Siblings Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton found STAX Records (STewart/AXton = STAX) in Memphis, featuring integrated bands recording Memphis Soul, Funk, Gospel, Jazz and Blues.

- Booker T. & the MGs, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding,
- The Shirelles, The Supremes, Roy Orbison
- James Brown, Jan & Dean, The Beach Boys, Little Stevie Wonder
- The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Yardbirds, Cream

African Retentions

Some elements of American music come from Europe, some were indigenous to the Native Americans, and there are a number of elements from Africa, as well.

The African elements are recognized as African *retentions* – a term of art for parts of African tradition that survived the 'Middle Passage' and remain present and vibrant parts of African-American and American music and culture today.

African retentions commonly found in American traditional and popular music include:

- **Call & Response** is a structure rooted in communal singing in which a solo call is answered by a group response – adapted to include instrumental responses in Delta Blues, a change that led to the musical conversations' evident in Jazz, Black (and subsequently, White) Gospel, Rock 'n' Roll, Heavy Metal guitar solos and much more.

- **Rhythmic Variation** is used as an expressive element in much the same way that European musicians vary harmony and melody for expressive effect. African musicians vary meter and beat sub-divisions (especially 3:2 contrasts) in a complex layering of simple rhythmic patterns to create highly complex sound scapes.

- **Syncopation** involves the stressing rhythmic pulses off the established beat---an extension of the rhythmic variations that drive African-American music and dance styles.

- **Emotional Singing** which can include shouting, crying, screaming and other speech sounds not typically found in European singing prior to the 1950's and 60's, when African-American based vocal styles began to be heard more widely and crossed the color line to be employed by white performers. [In your mind, compare Julie Andrews and Aretha Franklin; Perry Como and Ray Charles; Pat Boone and Little Richard, etc.]

- **Timbre/Tonal Variation** within the voice of the singer or an instrument. Tonal variations to engage the emotions of the listener play an important roll in African-based musical cultures. The employment of distortion and the incorporation of a noise element (with loosely nailed bottle caps or ring-fans on the lead drums [djembe], for instance), as well as, the shift in timbre between a chest voice, falsetto or a more nasal, facial resonance all become expressive elements to be employed and varied according to the instincts and skill of the performer. Each shift awakens a different emotional response in the listener.

Even the youngest students can identify these African retentions when they are explicitly presented to them. Kindergarten students have readily brought in music from home that demonstrates some of these African characteristics.

Additional Listening: Genres that show African retentions include *Country, Gospel, Heavy Metal, Hip-Hop, Jazz, Rock, Folk, Bluegrass, Rhythm & Blues, Soul, Contemporary Ballads, Reggae, Ska, World Beat,* and *Funk.*

Program Notes

In *Before Rock 'n' Roll*, specific songs are played in the course of demonstrating musical and cultural ideas. In this section, we'll elaborate on those songs, ideas, and their history.

1. When You've Got A Good Friend (*Robert Johnson, 1936*) This is a classic example of the 12-bar Blues structure, featuring an AAB lyric form where the first line is repeated a second time to a different harmony and the verse is tied up with a line that features an end rhyme with the A line. The now familiar Blues shuffle rhythm is one of the signature figures of Delta Blues*

Robert Johnson

The young Blues guitarist and singer Robert Johnson was one of the first performers to adopt and move these figures from Blues piano onto the guitar.

Johnson recorded 29 different songs in a series of recording sessions in 1936 and again in 1937. He died at the age of 27 in 1938, with eleven 78 rpm records in print. Through his live performances and recordings, Johnson had considerable impact on other Blues performers of his day.

A selection of Johnson's music was re-issued in 1961 on vinyl LP as *Robert Johnson: King of the Delta Blues Singers*. The recording quickly fell into the hands of young English rockers, influencing the development of the music of Eric Clapton with The Yardbirds and Cream; The Rolling Stones, and Led Zepplin, among many others.

