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Swamp Blues: Race And Vinyl From Southwest Louisiana

Evelyn Levingston Malone
University of Pennsylvania, eowens@sas.upenn.edu

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Swamp Blues: Race And Vinyl From Southwest Louisiana

Abstract
The swamp blues have lain in the margins of music history despite foundational, if brief, contributions to 1960s popular music broadly and British blues-rock specifically. The canon is not stylistically unified, but organized around a musical sodality from the independent record industry of Southwest Louisiana between 1954-1966. Why has this regional music been forgotten, and why are the few traces of its history all overseas? Through an investigation of the postwar industrial and economic forces that reshaped the South Louisiana cultural territory into a Southeast-Texas-and-Southwest-Louisiana musical byway, this dissertation reveals how migrations of African-American workers and a “Crawfish Circuit” of nightclubs heightened musical exchanges across the region. Influenced as much by New Orleans’ piano-driven r&b as Texan guitar blues, the swamp blues represent a cultural third-space beyond the more popular Zydeco and swamp pop local arenas. Poppy, sophisticated, grooving ensemble r&b by Charles Sheffield, Katie Webster, Lionel Prevost, and Slim Harpo, late-era downhome blues by Lightning Slim and Juke Boy Bonner, and transitional r&b that encapsulates both sides from Guitar Jr., Big Chenier, and Lazy Lester came out on Excello and Goldband Records. The music trades alternately in notions of downhome authenticity and hip urbanity, the anticommercial and the big-league professional. Under the black-white binary aegis of the postwar record industry, non-Creole African Americans here made trendy records with vast market appeal, all sourced from Louisianian musical crossroads and material, and in so doing, harnessed essentialist ideas about black American identity to commercial ends. Few swamp blues musicians had virtuosic talent, so history has instead honored the genius of two white independent record producers, J.D. Miller and Eddie Shuler. Their watermark follows the swamp blues overseas, where a British fanbase buoyed the Jay Miller legacy especially. I consider how, across different spaces in time, the placedness of black musicians’ bodies has influenced varying interpretations of the swamp blues. I argue that the unconventional “regional” swamp blues beg a revaluation of both blackness in Civil Rights-era Southwest Louisiana, and the accepted racial and ethnic segregations of sound found there that exclude the swamp blues from standard narratives of local music history.

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SWAMP BLUES: RACE AND VINYL FROM SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

Evelyn L. Malone

A DISSERTATION

in

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Supervisor of Dissertation

___________________________________

Guthrie Ramsey

Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Term Professor of Music

Graduate Group Chairperson

___________________________________

Carol Muller, Professor of Music

Dissertation Committee

Emily I. Dolan, Gardner Cowles Associate Professor of Music, Harvard University

Salamishah Tillet, Associate Professor of English and Africana Studies
For my sweet Louisiana, may we treat you better.
This dissertation stands on the shoulders of many giants, whose affection, commitment, and faithfulness to Southwest Louisiana music has been a luxury and a joy to learn from. I am most thankful to the musicians who experienced, practiced, conceived of and created, continually worked on, collaborated, and sought to document this masterpiece of a sonic repertoire, which is furthermore such a singular cross-section of American history. The interests and efforts of researchers like John Broven, Mike Leadbitter, Bruce Bastin, Simon Napier, Mike Vernon, Paul Oliver, Chris Strachwitz, Ray Topping, Ian Saddler, and Martin Hawkins have been nothing if not a Godsend to this and any work on the swamp blues. So much of what I have learned about the swamp blues has been a function of enamored listeners, whose joyful thumbprints have accrued across history’s archive of this music. Thank you especially to John Broven, for validating the project in its earliest days, and for generously wanting to read the work even in its earliest, ugliest forms. Thank you to Shane Bernard, for making inroads in a field that has so much yet to be done, and for welcoming me into your field with friendship and encouragement. At the University of Louisiana-Lafayette Center for Louisiana Studies, thank you to Mark Dewitt for enthusiastically meeting with me over nothing in particular and everything at once, and to John Sharp for your shared archival fervor and encyclopedic knowledge of the material.

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ABSTRACT

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Evelyn L. Malone
Guthrie Ramsey

The swamp blues have lain in the margins of music history despite foundational, if brief, contributions to 1960s popular music broadly and British blues-rock specifically. The canon is not stylistically unified, but organized around a musical sodality from the independent record industry of Southwest Louisiana between 1954-1966. Why has this regional music been forgotten, and why are the few traces of its history all overseas? Through an investigation of the postwar industrial and economic forces that reshaped the South Louisiana cultural territory into a Southeast-Texas-and-Southwest-Louisiana musical byway, this dissertation reveals how migrations of African-American workers and a “Crawfish Circuit” of nightclubs heightened musical exchanges across the region. Influenced as much by New Orleans’ piano-driven r&b as Texan guitar blues, the swamp blues represent a cultural third-space beyond the more popular Zydeco and swamp pop local arenas. Poppy, sophisticated, grooving ensemble r&b by Charles Sheffield, Katie Webster, Lionel Prevost, and Slim Harpo, late-era downhome blues by Lightning Slim and Juke Boy Bonner, and transitional r&b that encapsulates both sides from Guitar Jr., Big Chenier, and Lazy Lester came out on Excello and Goldband Records. The music trades alternately in notions of downhome authenticity and hip urbanity, the anticommercial and the big-league professional. Under the black-white binary aegis of the postwar record industry, non-Creole African Americans here made trendy records with vast market appeal, all sourced from Louisianian musical crossroads and material, and in so doing, harnessed essentialist ideas about black American identity to commercial ends. Few swamp blues musicians had virtuosic talent, so history has instead honored the genius of two white independent record producers, J.D. Miller
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INTRODUCTION

The music issuing from Eddie Shuler’s Goldband Records in Lake Charles, Louisiana and J.D. Miller’s recording operations in Crowley, Louisiana between 1954 and 1966 is the object of my study. Shuler’s swamp blues came out first on Folk-Star and later on Goldband; Miller’s tester label was Feature, and after 1955 he leased most of his rhythm and blues to Excello records, although he also ran several imprints of his own. What little has been written on the swamp blues generally mentions Excello and Jay Miller, Eddie Shuler and Goldband, and mistakenly, Baton Rouge, in the same breath. In this work I aim to remap the swamp blues territory, fan out the surprising, global breadth of its story, contextualize it as a non-folk, consciously commercial product of Southwest Louisiana, and recomplicate the simplistic, parenthetical treatment it has received in most discussions of Louisiana musics in history thus far.

In each chapter, my discussion centers on the practice of place, each specifically exploring how the creation, expression, reception, and legacy of the swamp blues changed as the places and time in which the music was in practice changed. I focus on the swamp blues as what it represents, and how it is represented, changes across various media over roughly three decades. In Chapter 1, the medium is cultural capital, variously harnessed and erased to construct ideas about heritage and identities proper to Southwest Louisiana. In Chapter 2, the conversation on heritage carries over into a consideration of the
swamp blues as recorded music product from the golden age of the independent record studio, and as such, the golden age of recording the Swamp Blues, which was from about 1955-1962; they were fundamentally commercial in nature, engineered for certain parties and demographics. In Chapter 3, I trade the lenses of place and time to examine different social functions enacted by the swamp blues in public white spaces in Southwest Louisiana and Southeast Texas along a corridor I call the “Crawfish Circuit”. Last, in Chapter 4, I meditate on three different large-scale ways in which the swamp blues bore meaning thanks to its transliteration into the written word in the U.K. This process that began reconstructing the swamp blues into verbiage in 1962 launched a new life for the music under the umbrella of the blues “revival”. I divide the discussion of the swamp blues in Britain thematically, examining three different manipulations of the swamp blues in the hands of first, folklorists, which I frame as the archeological “British Blues Revival” and second, counterculture youth, which I frame as a politically-motivated “British Blues Movement”. Third, I discuss a transcendental detachment from black persons and black experience that was superimposed on the swamp blues in Britain, and how the music and its musicians became a consumable precursor to the demigods of British blues-rock in a momentary “British Blues Boom.”

Among these discussions, I aim to highlight the huge specter of the musician/engineer dynamic in each iteration of these swamp blues. In Chapters 2 and 3, it is in live studio performance in 1950s-60s Louisiana, where the
engineers’ hand was most active; in Chapter 4, it is on record and written word in 1960s-1970s England, where some of that engineer’s shaping became synonymous with—or surrogate for—the musician’s identity. Lastly, closing Chapter 4, it is in the American and European blues appreciation tours of the 1970s-1980s, where musicians were expected to reenact that engineer’s vision from decades past, in a vision of the swamp blues and the swamp bluesman which audiences had in the meantime absorbed from the record, memorized, and were now commissioning performers to replicate.

**The Rule of Golden Eras**

Because of these fluxes in the history of creation and reception of the music, settling the notion of a “golden era” for the swamp blues poses an interesting dilemma whose mapping can serve as a subtext to this dissertation’s organization outside of strictly unilinear time. As received and perceived from different times and places, the swamp blues had four conceivable golden ages. Chapters 2 and 4 map directly to golden windows, as I enumerate below; Chapter 1 gives context to the rest, and Chapter 3 reveals some of the overlaps, multiplicities, movements, and disconnects that messy up attempts to bridle the swamp blues into a singular story at all. Now to the golden eras: The first was a golden age of recording the music (Chapter 2); the second, a notably separate window of American commercial success. The third is a window where the swamp blues most directly benefitted their creators (Chapter 4)—a time of paid, live appearances, mostly overseas, that had the most financially direct and profound effect on swamp blues musicians. The fourth and final golden age is an
extended one of widespread availability of swamp blues recordings, in which we are seeing resurgence today.