The fusing of Blues and Rock 'n' Roll in England in the 1960s was made easier because the legal and social barriers that Black musicians and professionals faced there were lower than they were in the United States. The remarkable British Blues/Rock 'invasion' of the mid-1960s owed a great deal to American Blues recordings and to live performances by musicians who toured England and could play integrated white clubs and larger concert halls.

In the US, these same musicians were consigned to what was known as the *Chittlin' Circuit,* a loosely strung together trail of Black clubs, theatres, and juke joints stretching across the South.

Additional Listening: *T-Bone Walker, Muddy Waters, David 'Honeyboy' Edwards, Johnny Shines, Big Bill Broonzy.*

**The Mississippi Delta is a term of art referring to an ancient Delta – a leaf-shaped plain of alluvial deposits stretching from, as has famously been said, "The lobby of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis to catfish row in Vicksburg" (Mississippi). When we talk about Delta Blues, we are talking about the musical conventions and styles that developed in this very particular region of Mississippi and Arkansas. (The contemporary Mississippi River Delta is at the mouth of the Mississippi River where it opens into the Gulf of Mexico, nine hours by boat downstream from New Orleans, Louisiana.)*

2. Somebody Woke Me Up This Morning (*Public Domain*) This unaccompanied spiritual illustrates simple call-and-response structures that use echoing of partial lines to involved the audience.

I first learned this song from the singing of James Burrell, who, in addition to being the groundskeeper and handyman at a Presbyterian camp I attended when I was young, was a preacher in his home community. I later worked with Rev. Burrell. He was the first great black singer I was close to and his impromptu performances remain important touchstones of my musical education.

It is important to take note of the social impact and hope engendered by making music that has call-and-response as a foundational structure.

Music built this way is *inclusive*, rather than *exclusive*. Rather than keeping the audience out, it welcomes the audience into the music. There is room for everyone to join the band.

It is also significant to see how music and singing together can change the feeling in a room. It can usher strangers, friends, or colleagues into a kind of social harmony by lowering social barriers.

Music employing call-and-response gives us something positive and entertaining to do *with* each other, rather than *to* each other. This was an important part of music's social importance in its cohesive free home cultures in Africa and remained an important role for the music in the enforced and fragmented slave cultures of the New World.

Additional Listening: *Precious Lord Take My Hand; The Old Rugged Cross.*

3. Slow Down Chariot, Let Me Ride *(Public Domain)* Call-and-Response is often commonly expressed with a *set refrain* (in this case, *Let Me Ride*). A refrain is a line that is repeated. In this case, the refrain is 'set', meaning it doesn't vary.

I first heard and learned this song at a service in a Black church outside of Ahoskie in eastern North Carolina, in the winter of 1987.

Like the classic *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, this song is about conveyance, about traveling somewhere, about leaving where you are and, perhaps in some sense, about leaving your troubles behind.

Before freedom came, and even after the Civil War in the Jim Crow South, for Blacks to move about like this was variously illegal, dangerous, and threatening to the established segregated social order. It created fear in both Black and White communities.

In the *coded speech*[†] of the Black community, these songs of conveyance were, at the same time, spirituals and political/freedom songs associated with the Underground Railroad. They expressed the general yearning of people held in bondage to escape the suffering involved in living, not only in this mortal plane, but also in Southern slavery.

[†] *Coded Speech is a way of using language to mask its primary meaning and was commonly employed by Blacks, slave or free, to hide information from the dominant White culture. The vast majority of American slang has always had its origins in Black speech.*

Additional Listening: *Gospel Train is Comin' (Get On Board, Little Children); Follow The Drinkin' Gourd; Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.*

4. U Can't Touch This *(M.C. Hammer, 1993)* For twenty years, I have been citing this song as a good example of an African retention operating as a vital part of contemporary music.

When I call out (by singing the riff that Hammer sampled from the tracks of the great funk-master of the 1970s, Rick James), even K-3 students, who were born 15 years after the song was a hit on the radio, have always given me the unsolicited response, *Can't Touch This.*

This song has such long 'legs,' in my opinion, because we can all feel like it's *ours*. There is room for us in the work. You get eight beats into the riff and you know what to do, you know when to do it, and you can join the band.

This is powerful evidence of the vitality and persistence of African ideas in American music and culture. The usefulness of these ideas in creating socially open music continues to reinforce their place in American popular culture.

5. The Big Stars Are Falling *(Tampa Red, 1930s)* This is a reprise of the 12-bar Delta Blues style song and shares many elements with the first piece, Robert Johnson's song *When You've Got A Good Friend.*

After participating in echoing parts of lines or singing a set refrain, we come back to this opening style of Blues with new ears for how this conversation in the music (call-and-response) is suddenly expressed – not between my voice and the voices of the audience – but between the call of my voice and the instrumental response of the guitar.

All the lead guitar playing in Rock 'n' Roll, Country Music, or Heavy Metal and all the solos in Jazz are rooted in this call-and-response vocal tradition out of West Africa when it is adapted to the dance halls and juke joints[‡] where the Blues were played and an instrument 'talks back' to the voice. In a very real way, the guitar solo and replies in the music are saving that open structure of call-and-response. If anyone in the audience wants to reply, there is musical room for that. If they don't, we've got it covered.

6. Another Man Done Gone (Vera Hall, 1937) This is an old slave-era song passed down to Vera Hall (1902-1964) from her mother who had been born a slave in Alabama.

[‡] *Juke joints were gathering spots, generally outside the hearing of Whites, where Black musicians, dancers, and listeners gathered. The word 'juke' (also spelled 'jook' in the Black community) is thought to come from the West African word 'joog.' There, joog means to agitate or shake about. Juke joints were often impromptu dance halls sometimes nestled in the 'froggy bottoms' between the levees and the Mississippi River, in a kind of geographic and social no-man's land.*

Ethnomusicologist John Avery Lomax met Vera Hall in the 1930s in Livingston, Alabama, less than twenty miles from the Mississippi state line. He recorded her for the Library of Congress.

Hall was born in Payneville, just outside of Livingston in Sumter County, Alabama.

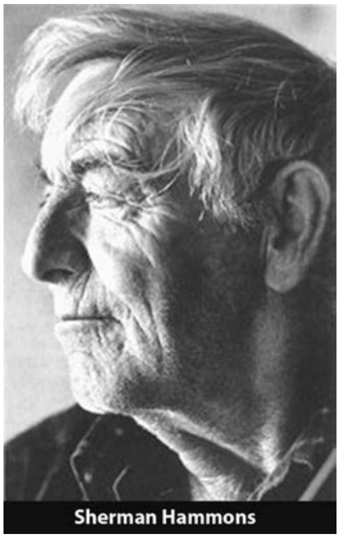
Hall sang her entire life, learning *Another Man Done Gone* and spirituals such as *I Got the Home in the Rock* and *When I'm Standing Wondering, Lord, Show Me the Way* from her mother, Agnes, and her father, Efron "Zully" Hall. But, it was not until the late 1930s that Hall's singing gained national exposure through the Lomax recordings.

Hall considered *Another Man Done Gone* to be a Blues piece and always felt like she had every right to sing both Blues and Gospel pieces.

Her church brethren did not always agree.

Hall's unaccompanied singing of this song was the only music chosen for a 1937 Library of Congress ceremony commemorating the 75th Anniversary of Lincoln's signing of the *Emancipation Proclamation.* (Signed by the President on September 22, 1862, the proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863.)

7. Sugar Babe *(Public Domain)* In 1972, I learned this banjo song from the playing of Sherman Hammons (1903-1988), a white mountain musician in the high country of Pocahontas County, West Virginia.



The fretless gourd banjo I travel with is an African-style instrument with a dried gourd for the body and a calfskin head. It is strung with nylon or gut strings (rather than the more common metal strings) that give it a distinctly plaintive sound.