The golden age of recording the swamp blues (Chapter 2) was 1955-1962. J.D. Miller achieved his signature sound thanks to a studio in the back room of his M&S Electric storefront, until 1961 when he lost the lease and had to move his store. The studio moved into an attachment he built on the side of his house. The sound changed, and he never achieved the “natural” reverb and group balance of the original one-mic studio, even if the musicians, house instruments, gear, and his direction and quality control did not change.

Perhaps the greatest outside determinant of success for Miller’s blues records was his relationship with Excello, whose Nashville-based mail order network distributed his swamp blues all over the South, aided by the 50,000-watt WLAC radio station that previewed those records. Himself responsible for what many considered and still refer to as the “Excello Sound”, the dissolution of the mutually beneficial relationship between J.D. Miller and Excello in 1966 sealed the door on two codependent eras within five years: the hey-day of Miller’s Crowley operations ended, and for Excello, who lost Miller’s reliably constant stream of solid blues records. As for Eddie Shuler, he said given the rise of soul and the decline of interest in rhythm & blues, that after 1963, blues artists simply stopped knocking on his door looking to record. I visit this era of prolific recording, and the next window of heightened record releasing, in Chapter 2.
The years swamp blues artists achieved the greatest American pop music commercial success were 1959-1967. Thus we have a second “golden era”, this time for American popularity. It is interesting to note that these two periods—first, when the best swamp blues records were made, and second, the window of time when the swamp blues came closest to being in the zeitgeist—barely overlap. Just as Excello records were making inroads on the r&b charts, in 1961, J.D. Miller moved to the new studio, and at the culmination of several years of pay dispute with Slim Harpo, in 1966 in a one-two punch, Miller both lost Harpo to Excello and ended his relationship with the label. In Lake Charles, Shuler had meanwhile lost interest in recording the blues by mid-1963, perceiving a shift in the market, and was instead recording—and promoting—mostly Cajun and swamp pop. Despite Miller and Shuler’s gradual abandon of the blues in the early sixties, it was in January 1966 when the most famous of the swamp bluesmen had the biggest hit of his career: Slim Harpo soared to the top of the *Billboard R&B* chart with his crossover hit “Baby, Scratch My Back”. It hit #1 on the *R&B* chart, #16 on the pop *Hot 100*, then hung tight on both charts for over three months.\(^1\)

Slim Harpo was the exception, however, as the only swamp blues musician to hit the national charts. Success for most swamp bluesmen meant regional popularity, especially for records out of Goldband that did not have the added benefit of nationwide broadcast that Excello’s connection with WLAC afforded Miller. Popularity or favor among local deejays radiated outward to live bookings at white clubs, and college or outdoor parties. Those performances might in turn

\(^1\) Excello 45-2273-A; Whitburn 2008, 127.
sell some records. So, when the British contingency came knocking in the late
sixties to invite semi-retired and former swamp blues players to join European
blues tours, many were quick to accept.

Thus began a third “golden era” (Chapter 4), from about 1968-1972, where
the incomes and performance opportunities of these musicians experienced
immediate and noteworthy increases. This window hovers around the 1970
height of the “rediscovery” era of blues musicians. They were playing again,
stateside and abroad, and for the first time, for ticket-purchasing audiences. The
commercial package tours had begun in 1962 with the biggest names: T-Bone
Walker, John Lee Hooker, Willie Dixon, Sonny Terry, Memphis Slim. As that
supply of “living legends” exhausted, smaller-market bluesmen, such as these cult
favorites from South Louisiana, got tapped for the job—Whispering Smith,
Lightning Slim, Juke Boy Bonner—starting in 1969. These musicians, who were
invited on the basis of their classic swamp blues recordings from the recording
window of 1955-1962 I mentioned above, had long since left Shuler, Miller, and
Southwest Louisiana. Juke Boy Bonner, who had recorded at Goldband earlier in
the decade but was living and recording in his native Houston, played the
American Folk Blues Festival tour of 1969 with the zydeco patriarchs Clifton and
Cleveland Chenier. Jay Miller artists Lightning Slim and Whispering Smith
reunited to play it in 1972, spurred in part by Lightning Slim’s “rediscovery” in
Pontiac, Michigan in December 1970, and subsequent performance at the
Chicago Folk Festival of January 1971.
The last, but perhaps most hopeful window is a golden age where the music is most widely available on record. Several reissue campaigns were started at the close of the mega-production blues festival era as the mostly-British blues illuminati realized what was at the precipice of being lost. Furthermore, the swamp blues generation was losing its most iconic players: Slim Harpo had died suddenly in 1970, Lightning Slim and Hop Wilson in 1974 and 1975, and Juke Boy Bonner in 1978. Reissue specialist labels like Ace (UK), Flyright (UK), Arhoolie (US), Blue Horizon (UK), Blues Unlimited (US), Storyville (DNK), and Sonet (SWE) opened up to put out compilation LPs and anthologizing, multivolume LP series to commemorate, conserve, or otherwise champion the music of lesser-known and under-rewarded blues artists.

British researchers had by this time thoroughly raked the attics and back rooms of independent record producers across the American South, and their probing inquiries on personnel, back catalogues, and timelines spurred label owners like Miller and Shuler to take stock for the first time. This is when Shuler created Goldband’s first full inventory catalogue to enable retail reissues, at first mediated by the Brits, and later, on his own. The result was a series of “Collectors Item” Goldband albums in the mid-1970s. Flyright started issuing its single-pressing Legendary Jay Miller Sessions series in 1976 and capped their last volume at number fifty-seven in 1989, when they switched most of their operations to CD.
On paper, this stream of swamp blues double-LPs, remasterings, and reissue albums trickled off at the end of the 1980s when their labels shut down one by one. One could therefore align this fourth window with the definitive LJMS series, framing it from 1976-1989; however, as the twenty-first century approached, twenty- and twenty-five-song CDs could deliver more quantity than LPs, and furthermore digitally clean-up low-fidelity masters. A new crop of CD box set-oriented labels turned their interest to the old Goldband and Excello materials, and the swamp blues flowed again. Ace and Flyright continued their catalogues of the Goldband and Miller-Excello materials in CD format, revisiting and expanding prior LP releases. First Rhino, then AVI (as “Excello”), then Hip-O did Excello reissues of increasingly good quality (poorest with Rhino; best with Hip-O) from the eighties to the early aughts. Goldband got mainstream exposure to a certain demographic when the monolith “budget compilations” specialist Collectables Records did a three-CD *The Goldband Blues Collection* for distribution at retail warehouse clubs Sams Club, Costco, QVC, and their oldies.com flagship in 2009. The audiophile collectors’ contingency got the most recent Excello fix when the high fidelity “collectors’ record label” Bear Family Records put out an historic five-CD compendium on Slim Harpo in 2014.

**Chapter Overviews**

In Chapter 1, I discuss the larger economic circumstances in Southwest Louisiana that made Miller and Shuler’s studios inevitable midpoints in the state. Following the recent work of cultural geographer Thadious Davis (2011), I consider Southwest Louisiana (SWLA) as the cultural always-already in between,
and the particular alterity of black bodies in this subsection of the Southscape. My exploration of the cultural neutrality of Southwest Louisiana, as compared to the rich and deep Acadian and Creole adjacent cultures, is supported by three case studies of musicians whose music was shaped by the multiplicity of experiences that I argue the swamp blues inhabited. In particular, I explore their use of a “voodoo” faux-Caribbean aesthetic to stretch the boundaries of blackness in Louisiana, and establish their Southwest Louisiana-based identities as thoroughly American.

Chapter 2 explores genre divisions given to Louisiana popular music in the 1950s and 1960s, and the propagandized constructions of “Cajun” heritage of the 1970s and 1980s that contributed to the erasure of the swamp blues in the cultural landscape as these blues lacked footing in the French tradition. I consider the extent to which a scholarly, and legislated Cajun pseudo-heritage compelled South Louisianians to consume it, and how held against the inherent commercialism of the electric swamp blues, the music worked against its own dissemination as an authentic cultural product.

Chapter 3 revisits the furrowed byways introduced in Chapter 1 within the Golden Triangle and Southwest Louisiana, within which J.D. Miller’s complex in Crowley and Eddie Shuler’s in Lake Charles became convenient and frequently accessible midpoints within the social and musical promotional circuit of nightclubs that I call the Crawfish Circuit. My emphasis is not just on the multiple places where musicians encountered music and countered musical
tradition, but additionally I stress the importance of the movement between these places, in diurnal back-and-forthness articulated by their bodies. I argue that the swamp blues mark a collection of inhabitations of Cajun, Creole, and American blacknesses native to Southwest Louisiana.