Often referred to as a 'banjar' in early writings, white scholars and musicians have long thought our banjo to be derived from an African instrument. We have early descriptions, drawings, and paintings of the banjo in African hands.

And now, after nearly 200 years of conjecture and circumstantial evidence, we now know for a fact that the American banjo is a relative of a traditional African instrument: the *akonting* or *ekonting*.

In the mid-1980s, a traditional musician and MBA-educated Gambian, Daniel Jatta, chased down the relationships between both the structure and playing styles of the *akonting* a traditional instrument of the *Jola* tribe and the American 5-string banjo.

A Dutch musical researcher heard Daniel Jatta speaking on this connection and wrote a long article profiling Jatta and the Akonting for *The Old Time Herald*, a journal devoted to Old-Time music published in Durham, NC.

The Akonting is a three-string version of the American banjo, which during the heyday of the Minstrel show in the early 1820s had only four strings – the short drone string on top of the neck and three melody/chording strings below it.

A fifth string was added to the banjo late in the 19th Century in America, but the added string is not what is known as 'the 5th string' on contemporary instruments. The short drone string, known today as the 5th string, has always been a part of the instrument and is integral to its structure and playing. The fifth string that was added to the banjo in the early 19th Century was a chording/melody string that runs the entire length of the neck.

Additional Listening: More material on the Akonting can be found on line at:

http://www.oldtimeherald.org/akonting/index.html and
http://www.myspace.com/akonting

You can also search *YouTube.com* and find Daniel Jatta, Sana Ndiaye, and other akonting players demonstrating and performing on these instruments. You will see their picking hands doing what Sherman Hammons and other elderly, white mountain musicians taught me in the 1970s. They are playing in a style that is known here in America as *claw-hammer*.

8. Keep Your Lamp Trimmed and Burning *(Public Domain)* Another song that I play on the fretless gourd banjo, this spiritual uses the metaphor of trimming the wick on a kerosene lamp (so that it won't burn up the wick and smoke up its glass chimney or the house) as a way of urging listeners to tend to their own business and, as the song says, "see what the Lord has done."

There are many versions of this song in circulation. It has long been a favorite of Blues and slide guitarists. The last half of each line can function as a 'response' in the call-and-response tradition, as can the closing line 'see what the Lord has done.'

This spiritual also presents a good example of a melody built entirely out of the minor pentatonic scale commonly heard in West African music.

The minor pentatonic scale[§] has long been the source of melodies in the Black communities of the American South. Many Blues and Gospel songs employ this minor five note African scale for melodies and use European instruments and harmonies for accompaniments: marrying important elements from the two most important source-cultures for American music.

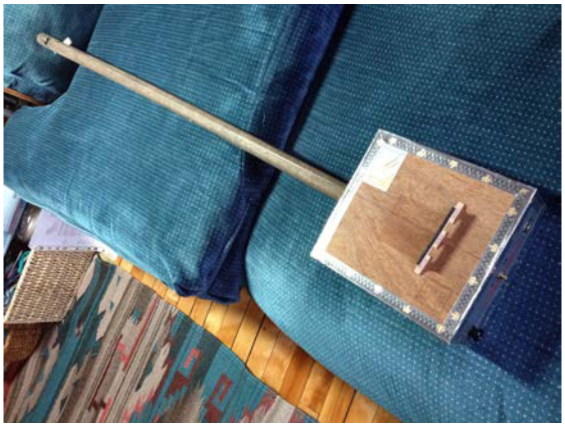
[§] *Ex: E-G-A-B-D*

9. Rollin' and Tumblin' Blues ('Hambone' Willie Newbern, ca. 1929) Another 12-bar Blues, here played on the sort of homemade one-stringed cigar box guitar that often served as the first instrument children of sharecroppers would rig up on their paths toward becoming musicians.