My final, Chapter 4 visits the swamp blues as they existed overseas in the second half of the twentieth century. The swamp blues largely would lack a legacy if it were not for their circulation in England, where journals, periodicals, distribution deals, and reissue labels were for a while their sole repository. But in the hands of researchers, collectors, fanatics and re-interpreters, I examine how the swamp blues became a poised blues artifact, in turn reshaped and differently consumed by a British white middle-class. I explore three iterations of “revival” as I see it: the British Blues “Revival” as a collecting craze rooted in a fundamentally folkloristic impulse (Karl Hagstrom Miller 2010), its development into a British Blues “Movement” wherein a generation of youth simultaneously retained its subcultural status while appropriating and regurgitating the swamp blues into the British mainstream. Last is the British Blues “Boom”, which I frame as an explosive moment of live performance for the swamp blues and the height of its mainstream currency, which, like any explosive, died out quickly and without fanfare as the blues magazines, festivals, and supporters who championed it themselves died out too.

**Methodology**

Three great unpublished resources inform my research. First are Eddie Shuler’s papers, the Goldband Recording Corporation Collection, which have
been housed at the Southern Folklife Center (SFC) at the University of North Carolina since 1995. J.D. Miller’s music was more successful and his producing skills have been more highly touted than Shuler’s, and as such, there is more availability of writing on the so-called “Crowley blues” than there is on Goldband. The paucity of in-depth coverage of the Goldband blues makes the SFC collection all the more important, as it is the sole repository of Shuler’s twelve years of correspondence with Mike Leadbitter, some thirty-five linear feet of acetate recordings, and all of the Goldband business records including artist contracts, marketing materials, and clipped scraps of press coverage.

My grasp on J.D. Miller’s operations come in large part from the serialized fieldwork performed on the record sleeves of the fifty-five-album LJMS produced by Flyright from 1976 to 1989, which I discuss in further length in Chapter 4. These albums were released in Europe and Great Britain alone, and though many of the individual songs have appeared across reissue CDs over the years, the treasury of album sleeve notes that include artist’s accounts of the sessions that were on the original LPs have not.

Last, the Center for Louisiana Studies (CLS) archive holdings of historical, anthropological, and academic inquiries into SWLA’s recording history at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette has been a boon to my understanding of the lay of the land. Shane Bernard and John Broven gave me permissions to access their papers and recordings, which included a goldmine of taped interviews with not just Eddie Shuler and J.D. Miller, but also Katie Webster, Warren Storm,
Harry Simoneaux, and swamp poppers Tommy McClain and Phil Phillips. Longtime fixture of the Baltimore blues scene Larry Benicewicz’s insightful, and at times comical, recordings of Eddie Shuler and son Wayne provided a wonderful presentation of Shuler’s take on his own career. Shuler’s monologues were interspersed with interjecting feedback from his son who alternately straightened out Shuler’s accounts of history, and illuminated shared aspects of personality between father and son. This revelation of personal motivations, in turn, elucidated the nature of Eddie Shuler’s treatment of others and of particular interest to me, his treatment of the black blues artists whose voices on this history have failed to be heard. These shoptalk recordings also clarified and contextualized some aspects of Eddie Shuler’s business dealings and decisions.

The online universe of long-term cult fandom of the swamp blues has been a surprising resource in this dissertation. Unpublished, non-academic, and with its own share of pitfalls including the obvious shaky reliability, this vox populi domain is a tentatively useful source for historical facts, which I discuss below.

“Fieldwork” in the SWLA Swamp Blues

A few things about the inherent nature of the swamp blues have benefitted my fieldwork. First, as an inherently constructed music—contrasted most simply against roots or community-developed music—in situ concerns about swamp blues music-making are not as relevant to the swamp blues as they would be in other “regional” blues studies. By nature, the swamp blues are tied to the recording studio. In fact, almost every facet of the swamp blues is deeply entwined with the studio as (1) a host for creative and rote labor between
culturally adjacent workers (black Creoles, non-Creole blacks, white Cajuns, and non-Cajun whites) under the influence of white, profit-driven, Texas-raised entrepreneurs in the age of segregation. The studio also figures as (2) a site of cross-pollination between musical styles, commercial song-making behaviors, and business procedures. Therefore, the presence of the recording technology (cognizant historical documentation) that is an obstacle for so much vernacular musical study is here the essential kingpin around which every other part of the swamp blues’ existence pivots. The constructedness of the swamp blues, as a product of independent record studio circuitry in SWLA, rendered the music, its actors, and its process self-documentary. By their nature the swamp blues were, in a large way, an instantaneous time capsule. The vast repertoire of blues recordings from J.D. Miller and Eddie Shuler’s studios, then, represent an extraordinary wealth of primary source materials for study. The result is a three-decade (1951-ca. 1981) audio-log.

Second to the inherent record(ing)ed history of the swamp blues is the nearly contemporaneous written-word histories and interviews from the Blues Unlimited cohort, followed by others at Melody Maker, Blues & Rhythm, Jefferson, Blues Access, Juke Blues, and other European blues circles. Together, this written record constitutes the small but tightly knitted library of published materials on the swamp blues, from original blues magazine stories and snippets (Blues Unlimited, Block, Blues Revue, Blues Access, Offbeat, Blues & Rhythm, Living Blues, Juke Blues) to pamphlets from Mike Leadbitter and the Blues
Unlimited team, and the eventual full monographs from those same authors. A new generation of publications came out in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which I discuss below.

A third and last readymade source for data collection is a vast online community of “obscure” blues fans. In this most recent, and ever-deepening quarry, are some websites laser-focused on the music of greater New Orleans and Louisiana (Monola (France), Home of the Groove blog (US)). Other websites have become institutions themselves, being multi-tiered, sedulous, years-long and ongoing considerations of an array of blues styles that includes the swamp blues corner. Two primary goldmines of “raw” data that have become research resources in their own right are Stefan Wirz’s expansive American Music database (Germany), which appears in the sources lists of most every other study of obscure blues from the 1930s on is on his personal website. Second, The Cosimo Code blog centers on New Orleans’ legendary blues producer Cosimo Matassa, the first, and central figure of Louisiana’s independent record producing “industry” and in whose studio J.D. Miller produced his first record. More discographical websites focused on indie label American rhythm & blues are Global Dog Productions (US), Pete Hoppula’s Wang Dang Dula (Finland), Both Sides Now Publications (US), and Gérard Herzhaft’s Blue Eye blog (France).

Exemplary “audio blogs” that inform a new generation of swamp blues fans by

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2 Monola is an acronym for its self-explanatory focus on “La Musique de New Orleans et de la Louisiane.”; Home of the Groove states its purpose is to feature “rare, hard to find, often forgotten, vintage New Orleans-related R&B...”. It is run by Dan Phillips of Lafayette, Louisiana, host of the “Funkify Your Life” radio show on the local NPR affiliate KRVS.

discussing the musical recording, contextualizing it in history, and compare it to other niche records are the *Don’t Ask Me...I Don’t Know* blog (NL), *Be Bop Wino* (UK), * Uncle Gil’s Rockin’ Archives* (based in Sweden but hosted in French and English), *In a Blue Mood* (US), *Wired for Sound* (US), the funk and soul-oriented *Funky Sixteen Corners* (US), the non-discriminating *So Many Records, So Little Time* (US), and many, many more. Gérard Herzhaft, the French musicologist, encyclopedist, blues historian, and former librarian, has effected a personal record label within his bilingual blog, with multiple self-fashioned album series of niche blues styles and “Complete Recordings” anthologies, each with its own French-language, followed by English translation, liner notes, cover art, and complete personnel and recording data.

From vested institutions are companion blogs to blues radio shows or podcasts like Nick Spitzer’s *American Routes* (NPR), WFMU’s *Beware of the Blog* (listener-supported WFMU Jersey City, NJ), Jeff Harris’s *Big Road Blues* (WGMC Jazz90.1 New York), *Blues Syndicate* (RockRockRadio Spain), *Gulf Coast Highway: The Music of US 90* [podcast] from the Kennedy Center’s ARTSEDGE podcast series, and *Blues Unlimited—The Radio Show* [podcast].

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4 Many owners and authors of download blogs, for privacy or otherwise, do not publically publish their legal names or locations. The owners of the domains I’ve named above, in order, are Serge Tillard (monola.net), Dan Phillips (homeofthegroove.blogspot.com) Stefan Wirz (wirz.de/music/American.htm), John Broven, Peter Gibbon, John Ridley, and Red Kelly jointly (cosimocode.com, powered by Red Kelly’s music super-blog SoulDetective.com), Andrew Reid (GlobalDogProductions.com), Petri Hoppula (wangdangdula.com), Mike Callahan (bsnpubs.com), Gerard Herzhaft (jukgh.blogspot.com), Xyros Tweevijf (dontaskmeidontknow.blogspot.com), “BoogieWoody”[pseud.] of Scotland (bebopwinorip.blogspot.com), “Uncle Gil” [pseud.] (unclegil.blogspot.com), Ron Weinstock (inabluemood.blogspot.com), Andrew Brown (wiredforsound.blogspot.com), Larry Grogan (funky16corners.com), and Kevin Patrick (somanyrecordssolittletime.com).
Together these websites have become repositories and reference-points in their own right. Through them, those obscure blues recordings have become accessible (via streaming, sampling, and occasionally, providing windows of time for downloading) in an age where the originals and first-edition reissue LPs are extinct in stores. Instead, vinyl buyers of the last quarter-century have had recourse to almost exclusively virtual retail markets like eBay, discogs.com, 45notes.com, LPcoverlover.com, 45cat.com, recordsbymail.com, RootsandRhythm.com, and others.