OKeh
ELECTRIC
FOR BEST RESULTS USE OKeh NEEDLES
8679
Singing With Guitar
ROLL AND TUMBLE BLUES
(Newbern)
HAMBONE WILLIE NEWBERN
(402306)
© MADE AND PAT'D IN U.S.A. JAN. 21-13 AND RE. 16588
OKEH PHONOGRAPH CORPORATION, NEW YORK

In the mid-1980's, I started to visit elderly black musicians in eastern North Carolina. These Blues and Gospel guitarists and singers played electric guitars when I met them. But, when I asked these elders – who were born between 1900 and 1930 – what their first instruments were, nine out of ten of them would say they first played a cigar box guitar.

Often strung with a piece of broom wire (or a single strand of screen wire fished out of the porch door), these elementary, homemade contraptions were gateway instruments.



Many fine traditional blues and gospel musicians grew up in rural, sharecropping settings where "cash money," as they said, was scarce. And if they wanted to make music, they flat out had to make the instrument they were going to make the music on!

There are prototypes for these one-stringed instruments all over sub-Saharan central West Africa, where the vast majority of America's slaves were kidnapped, stolen, or purchased for removal to the New World.

Instruments like these were likely the first stringed instruments built and played by African people in this hemisphere. And the musical roots of jazz, blues, funk, hip hop, and rap can be found here on this unassuming little instrument.

The cigar box guitar is a simple one-string instrument played by moving a slide along the string to change the pitches. For the slide, a piece of metal or glass, a folded up pocket knife, dried pork rib, or hambone would do.

Sometimes instruments like this were simply built on the sides of outbuildings or houses with a long piece of fencing wire. These would generate a great low note and set the entire building to vibrating. Many of the rhythms that we find expressed in Rock 'n' Roll and contemporary Country music are derived from the rhythms played on these elementary instruments made of whatever was lying around.

These instruments are known by a lot of different names across the Black South. In the Carolinas and Virginia, they are known as *cigar box guitars*, or *one-strings*. In Mississippi, I've heard them called *jitterbugs* (probably named after the dance, not the other way around) or a *pick-tar* (following a Southern pronunciation of GUI-tar).

In Georgia, they go by the distinctive name, *diddley bow*.

The *Diddley Bow* was the source for both the stage name of Bo Diddley, and also inspired the custom-made, rectangular shape of his electric guitar.

Additionally, the rhythms that Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry were playing and recording from the early 1950s on, come very readily off simple one-stringed instruments like this.

Additional Listening: *Who Do You Love; Maybellene (Why Don't You Be True?).*

10. Step It Up And Go *(Fulton Allen, aka Blind Boy Fuller, 1936)* This is a fine example of the regional Blues of Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida as recorded in the mid-1930s in Durham NC.

Blind Boy Fuller

Though still a 12-bar Blues, the style of the music is distinct from Delta Blues, and is widely known by three different names: *East Coast Blues, Piedmont Blues,* or *Ragtime Blues.*

The unmistakable influence of the piano music of Scott Joplin (1868-1917) on this style of Blues tells us something about the popularity of Ragtime music in the early 20th Century.

In 1900, Joplin published his first big hit, *The Maple Leaf Rag*. And in the initial two years of the 20th Century, a million copies of his sheet music were sold. A Million!

With just over 76 million people counted in the U.S. Census of 1900, roughly one out of every 76 people in the entire nation had a copy of this sheet music on their piano and was learning how to play it.

With a little over 317 million people in the US today, in order to have that level of penetration in the population, a musician would have to sell more than four million copies of their work (and the vast majority of those would be sound recordings, which require no skill, nor investment of time on the part of the owner, to be enjoyed).

The popularity of these ragtime rhythms and chord changes affected the dance and song styles on the East Coast in ways that they did not impact the more geographically, socially, racially, and economically isolated populations of the Mississippi Delta, where the older, more African accompaniment styles still held sway.

By the mid-1940s, following the end of World War II, Ragtime Blues was almost entirely supplanted as a popular music by Chicago and Texas Blues, styles derived by electrifying and urbanizing the musical styles preserved and protected for so many decades by the isolation of the Mississippi Delta.