Through them, too, those obscure blues have maintained long-term audiences of the boomer generation, reached new boomer audiences who had been on the periphery of the blues devotee community of the sixties and seventies, and found a new generation of fans. Some of these websites that focus on obscure blues music have transcribed or expanded upon similarly obscure blues discographical works on personal hobbyist websites.5 Yahoo and Google groups, many defunct, have straightened out personnel histories and timelines through Socratic method stretching back to the 1990s (Yahoo group “Prewar Blues”, Google group bit.listserv.blues-l). These email chains are the inheritors of blues magazine subscribers and correspondents. The most recent new breed of online attention to the swamp blues is state-sponsored support, in particular the growing KnowLa online encyclopedia of Louisiana history which has entries for “Slim Harpo”, “Louisiana Record Labels”, “Louisiana Rhythm and Blues music”,

5 Obscure label or artist discographies are at the heart of: Stefan Wirz’s American Music, Monola.net, bsnpubs.com, Wang Dang Dula, The Cosimo Code blog, and Gerard Herzhaft’s Blue Eye blog.
“Cajun Music”, “Zydeco Music”, and “Swamp Pop Music”, but as yet there are no other swamp blues musicians, nor an entry for the swamp blues, J.D. Miller, Eddie Shuler, or Goldband.6

Because of these three major repositories of swamp blues history—in decreasing reliability, vinyl, paper, and virtual—, performing a fieldwork of an under-documented music history amidst deceased blues players and a dead music scene became that much more feasible for me. The vinyl and paper media are each half a century old and bafflingly unmined by mainstream histories.

Authorial Presence

As a historian, my telling and consideration of history have the benefit of personal invisibility. Unlike the ethnographer, my person is not tangibly present, and that absence can invite assumptions of deceptive transparency. My presence as an interpreter of history is certainly on every page of this dissertation, though, and I would be remiss not to acknowledge the influence of my time and my situation within this (hi)story of the swamp blues. I was raised in SWLA, being first taught about local history and heritage (represented as blanket “Cajun”) within a public elementary school French Immersion program criticized for its import of Belgian teachers, and prescribed language planning curricula of the Académie française, as opposed to teaching elements of the Cajun French language that the program had been established ostensibly to preserve.

Since 1950, my hometown of Lake Charles has been demographically roughly 50% African American and 50% Caucasian, and its majority Christian

population has steadily been, reflective of German and midwestern migration, 50% Protestant, and reflecting French influence, 50% Catholic. Eddie Shuler’s Goldband, a name that was always vaguely familiar to me, was headquartered just beyond the interstate overpass and across the railroad track from my parents’ church. From the first presentations of the “rich” history of which I was supposed to be a product, the makeup of Southwest Louisiana was marked as having many pieces and parcels, and a nexus of races and cultural backgrounds. But the hegemonic institutional promotion of Cajun heritage overshadowed the visibly, audibly, physically present ethnic heterogeneity; the most glaring omission was the ignorance of the region’s African-American history. The story being told, compared to the inaudible stories, reified the divides between smaller populations ignorant of the others. There was a confusing under-dissemination of history and inattention to cultural wellsprings. There was a fantastic repertoire of boogieing, soulful, recordings built on the somewhat anachronistic combination of growling voices, barrelhouse piano, congo drumming, surfy electric guitar, and a fat bass from this dusty back street that had been cut in half by the interstate ramp. Worse, it seemed that everywhere outside of Louisiana were people who knew how great it was! Why has no one even heard of the swamp blues here? The absence of attention to prevalent black cultural products despite the great

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7 In the later decades of the twentieth century, with the growth of the petrochemical industry came an influx of international populations of engineers, chemists, and agricultural and ecological experts, mostly from Southeastern Asia. Growth in the Hispanic population coincided with post-hurricane rebuilding. New populations, in addition to the rise in citizens claiming multiple ethnicities, hedged demographic records. Those 50/50 black-white statistics gradually eked closer to 45%/45% where they are today.
prevalence of black culture—and history—locally is what ultimately developed in me, and hopefully many more of my generation, an infatuating fascination with the swamp blues.

**Literary Intervention**

I devote this last portion of the Introduction to the literary situation of this work. First, this dissertation is part of a wave of swamp blues-related projects that began in 2012 and has swelled in 2016. A documentary on Slim Harpo titled *King Bee: The Slim Harpo Story*, was announced in late 2015 from the Slim Harpo Music Awards foundation (Slim Harpo’s son’s 501(c)(3) non-profit organization) and Pal Productions (the production company belonging to one of its board members). The documentary was originally slated for release in 2016 or 2017, but currently postponed pending funding. Another documentary, the Canadian project *I Am the Blues* (2015) features Lazy Lester among ten other mostly octogenarian blues musicians “rooted in the genre’s heyday”. Its American premiere was at the South by Southwest festival in March 2016, followed by a series of screenings at various documentary and film festivals across North America in the months following.

The first full-length book on any aspect of the swamp blues came out in September 2016, a biography on Slim Harpo by veteran compiler and writer Martin Hawkins called *Slim Harpo: Blues King Bee of Baton Rouge*, with foreword by John Broven. Tom Aswell, a long-time music journalist and author of *Louisiana Rocks* (2010), has been working on a follow-up volume on the independent record producing scene of mid-century Louisiana and its relation to
radio since 2009. The next most recent work on SWLA music was in 1996, when Shane Bernard made a watershed intervention on the critical study of indigenous Louisiana musics. His *Swamp Pop: Cajun and Creole Rhythm and Blues* was the first academic argument to name swamp pop as a third indigenous music after Cajun and zydeco. Like my project is to the swamp blues, Bernard’s was the first full-length work devoted to the swamp pop genre. It is an exciting time in the rediscovery of the swamp blues, heightened furthermore by the zeal of a new generation of documentarians, programmers, writers, and other cultural creators.

Prior influential monographs that feature the non-Creole African-American popular music landscape of Southwest Louisiana are Mike Leadbitter’s booklets *Crowley, Louisiana, Blues* (Blues Unlimited 1968), *From the Bayou The Story of Goldband Records* co-written with Eddie Shuler (Blues Unlimited 1969), and *Nothing But the Blues* (Hanover 1971), a collection of interviews from the first fifty issues of *Blues Unlimited*. In book form are John Broven’s groundbreaking *South to Louisiana* (Pelican 1983), Rick Koster’s *Louisiana Music* (Da Capo 2002), Tom Aswell’s aforementioned *Louisiana Rocks!* (Pelican 2010), and Broven’s recent *Record Makers and Breakers* (University of Illinois Press 2009). Longtime journalist Alan Govenar’s *Texas Blues: The Rise of a Contemporary Sound* (Texas A&M Press, 2008) dedicates substantial space to the shared swamp blues terrain of SETX, and as such also includes discussions of several Goldband and Excello swamp blues musicians.8

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8 One of the most influential works to feature connective tissues between the consanguine New Orleans rhythm ‘n’ blues scene of the 1950s-1960s and the story of the swamp blues is John
On the discographical front, swamp bluesmen have been at the forefront of British interest from the earliest contact between those researchers and American producers. John Broven published discographies of Lightning Slim and Lonesome Sundown in *Jazz Statistics* December 1962 that were continued three months later by Mike Leadbitter in the second issue of the brand new counterpart

Broven’s *Walkin’ To New Orleans* (Blues Unlimited Books 1974, republished as *Rhythm & Blues in New Orleans* by Pelican 1978 and 2016). The rest of the essential New Orleans r&b bookshelf is Arnold Shaw’s *Honkers and Shouters* (Collier 1986), Berry, Foose and Jones’ *Up From the Cradle of Jazz: New Orleans Music Since World War II* (Da Capo 1986, ULL Press 2009), Jeff Hannusch’s *I Hear You Knockin’: The Sound of New Orleans Rhythm and Blues* (Swallow 1989) and his follow-up *The Soul of New Orleans: A Legacy of Rhythm and Blues* (Swallow 2001), Michael Smith’s *Mardi Gras Indians* (Pelican 1994), and Nick Sublette’s successful, if historically imperfect, *The World that Made New Orleans* (Lawrence Hill 2008). On the quantitative front, one of the earliest discographical researches into New Orleans R&B came from Ray Topping and Flyright Records in 1978, in the form of the 67-page booklet “New Orleans Rhythm and Blues Record Label Listings.” Another marker of increased interest and deepening attention in New Orleans’ rhythm & blues era, biographical attention to single musicians is also relatively fresh: on the early side is Dr. John’s autobiography written with Jack Rummel *Under a Hoodoo Moon* (St. Martin 1994) followed by Earl Palmer’s cowritten *Backbeat: Earl Palmer’s Story* with Tony Scherman (Smithsonian Press, 1999); *The Brothers* is a co-written autobiography – interview of the Neville brothers with David Ritz (Da Capo 2000). Rick Coleman’s 2006 biography of Fats Domino *Blue Monday* (Da Capo), Ben Sandmel’s *Ernie K-Doe: The R&B Emperor of New Orleans* (HNOC 2012), John Wirt’s *Huey “Piano” Smith and the Rocking Pneumonia Blues* (LSU 2014),


The rockabilly scene of North Louisiana has received attention for some years thanks to the famed *Louisiana Hayride* radio and television program that was the springboard for Elvis Presley’s career (hosting the infamous first television appearance of the artist and his hips), as well as hosting iconic acts like Kitty Wells, Hank Williams, Webb Pierce, Buck Owens, Jimmie Davis, Johnny Cash, Johnny Mathis, Jimmy Newman, Lefty Frizzell, and many others. The rhythm & blues community of Shreveport, however, has only recently been covered in book format, most notably by Kip Lornell and Tracey Laird in *Shreveport Sounds in Black and White* (University Press of Mississippi 2008), though *Blues Unlimited, Jefferson, Alley Music* and even *Billboard* had been writing on local record man Stan Lewis’ Jewel/Paula empire since 1968. See also Stephen Tucker’s 1995 dissertation ““Louisiana Saturday Night”: A History of Louisiana Country Music.” from Tulane University.
This issue also had Lazy Lester and Slim Harpo discographies by John Broven, and Guitar Jr. and Big Walter Price discographies by Mike Leadbitter.

New critical series abound on the latter-twentieth-century subjects of under-told or forgotten histories of regional black music-making, histories of black folk and roots musics within the popular music industry, their popularity and transformation among white audiences thanks to radio and record, and new critical directions in African-American cultures and musical studies of the American South. Duke’s Refiguring American Music series counts Karl Hagstrom Miller’s *Segregating Sound*, which helped to shape my thinking on the treatment of black music in the history of the commercial recording industry, and its inability to break through certain received notions of folk authenticity. Thadious Davis’ *Southscapes*, a critically trailblazing work on the subject of non-Creole blackness in midcentury South Louisiana, which is an important if not main theme of Chapters 1 and 3, is part of the New Directions in Southern Studies series from UNC Press. Ashgate’s Popular and Folk Music Series now issued

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11 A similar recent study to Miller’s *Segregating Sound* that focuses on the unnaturalness of the music industry’s racial divides from a literary perspective is Erich Nunn’s *Sounding the Color Line: Music and Race in the Southern Imagination* (University of Georgia Press 2015), which draws from the configuration of black and white musics in William Faulkner, W.E.B. Du Bois, and
by Routledge counts several dozen releases since 2000; the Music in American Life series from the University of Illinois Press and the University of California Press’s two American Crossroads and Music of the African Diaspora series have corralled over a hundred more such cultural studies. The stalwart blues-supporting Pelican Press, LSU Press, and the University Press of Mississippi continue churning out localized blues studies that have gradually pushed forward chronologically and today feature many on Civil Rights-era black music-making in the so-called Gulf South. Yet unpublished academic inquiries into these subjects have also proliferated in the past ten years. In 2005, Michael Francis Scully’s dissertation “American Folk Music Revivalism, 1965-2005” focused on Rounder Records and the “folk” in the music industry. Similar to my study of the roles of place (Chapter 1) and space (Chapter 3) in the swamp blues, for instance, is Emily C. Morry’s 2012 dissertation “‘I Too Sing America’: The Sense of Place in African American Music, 1920-1992”. Chapter 3 considers similar sociological subjects as Tyina Steptoe’s Houston-oriented dissertation “Dixie West: Race, Migration, and the Color Lines in Jim Crow Houston”, but where I build my

Jean Toomer. This title is from another wave of reconfigured cultural studies of the American South, this one “The New Southern Studies Series” from UGA Press. Other recent works comparing the arbitrary racial divisions of popular music history in other genres are Charles Hughes’ Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South (UNC 2015), and Ben Wynne’s In Tune: Charley Patton, Jimmie Rodgers, and the Roots of American Music (LSU 2014). David Brackett’s Categorizing Sound: Genre and Twentieth-Century Popular Music (UCLA 2015) connects similar issues, eliding Miller’s discussion of the role of the folklorist in creating racialized divisions in favor of a latter day discussion of why, and how the unnatural genre divisions—whether racial, ethnic, classist, or regional—matter.
discussion from a repertory of recorded music, Steptoe’s work is rooted in historic demographical and migration data and the legal history of race.\footnote{Steptoe, Tyina. "Dixie West: Race, Migration, and the Color Lines in Jim Crow Houston." Diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008.} \footnote{Where the subjects of the economy of black music-making, and the stagnant black body as a symbol for black American music, feature most prominently in my Chapter 4 consideration of the black body in England, and to a lesser extent in my Chapter 2 discussions of the manual labor of raced music-making in the independent recording studios of SWLA, few monograph-length works have been recently published on the subject as it figures in the vinyl era. One recent exception is the 2012 Unfree Masters: Popular Music and the Politics of Work from Duke’s Refiguring American Music series by Matt Stahl. Although its main focus is on labor studies of the twenty-first century, he lays out a lucid, and complex, map of the power dynamics at play and the economy of intellectual property under negotiation in the recording industry of my focus as well. Rich Cohen’s Machers and Rockers: Chess Records and the Business of Rock & Roll (Enterprise 2004), republished as The Record Men: The Chess Brothers and the Birth of Rock & Roll (Norton 2005), is a cornerstone in the literature of rhythm & blues producer-musician relationships. A similar study of the rise of the music business, authenticity debates, and musician labor, but in a white context, can be found in Diane Pecknold’s The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry (Duke 2007).} Increasing works on the concept of latter-century pop music revivalism generally and the black blues in Britain since 1945 specifically have also recently appeared. From the Ashgate and Routledge series I mentioned above alone (except where indicated), in the former category, this post-Lomax revivalism is the subject of Benjamin Filene’s Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and
American Roots Music (UNC 2000), and Remembering Woodstock (Ashgate 2004). The North American Folk Music Revival (Routledge 2007) compares the Canadian and U.S. iterations, and Play It Again: Cover Songs in Popular Music (Ashgate 2013) is arguably the first book of critical essays on that subject. The thirty-chapter The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival (2014) is a powerful new multi-faceted contextualization, as well as a theoretical and methodological resource, that examines the after-effects of music revival on social infrastructures not just in Europe and North American, but also in rarely discussed global revivals. Like my Chapter 4, this tome considers the important role of the intelligentsia and collector in setting the stage and tone of a music revival, and the quick ascription of “heritage” and “tradition” within those revivals.

Among the most frequently cited of the latter, British blues-focused category is Roberta Freund Schwartz’s How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom (Routledge 2007), which considers the how and why of British fascination and embrace of American blues in the 1960s, and its centrality to the profile—and identity—of English popular music. Other titles are The British Folk Revival: 1944-2002 (Ashgate 2003), Ulrich Adelt’s flipped dissertation Blues Music in the Sixties: A Story in Black and White (Rutgers 2010), the Neil Wynn-edited Cross the Water Blues: African American Music in Europe (UP Mississippi 2010) collection of essays, and a pair, Stan Hawkins' The British Pop Dandy: Masculinity, Popular Music and Culture (Ashgate 2009) and Martin King’s Men,
Masculinity and the Beatles (Ashgate 2013), that consider the extent to which English rockers embodied and rejected changing notions of masculinity, a concept partially received from the models of black bluesmen, from the sixties on.14 Most recently, Ronald D. Cohen and Rachel Clare Donaldson together wrote Roots of the Revival: American and British Folk Music in the 1950s (U. Illinois 2014), which compares the “twin” folkrevivals of the U.S. and the U.K. and grounds them in the Lomaxian exploration of the British isles that presaged the 1950s transatlantic movement(s).

Offering new methodologies for the study of popular music have been Allan Moore’s Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song (Routledge 2012), along with David Brackett’s suggestive Categorizing Sound (LSU 2014), and the homage and expansion to Simon Frith’s work, edited by Lee Marshall and Dave Laing, Popular Music Matters: Essays in Honour of Simon Frith (Ashgate 2014). Much of the above builds on a Tamara Livingston essay written nearly two decades ago, which in 1999 pointed toward a new wave in pop music studies, in “Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory.”15

Last, twenty-first century expansions on Adorno, and Bourdieu’s collecting fetish, cultural consumption, and their influence on the construction of self have appeared with reference to record collecting culture and the pop music canon.

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14 This The British Folk Revival title from Michael Brocken describes itself as “the very first historical and theoretical work to consider the post-war folk revival in Britain from a popular music studies perspective.”
Amanda Petrusich’s *Do Not Sell at Any Price* (U. Illinois 2008) is a study of a fandom of the obscure and the extent to which the materiality of the record can engender obsession, and Roy Shuker’s *Wax Trash and Vinyl Treasures: Record Collecting as a Social Practice* (Ashgate [2010] 2013). Meditations on the recent (white) academic attraction to such studies of popular music, and self-reflective considerations of that attraction include Steven Garabedian’s 2004 dissertation “Reds, Whites, and the Blues: Blues Music, White Scholarship, and American Cultural Politics”, and George Plasketes’ *B-Sides, Undercurrents, and Overtones: Peripheries to Popular in Music, 1960 to the Present* (Ashgate 2009), which uses the 45 rpm as a metaphor for patterns of creation and reception. This work dovetails a Petrusich-like study of the material with restorative histories in the vein of Elijah Wald’s *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock’n’Roll* (Oxford 2011), which is a pop musicologist’s Taruskin-like reconceptualization of received history.
CHAPTER ONE
CONTEXTUALIZING THE SWAMP BLUES: An Industrial, Social, and Spatial Geography of Southwest Louisiana in History

Doreen Massey stipulated that any study of the spatial must also include a study of the economy and its host society. This chapter follows this line of thinking in its consideration of the swamp blues, a regional music that is fundamentally tied to location, and that came from within an ideal economic bubble for mom and pop record labels there, as a music that affected, created, and materialized out of social spaces within that locale. In “regional” music, the identities, multiform and variously constructed, inhabited by musicians creating it are paramount to understanding that music. For black musicians in the middle of the twentieth century, systemic racism and the resulting permanent occupancy of lower social strata informs those identities such that formations of space, in-placedness, and geographical location are key to the nature and character of that social strata. Thus, my first chapter seeks to locate first and second, the non-geographical cultural territory within the scope of Southwestern Louisiana’s geological location as an oil-rich, water-bound and water-led collection of communities and economies, and the social and musical phenomena enacted by Southwestern Louisianian and Southeast Texan industries and economy.