But, as late as the 1980s and 90s, when I was visiting elderly musicians in the Carolinas, Virginia or Georgia, it was mostly Ragtime Blues that they played for me. Rather than disappearing, the music had held on in the houses and on the front porches of elderly Blacks, and its influence and sounds were taken up by early Country artists and can still be found in various Country music recordings today.

With its distinct boogie-woogie bass part, *Step It Up and Go* is a song about knowing when to get out of the way – when to leave a situation. This remains a very fine skill to have.

Additional Listening: *Reverend Gary Davis; Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee; Barbecue Bob; Guitar Gabriel; John Dee Holeman; Thomas Burt; George Higgs.*

11. The Walkin' Blues *(Robert Johnson, 1937)* Recorded most famously by Robert Johnson, this song introduces rhythms of the work songs used by slave, penitentiary or sharecropping laborers.

In Sub-Saharan, central West African cultures (from which most American slaves were pulled), there were songs to accompany almost every repetitive, daily activity: harvesting, grinding corn, washing clothing, walking, carrying fire wood, threshing wheat…

It was natural for work songs to be transferred from the harsh physical environment of Africa to the harsh social and physically abusive environment that awaited Africans caught up in America's slave-based economy.

These songs were used to coordinate communal labor tasks and to lighten the psychological burden of repetitive tasks, while providing some social interaction and relief from the isolation such labor can require.

Recorded as *My Black Mama* by first generation Blues musician Eddie 'Son' House in 1932, and popularized as *The Walkin' Blues* by Robert Johnson in his 1937 recording, this song has its roots squarely in the African-related work song traditions of the American South.

The Walkin' Blues also presents a strong example of the kinds of rhythms employed in what are known as *Axe* or *Chopping Songs* – used to pace and to coordinate any overhead swinging motion in gang labor situations, whether driving railroad spikes, chopping logs, or even chopping weeds out of the young cotton rows.

Multiple men wielding axes (or swinging sledgehammers) at the same targets could get dangerous in a hurry. But the priority was laid on getting the work done quickly, not safely.

Black life was cheap[**] after the Civil War and in leased convict labor settings that persisted legally in the South up into the 1940s (and that persisted informally in pockets across the South right up into the 1960s and the Civil Rights Era).

Workers had to protect themselves and each other. And they did it with songs.

The rhythm of these work songs could coordinate their chopping and possibly get everyone to the end of the day, safe and sound. The songs also could pace how fast or how slow the work would proceed, within the relative safety of the chopping they coordinated.

This is how it worked:

The music has four beats per measure. The downbeat, the first beat, was left empty and the workers would sing the pick-up notes from the measure before leading up to that unsung downbeat. Say you would chop on beat #1 and then sing through beats 2, 3, 4. Then your partner would chop on the next downbeat, alternating as you go through the song to safely accomplish the task at hand.

In the *Land Where The Blues Began* DVD that compliments the book of the same name by Alan Lomax, one can hear and see demonstrated this type of songs at work.

From the infamous Mississippi State Penitentiary *Parchman Farm*, there were written accounts of four convicts, all armed with axes, chopping down one live oak tree, working in alternate pairs.

You wouldn't want to replace one of these guys without teaching him the song.

This way of organizing a song (with an unsung, strongly accented downbeat), moved up into Rock 'n' Roll, contemporary Country, and Heavy Metal music on the back of this one particular song, *The Walkin' Blues*.

In this one piece, we can hear the vestiges of this old work song rhythm and the roots of Rock 'n' Roll.

[**] *By 1830, slaves represented the single largest financial asset in the United States, more than all the manufacturing and transportation service sectors combined. Prior to the Civil War, A healthy Black male slave would cost roughly $900-1,400 (according to the calculator at http://westegg.com/inflation/infl.cig, the lower $900 figure is the equivalent of $15,295 in 2012 dollars). After the Civil War, a convict could be leased for $9/month with no up front purchase cost or investment. Convict Leasing, common across the South, was one of the unanticipated consequences of ending slavery. It caused the economic investment and value of a Black life to Whites to plummet from around $1000 before the war to zero. Convict Leasing in the South continued from 1865 until 1942, when, fearing the propaganda use of the practice against us by the Japanese and the other Axis powers, the last bastion of convict leasing was broken up at FDR's direction in Birmingham's steel and coal industries.*

On Line Resources for the Classroom

On iTunes:

Old-Time Mountain Music: Compare versions of the fiddle tune *Soldier's Joy* by *Fiddle Fiddle Fiddle* in the Northern Style on their album *Turkey in the Straw*, with the version in a Southern, more highly-Africanized style, by the iconic *Tommy Jarrell* on his *The Legacy of Tommy Jarrell* CD.

Work Songs: Recordings of Son House's *My Black Mama* can be compared with versions of *The Walkin' Blues* by Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Bonnie Raitt, myself, and others.

Spiritual and Gospel Music: Compare the version of *Wade In the Water* by the Badgett Sisters of the North Carolina mountains in an old spiritual singing tradition (where clapping, moving the body, and percussion were strictly forbidden), with the more physically active and liberal version by The Staple Singers on their *Freedom Highway* CD.

Also, in memory of the loss of Dr. King to a sniper's bullet in Memphis on April 4, 1968, may I recommend *Precious Lord, Take My Hand,* sung by Mahalia Jackson[††], the song she sang at King's funeral.

It is worth knowing that Jackson was also with Dr. King on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial for the great March On Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August of 1963, when King give what we now call his "I Have A Dream" speech. Jackson is the one who can be heard to call out (as Dr. King was reading from different prepared remarks about America giving Black citizens a promissory note that had been returned to them marked 'insufficient funds'), "Tell them about your dream, Martin. Tell them about your dream."

Thankfully, he did.

African Rhythmic Retentions: Listen to *Jin-Go-Lo-Ba* by African master drummer Olatunji and compare it with *Jingo* by Santana.

Also, you'll enjoy *Hey, Hey (Indians Coming*) by The Wild Tchoupitoulas (Mardi Gras Indians from New Orleans, on a self-titled album featuring the Neville Brothers and the Funky Meters).

On YouTube.com:

12 Bar Blues Backing Tracks: Are available on *YouTube.com* in a variety of keys and settings, both major and minor for free streaming in the classroom. Search *YouTube.com* for "SulliBackingTracks."

[††] Notice that the rhythms of the piece float and Jackson's phrasing is entirely free, the piano player is following her carefully, not pushing or confining her with any conventional notion of pulse or meter. The emotions of each line are freely expressed as the singer leads the accompanist through the song, decidedly not the other way around. Jackson's longtime collaborator and accompanist was the remarkable Mildred Falls.

EX: *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIUNr6cF09k* 12-bar in A Major

EX: *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubLHalA53ck* 12-Bar in A minor

The Akonting/Banjo connections: Look up *akonting* or *ekonting* using an internet or *YouTube.com* search. You will find Daniel Jatta and Sana Ndiaye, among others.

Old-Time Music: Search for *Tommy Jarrell: Let Me Fall (1983)*. This is a fine example of young and senior old-time musicians playing together, recorded three years before Jarrell's passing. (Full disclosure: I'm on this recording, playing on a track with Tommy Jarrell.)

Folk Archival sites: Alan Lomax's *American Patchwork* collection can be accessed at:

http://research.culturalequity.org.

A number of videos of African music and dance may be viewed at:

http://www.folkways.si.edu/video/africa.aspx

Also, my friend and colleague, the late Mike Seeger introduces and performs *Walkin' Boss*, a song that Thomas Clarence Ashley learned from black railroad workers. This is a good example of how low the barrier was between black and white musicians when it came to the music, at least:

http://www.folkways.si.edu/explore_folkways/mike_seeger.aspx

Other Resources for the Classroom

Books:

Deep Blues: A Musical and Cultural History of the Mississippi Delta *(Robert Palmer, 1982)* A highly readable, anecdotal tour of the Delta's geography, personalities, customs and history told from a musician's perspective.