Next, with the premise of these economic and historical forces, I conclude the chapter with a consideration of the production—musical and

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16 Massey 22-23.
vinyl—of the swamp blues as dependently bound upon the spatial forms and geographical specificity of this gulf coast region. It is important to understand that amidst all the discussion of this music as a fundamentally Southwestern Louisiana phenomenon, the swamp blues are not a generic musical classification, nor are they mappable to a community of musicians. Instead, the swamp blues connote an inhabitation of its non-Creole black actors at the interstices of multiple instantaneous configurations of cultural influences, experiences, kinetic memories, constructions and ideas of self, and people flows, all of them local.

Part I. Geography and Industry in SWLA, 1800-1950

Topographically, the state of Louisiana divides into two distinct halves: the northern uplands and the southern alluvial regions, popularly divided along the symbolic axis of Interstate-10. Timber, railroad, farmland, and oil outposts are to the Protestant North, while swamps, low-lying marshland, and rice crops are to the primarily Catholic South. Four thousand miles of aggregate waterways form a natural and navigable system that have greatly informed if not all but predetermined industrial activity potential for the state. The state’s northeastern side is carved out by the Mississippi River, the Pearl River squares up the southeastern quadrant, and Louisiana’s southern coast runs four hundred miles along the Gulf of Mexico.

Louisiana is bounded on the west by the Sabine River, which figures frequently in this dissertation, as the southernmost development of its ferries, then railroad and car bridges had crucial bearing on the cultural transactions between Southwest Louisiana and the expatriate Cajuns and Creoles who
populated Southeast Texas after the first quarter of the twentieth century. When I refer to “Southwest Louisiana” in this work, I mean the rectangular area that stretches from the Sabine River that divides Louisiana and Texas, through Lake Charles, and until Lafayette, itself the cultural and political seat of Louisiana Cajun culture. Just beyond Lafayette are the vast swamplands of the Atchafalaya Basin. Southwest Louisiana meanwhile radiates to the north and south outward from modern Interstate 10, down to the Gulf of Mexico. This total area encompasses the five modern parishes of Calcasieu, Cameron, Allen, Beauregard, and Jefferson Davis Parishes, which were formerly all part of the historic Calcasieu Parish, and are still referred to as “Imperial Calcasieu” as the area is unified geologically, economically, and culturally. The two Louisiana cities most important to this dissertation are Lake Charles, the seat of Calcasieu Parish, and Crowley, the seat of Acadia Parish. Both are situated on modern I-10 and the historic Highway 90.

The state has traditionally been divided into three major cultural subregions, as depicted in Figure 1 below: the Northern country above I-10, the Southwestern prairielands, and greater New Orleans. That Crescent City, which takes its nickname from its upward-facing crescent shape, is culturally cordoned off from other parts of the state by water: first, the snaking Mississippi River cradles the city in a rough U-shape. Second to the river is vast rural land to the west: the curling River Road leads out of New Orleans through Louisiana’s “River Parishes” and plantation country westward to Baton Rouge, which is eighty miles as the crow flies and about one hundred miles following the river. Lake Pontchartrain sits atop New Orleans as the
third largest enclosed lake in America, curtailing cultural continuity between New Orleans and points north into Mississippi.

Figure 1. Louisiana’s three major cultural Subregions. Courtesy Maida Owens, Louisiana Folklife Program.

Maps like the one pictured above are common among scholarly and popular discussions of Louisiana cultures. For the sake of my discussion, however, the east-west breadth of the southern cultural subregion reaches to far to the east. Namely, the capital city of Baton Rouge, located roughly halfway between New Orleans to the east and Lafayette to the west, may figure within the cultural “South Louisiana” in many ways, but in the fixing of the swamp blues in place and in history, it does not. Chapter 3 explores this issue in greater detail, but I will devote a brief moment here in the discussion of geography and topography in Louisiana to my exclusion of Baton Rouge as a cultural component of the swamp blues.

As water is a great cultural determinant in the state of Louisiana, it figures that the world’s largest wetland, the Atchafalaya Basin, would have a role in my configuration of the closer geographic focus of my study, Southwestern Louisiana. The Mississippi River carves a squirrely southeasterly path from Baton Rouge and New Orleans, with Baton Rouge
situated on the river’s east bank. So, geographically, like New Orleans from points north, east, and west, Baton Rouge too is separated from Southwestern Louisiana by water. Beginning almost immediately beyond the Mississippi to the west is the Atchafalaya Swamp, an uninhabitable 1.4 million acres of rivers, bayous, bald cypress swamps, marshes, bottomland hardwood forest, farmland, backwater lakes, lake outlets, and since the mid-nineteenth century lumber boom, important manmade navigation channels.17

Today the Basin is passable via the eighteen-mile Atchafalaya Basin Bridge, but it opened in 1973 and as such Baton Rouge did not have the direct path westward it has today to Lafayette, Lake Charles, and East Texas during the golden age of the swamp blues, from about 1955 to 1965. Instead, travel west from Baton Rouge was routed in an arc north of the Basin, along U.S. Highway 190, which once extended in about 1935 to East Texas connected Baton Rouge with the small town of Opelousas, where one could then head thirty miles south for Lafayette. Lafayette was the last east-west waypoint on U.S. Highway 90 before the highway turns south to curve under the Atchafalaya Basin. The routing of these highways, especially of U.S. Highway

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17 The Atchafalaya Basin, or the Atchafalaya Swamp, marks where the Atchafalaya River, a channel of the Mississippi, and the Gulf of Mexico converge. It is not entirely, but almost entirely uninhabitable, with much of its land being reserved for wildlife refuge. There are a handful of passable roads across the basin, all built on manmade levees, and the most important of those is the paired (parallel) Interstate 10 Atchafalaya Basin Bridge, which was built across eighteen miles of concrete pillars, and is the third longest bridge in the United States outright, and the second longest in the interstate system. Dredging for cypress opened up many navigable pathways in the basin during Louisiana’s lumber boom, but the greatest clearing activity in the basin occurred between 1960-1980, with heightened oil and gas exploration and development. The basin was (re)declared a spillway for the Mississippi in 1950 and channels were dug in it from then until 1974 to divert its own flow across the floodplain. Because the large access canals and channels were all built at the end of and after the period of my greatest focus, about 1955-1965, petrochemical activity in this central part of South Louisiana does not figure prominently discussion of industry activity in this dissertation.
between Houston and Lafayette, comprises a large part of my third chapter on the “Crawfish Circuit” of nightclubs where swamp blues musicians who had bands played with them, or sang alone with juke boxes, or toured as part of arrangements made by their agent-manager-producers Eddie Shuler and J.D. Miller.

**Lumber in Louisiana**

Lumber was Louisiana’s great industry after Reconstruction, and floated the economy until the trees ran out just before the Great Depression. The importance of timber in the state cannot be underestimated, as it was the first and greatest natural resource around which Louisiana could build such an early industry. White settlers had homesteads in Southwest Louisiana before the American Revolution, the city of Lake Charles’ namesake arriving around 1800 and joined by his family in 1802, and from the earliest accounts, lumber and water was what attracted them to the region.\(^{18}\) The first European

\(^{18}\) Upon white arrival in the late seventeenth century, bands of the Atakapas Native Americans had been living in southwest Louisiana and southeast Texas since, anthropologists believe, about the time of the birth of Christ. “Atakapa” is not how the tribal group identified themselves, but instead a Choctaw pejorative meaning “eaters of men” in reference to their practice of cannibalism. French, Spanish, and Anglo traders and settlers adopted the Atakapa (or Attakapa, Attacapa) name. Where estimates place about 3,500 Atakapas in Louisiana in 1698, only 175 remained in 1805, and nine were known in 1908. According to a 1917 report, disease from contact with the now-surrounding white settlers was to blame for the disappearance of the Atakapas. The last known residence of late-nineteenth century descendants were in Beaumont, TX and Orange, TX. (Dyer 8.) By the mid-20\(^{th}\) century, those two small towns were two parts of the “Golden Triangle”, an area comprised mostly of contract laborers for the surrounding oil, lumber, and shipbuilding industries between the port cities of Houston, Galveston, and Lake Charles. While Beaumont had a reputable Main Street and downtown, Orange had a reputation for an absence of cleanliness and civility, disorderly conduct, and nighttime vice. The last three Texan towns before the Louisiana border, Beaumont, Orange, and Port Arthur were frequent stops on the Crawfish Circuit, commonly visited, and sometimes inhabited, by swamp blues musicians. For more on the Atakapas in Southwest Louisiana before white contact, see Couser, Dorothy. “Atakapas Indians.” in *Handbook of Texas Online*. Texas State Historical Association. 9 June 2010. Web. See also the six-page 1917 published report on the Atakapas written for the library at Tulane University: Dyer, Joseph O. *The Lake Charles Atakapas (Cannibals): Period of 1817*
pioneers had, by and large, French last names: Martin LeBleu from Bordeaux, France, and Charles Sallier of Savoy, France settled the area that would become Lake Charles in 1770 and 1800, respectively. The changing of hands between Spain and France, in addition to the confusion of land grants from both countries, brought more French, and non-French settlers shortly thereafter: Reon, Moss, Ryan, Vincent, Rigmaid. After the Louisiana Purchase by the Americans in 1803 however, land grants were offered to American settlers coming from other southern states to guard the border against Spanish inroads. In 1803, the ratio of Francophones to Anglophones among the free population of Louisiana was 7:1. Once American, and especially once Louisiana achieved statehood in 1812, large migrations into the region drastically reduced the Francophone majority from 7:1 to 3:1, this ethnic diversification causing large shifts and rifts in the cultural landscape.19

From about 1824 onward, then, the names and cultures settling Southwestern Louisiana were increasingly Anglo: the names Choate, Iles, Johnson, Henderson, Kirby, Bryan, Praither, Pujo, West, Bilbo, Hodges, Barnett, Pithon, and Herbert families count among the first 2,000 inhabitants of Calcasieu Parish upon its founding in 1840. Although Calcasieu was later divided into five separate parishes, it was unified by industry through the twentieth century, taking the token name of “Imperial Calcasieu”.20

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20 Calcasieu Parish, founded in 1840, eventually begat Cameron Parish in 1866, and Allen, Beauregard, and Jefferson Davis Parishes in 1912. Even still, the whittled down Calcasieu was the state’s largest parish at fifty miles wide and thirty miles long. (Gremillion, n.p.)
In his 1954 dissertation “Lumbering in Southwest Louisiana: A Study of the Industry as a Culturo-Geographic Factor”, George Alvin Stokes says that in the 1850s, Lake Charles became “the first great center” for logging and lumber in Louisiana, supported by the natural lake (Lake Charles) that linked schooners transporting lumber down the Calcasieu River and to the Gulf of Mexico. Historical agricultural reports from 1949 and 1989 say the Calcasieu River and Sabine River watersheds, both approaching or adjacent to the town of Lake Charles, were home to the most productive virgin pine forests in the South, producing up to 30% more than the pine and hardwood forests to the east.\(^{21}\) This convergence of at least three waterways at Lake Charles also offered large expanses of shoreline for docking, loading, and other mill operations, all of which relied on waterways for transport until railroad overtook trade by schooner at the end of the century. Though other sawmills had been cropping up in Louisiana’s vast forests from the mid-nineteenth century, the largest economy at that time in Southwest Louisiana was cattle ranching, an effort begun by the Acadians, who expelled from their Canadian prairies in 1756 continued the practice in the prairies they found in South Louisiana. Lake Charles proper was too wet for successful ranching, so lumber industry developed there earlier than elsewhere. This early date, the two lakes the town sat on, and the rivers linking it to Galveston’s port in southeast Texas, and Mexico beyond, gave the town advantages in these early lumber, \(^{21}\) Stokes 12, Fricker 10; For a comparative of the productivity of Southwest Louisiana to lumber operations against other timber states, see also *The Timber Pines of the Southern United States* by Charles Mohr of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (1896) and with historical context, Michael Williams’ *Americans and Their Forests: A Historical Geography* (1989): 241, 264-7.
trading, and shipbuilding days. According to contemporary U.S. Department of the Interior reports, within three decades of opening its first mill, by 1884, Lake Charles was the “principal point of lumber manufacturing” in the state.

The Civil War slowed production down on all fronts save the construction of railways, which were needed for the transport of Confederate supplies. Those railways would be a boon to the lumber industry in Southwest Louisiana, which by 1870 had doubled its 1850s numbers. From the beginning, lumber and rail had great codependence and the history of their growth and booms coincide. At the beginning of the war, only 335 miles of rail track were laid in Louisiana. By 1880, when the first railroad was built in Lake Charles, the state had a 652-mile branching network whose length would increase eightfold over the next thirty years. The great Louisiana lumber boom (1880-1925) had begun in unison with the rail boom (1880-1910), just in time for the arrival of the “Michigan Men”, the first wave of midwestern immigrants who would change the face of Southwest Louisiana topographically and culturally, separating it from the rest of South Louisiana culture for good.

**Southwest Louisiana Culture turns Midwestern**

A handful of investors, mostly Midwestern or English, bought up large tracts of land in Southwest Louisiana where they laid road for their rail lines,

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22 For more on the history of settlement and industry in Southwest Louisiana, see the unpublished manuscript *Calcasieu Parish* by John Berton Gremillion, 1963. Located in the McNeese State University Archives. For a detailed examination of the face of the "Great Louisiana Lumber Boom" of 1880-1925, see Stokes, George Alvin. "Lumbering in Southwest Louisiana." PhD dissertation in the Department of Geography and Anthropology at LSU, May 1954. For a précis of the same, see Fricker, Donna. "Historic Context-The Louisiana Lumber Boom, c.1880-1925". Fricker Historic Preservation Services LLC.

and sent advertisements across the U.S. and Europe in a land immigration
scheme that called for farmers and mechanics to come tend the midwestern-
looking prairielands of Southwest Louisiana and the railroad running through
it. This generation of pamphlets advertising land in South Louisiana were not
unlike the many thousands of pamphlets that had circulated before them:
German settlers had been in Southwest Louisiana raising cattle since 1731. By
the land-grab of the 1880s,
Germans, Belgians, Midwesterners from Iowa, Michigan, and Illinois had
settlements all over. The population of Calcasieu Parish had grown to 12,484
in 1880 thanks in large part to the arrival of Anglo-American farmers from the
Midwest. For every decade between 1870 and 1910, the population roughly
doubled in Southwest Louisiana—and its culture was increasingly midwestern
instead of Louisiana French.24

Part of the post-Reconstruction Bourbonism across the (re)-developing
“New South”, whose pursuit was to “out-Yankee the Yankee” in vast industrial
development, the era of the “Great Louisiana Lumber Boom” was its second
wave, larger in scale and truly industrial compared to the early mills in Lake
Charles. It is important to note that since Lake Charles’ lumber production
began earlier than in other parts of Southwest Louisiana, the timber supply
was exhausted earlier, too. So while the “great” industrial phase of lumbering
lasted from 1880 to 1925 for most economies, the Lake Charles economy
moved on to port activity, rice cropping, and petrochemical development

24 Gremillion, n.p.; Ancelet 1237.; “Measuring America: The Decennial Censuses from 1790 to
fairly soon, as I discuss in a moment. Nevertheless, when the industrial lumber boom began in 1880, 85% of all Louisiana land was forest—roughly 22 million acres of mostly yellow pine—and Louisiana ranked thirtieth in the country for timber value. By 1900 it was tenth, and during the 1910s-1920s, Louisiana timber vied with Washington State for the highest dollar value on timber in the country. Lumber and rail, everywhere, were exploding.

It took just under fifty years for the wood to run out. By 1910, 50% of the virgin yellow pine in Louisiana was gone and industry experts were making calls to cap lumber production across the country. Millions upon millions of trees were eaten before 1930, and reforestation efforts and legislation had begun in 1904. The great boom years were followed by what Stokes said was a “peckerwood” mill phase, where industrial sites and sawmill towns were replaced by truck-hauling portable mills, since most patches of harvestable timber were served by roads by now. This phase of activity trickled down until the last of the mills died permanently around wartime.

Amidst the gangbuster timber and rail activity, sulfur had been discovered and produced near Lake Charles since 1869, in what came to be called the “Sulphur City”, shortened later by the postal authorities to

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25 Fricker 2-3.
27 Stokes 13; For more on the codevelopment of lumber and rail in Louisiana, see Stokes’ third chapter.; The true last sawmill at Longleaf, LA closed in 1969; the second latest mill closure, the near Natchitoches, had been in 1944. (Fricker 2.)
“Sulfur”. The production reached commercial quantities in 1894, and for the twenty years thereafter, Louisiana would supply nearly 75% of the nation’s sulfur, spawning an investors’ dream for the group of New York men who funded the operation. Their profits were so immense that it is said with the exception of the Ford Motor Company, no investment in the nation wrought more profit than the Union Sulphur Company from the mid-1890s to the mid-1920s.28 Southwest Louisiana industries, economy, and cultural makeup were diversifying.

**Discovery of Oil in Southeast Texas, 1901**

Meanwhile towns dotting the routes between port cities Lake Charles, Galveston, Corpus Christi, and Houston cropped up in Southeast Texas. Beaumont had been settled in 1835, and like Lake Charles fifteen years later and sixty miles to the east, Beaumont had an economy based in lumber and shipbuilding, farming, and other port industries. In 1858 Orange, Texas incorporated on the Sabine River, as the easternmost town in Texas before crossing the river to Louisiana. Port Arthur was founded in 1895 before becoming a seaport itself and starting construction on the man-made Pleasure Island. Then, on January 10, 1901, the Spindletop gusher blew oil for nine straight days, indicating the potential for oil production in the area and birthing a major industry overnight. The area between Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange became known as the “Golden Triangle” because of the riches they promised.

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Figure 2. Southeast Texas' "Golden Triangle"

To get to Houston from Lake Charles, one must pass through at least one of these towns, with Beaumont almost the halfway point: it is sixty miles west of Lake Charles, and ninety miles from Houston. Port Arthur and Orange are ninety and 113 miles from Houston, respectively, making Lake Charles much closer at just thirty miles to Orange and another thirty to Port Arthur.