The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America *(Nicholas Lemann, 1992)* The best analysis of America's own Black Diaspora that took place between 1940 and the early 1960's. Lemann follows specific Black families out of the deep South and into the urban North with remarkable insight and compassion. A classic of contemporary history, this book is vivid, heartfelt and features a brilliant analysis of the social, political and cultural forces at work.

Roll, Jordan, Roll *(Eugene D. Genovese, 1976)* A comprehensive interdisciplinary examination of "the world that the slaves made". This book presents an eloquent look at black and white power dynamics in the slave period and the forces they set loose in Southern culture and society.

Slave Nation: How Slavery United The Colonies and Sparked the American Revolution *(Alfred & Ruth Blumrosen, 2006)* An impressive documentation of slavery's role in drawing Southern states into the Revolution, following on a 1772 legal ruling in England rejecting slavery as an insult to British Common Law traditions – a ruling that all slave holders knew would eventually apply, not only to Britain, but to all her colonies.

Understanding that Americans fought two wars to protect the institution of slavery will change how we see ourselves and our place in the world. In early drafts of the Declaration of Independence the document read: *All men are born equally free and independent…* This was changed by Thomas Jefferson to *All men were created equal…* in order to prevent any implication that slaves would or should be freed.

Robert Johnson/At The Crossroads *(Scott Ainslie, 1992)* Guitar transcriptions, annotated lyrics, historical introductory notes to each of Johnson's songs and a biography highlight this ground breaking work on Mississippi's most famous blues legend. Praised for its scholarship, as well as the accuracy of its transcriptions, this book has a place on the book shelves of historians and musicians, alike.

Rising Tide: The 1927 Flood of the Mississippi and How It Changed America *(John Barry, 1998)* This is another epic cross-disciplinary study of events in the Mississippi River valley that stretches across two centuries and multiple cultures. It is one of the most influential and readable books I have enjoyed in the past decade.

Discography:

Roots 'n' Blues *(Columbia/Legacy)* White and Black roots for American Blues including Old-Time mountain string bands, early Country, Gospel, primitive Blues, Cajun music, and early Rhythm and Blues.

Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings *(Sony/Columbia)* All 41 surviving takes of the twenty-nine songs recorded by this Mississippi Blues legend in the 1930's. Upon their re-release in 1961, this music literally changed the direction of Rock ‘n’ Roll through the work of Eric Clapton, The Rolling Stones, Led Zepplin, and others.

Other artists:

Deep South/Delta - Chicago: *Son House, Muddy Waters, Blind Blake, Jimmy Reed, J.B. Lenoir, Bukka White, B.B. King, Leadbelly.*

Upper South/Eastern Piedmont: *Rev. Gary Davis, Blind Boy Fuller, Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee; Libba Cotton and Etta Baker (NC); W. C. Handy, Vera Hall, Johnny Shines (AL); Blind Willie McTell, Peg Leg Howell, Barbecue Bob (GA).*

Magazine Articles:

North Carolina Blues, Parts 1 & 2 *(Living Blues Magazine, February and April, 1993)* Profiles of living blues musicians from all across the state, a valuable resource! Available from Living Blues, University of Mississippi, University, MS 38677.

Interview: Scott Ainslie *(Acoustic Musician, October, 1995)* An interview that exposes much of the background and social context of blues and addresses some of the issues that Blues music faces today.

Videos:

The Land Where The Blues Began *(Alan Lomax)* An unequaled video introduction to the American musical and cultural background of Mississippi Delta Blues (a companion to Lomax's book by the same name).

Searching For Robert Johnson *(with John Hammond)* A video tour of the Delta with blues artist John Hammond, Jr. as your host, that examines some of the haunts and, then surviving, acquaintances of this blues legend.

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