The Golden Triangle first drew southwestern Louisiana workers in the mid-nineteenth century to jobs in lumber, shipbuilding, rice and shrimp farming, and oil and sulfur production. After the 1901 oil discovery, Anglo-American oil workers quickly began to arrive from Texas, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania, flocking to jobs and promises advertised in the Golden Triangle and not long after, into Southwest Louisiana. The growing Golden Triangle work-towns were not made up of just northern and midwestern workers, however. Freed slaves had begun settling on Beaumont’s south side, near the waterfront of the Neches River, after the Civil War. Racial tensions were a

29 Ancelet 1237.
mainstay in Beaumont thereafter, with echoes in Port Arthur, where after
dark, the muddy and unpaved main roads became racially charged
battlegrounds among patrons leaving saloons.

None of the Golden Triangle towns had auspicious beginnings, as the
lumber, then rail, and oil industries had brought unattached male workers,
with little domestic distraction or family, and nighttime off. The petroleum
boom coincided with the emergence of honky-tonks and saloons, and
eventually as the twentieth century got rolling, a nightclub touring circuit
arose.31

Lake Charles, the Port City

The Port of Lake Charles catalyzed economic activity in the Southwest
Louisiana area in three waves: first, with the growth of the lumber industry as
southern states rebuilt after the Civil War and followed immediately by the
rice boom of the 1890s and onward. The shallow waterways limited transport,
however, so a second economic boom began in 1915 once construction
finished on the Intracoastal Canal, which connected two thoroughfare rivers
that flanked the city. Between 1921 and 1925, the newly sanctioned Port
Authority enacted legislation, built infrastructure, and dredged, deepened,
and widened the area’s rivers to provide route from the Port of Lake Charles
to the Gulf of Mexico, establishing Lake Charles as an official port of entry to

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31 Texas blues historian Alan Govenar says that the race-based infrastructural failings of the
Golden Triangle towns were not matched in music-making and on nightclub stages in the
area, where workers played in integrated bands. (Govenar 367). After the war years, that
“Crawfish Circuit” opened up possibilities for part-time careers in live music, which I discuss
in Chapter 3.
the U.S. The city and Port both continued to flourish through the 1930s as oil began to provide an economic boost to the area, alongside the stalwart rice crops and the renewed lumber and cotton industries, even as nearby lumber-reliant areas floundered when saw and paper mill operations dried up, to the point of becoming ghost towns.

The outbreak of war in Europe sparked the third wave, around 1941, whereupon dozens of petrochemical companies built plants along the river, and increasingly diverse cargo traversed the Port—now including walnuts, tired, and resin. A contract with the U.S. War Department only further amplified Port activity with the storage and handling of military cargo thereafter. By the beginning of this dissertation’s main timeframe, in 1957, Lake Charles had been drawing workers from points east, north, and west consistently for six decades. Musicians therefore passed frequently between the cities and towns along the Gulf Coast, as (day-)jobs in agriculture, refinery, and with the port fluxed back and forth.

As many port cities do, Lake Charles had become more of a melting pot than the neighboring prairieland communities, to the extent that anthropologists and cultural geographers began to document its “reputation for a high tolerance for differences—racial or otherwise”, and “tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity”. In a 1964 report on the history and government of the state from the Louisiana Legislature, it was noted that “This city [Lake Charles] is an interesting combination of a Louisiana-French and Texas town. During its early days Mardi Gras was celebrated with a Texas

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32 Gaudet 171; Rosaldo 217.
round-up in which the participants rode through the streets and demanded drinks wherever they stopped.”

As such, ethnic groups and musics blurred cultural zones in the region. Western Swing and Cajun dance music were played together, by the same bands, for dancing audiences in Southwest Louisiana dancehalls before the Great Depression. Black Creoles began to blend rhythm & blues into their traditional musical repertoire as they became increasingly invested in the growing civil rights movement.

Longtime deejay, journalist, and Louisiana rock historian Tom Aswell went so far as to say in the late 1940s to the 1960s there was a musical “upheaval” in Louisiana as five “distinct” styles developed: (1) rockabilly, from Shreveport and its runaway success Louisiana Hayride; (2) the New Orleans R&B from Little Richard, Fats Domino, Dave Bartholomew, and Professor Longhair; (3) Cajun and (4) Zydeco developed within SWLA and SETX; and (5) swamp pop bubbled up from Lafayette.

While his characterization is an accurate portrayal of popular impressions about the musical cultures of Louisiana, his enumeration omits two things. First, he fails to mention the delta blues, which mostly emanated from Louisiana’s Florida Parishes north of Baton Rouge and along the Mississippi State border, territory that famously includes Angola prison and produced those famed delta blues fieldwork recordings. Second, he omits the swamp blues.

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33 Louisiana Legislature 297.
34 Ancelet 1241.
35 Aswell 15.
Part II. Musical Cultures and Identities of SWLA & SETX

In the late 1990s, scholarly attention turned to note the historic absence of black Creole life in characterizations and histories of South Louisiana and conceptions of its culture(s). The call to revisit assumptions about Zydeco, for instance, came in the late 1990s to encourage us to restore to prominence the constitutive role of French Creoles in its development as a roots musical form. Scholars say black Creole contributions were written out of Southwest Louisiana’s cultural history at the precise moment of the international Cajun boom, when the minority white ethnic group of Cajuns surfaced as darlings of international folk interest. Over the prior two decades, Cajun culture had emerged as a global player in the culture industry, joining New Orleans as a mainstreamed Louisianian form; the Cajuns offered a new alternative representation of Louisiana to foil the cultural shadow cast by New Orleans that had previously metonymized the state. The “success” of white Cajuns in the culture industry, however, worked to the suppression of other communities in South Louisiana—different regional modalities—such as those of Black creoles.

My purpose now is to point to an even more written-out group than Black creoles: the active presence of non-French black cultural agents in Southwest Louisiana has traditionally been either unaddressed in South Louisiana histories, or ascribed to nearby cultural centers, here primarily

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Baton Rouge and Houston. This chapter analyzes how Southwest Louisiana rhythm & blues musicians made records that were clear representations of their spatial locatedness in Southwest Louisiana while playing outside of traditional Louisiana musical tropes. Their music articulates the connections between society and environment, and the interconnectedness of Southwest Louisiana and Southeast Texas cultural flows, especially, at a specific moment of industrialization and petrochemical growth at a peak era for gulf coast rhythm and blues, from around 1950 to 1960.

Many musical works that I consider integral to the swamp blues repertoire challenge established musical boundaries on blackness in Louisiana while still articulating discrete representations of place, and in particular, Southwest Louisiana as practiced place and their music as cultural capital within that place. The means by which this music manifests an elastic, non-Creole African-American presence in the music are manifold. In the second half of this chapter I discuss just one of those place-centric apparatuses: the discrete evocation of a non-local, not even domestic, but indeed exotic, yet increasingly American, musical neutral zone that allies their South Louisiana rhythm & blues with popular music trends at the national level. By adding Caribbean instruments and rhythmic underpinnings—or rather, sounds they perceived to be representational of the Caribbean—to their rhythm & blues music, “regional” artists like Clarence Garlow, Charles

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38 The music of non-French black actors is absent entirely from the studies of SWLA cultures of John Broven (1983), Tom Aswell (2007), Ryan Brasseaux, and Barry Jean Ancelet. Historians and scholars who have offered Baton Rouge or Houston as centers for a swamp blues-y sound are Shane Bernard (1996), Johnnie Allan (1982; 2010), Tom Govenar (2011), and selections from Neil Slaven and Mike Leadbitter.
Sheffield, and Katie Webster reconfigured the musical tropes of “Louisianian,” “Texan,” and “Caribbean” identity(ies).

My first example is the 1949 recording of “Bon Ton Roula”, in which Garlow sings in a half-French, half-English, distinctly recognizable South Louisiana vernacular; he is backed by a standard jump blues ensemble of electric guitar, boogie piano, a barely audible string bass, a drum kit, and sax duo playing in octaves. Last, the song is driven by a rolling “parade beat” drum. This combination of disparate elements removed the record from a regional listener-base in Louisiana, I suggest, and helped it appeal to a national audience attuned not just to jump blues boogie piano, rhythm & blues guitar licks, and bravado saxophones, but also to the excitement of unbridled drumming; to the hip novelty of “exotic” percussion; to the contemporary “rumba rhythms” sweeping pop music charts; and to the rugged Cowboy-like nonverbal hoopla calls and response between Garlow and his horn section.

These sonic reconfigurations changed the music’s status as black cultural output. Whether or not the music explicitly or correctly mimics Caribbean sounds is almost arbitrary. Rather, what is important is that the impression of Caribbean sounds translated the complicatedness of Creoleness into terms American listeners already understood because of their familiarity with Caribbean—or mambo, calypso, or rumba, interchangeably—music. Instead, given the multitude of in-group Louisiana regionalisms and out-group Caribbean gimmickry in “Bon Ton Roula”, the immediate impression of the music and its extraneous sounds carried it out of the realm of strict “black
music,” and into the more racially ambiguous arena, ironically, of mainstream pop sounds. To Garlow, the Caribbean sounds signaled difference from rhythm & blues. To his local audience in Louisiana, the Caribbean sounds signaled difference from local Cajun or Zydeco iterations of rhythm & blues. To his nationwide audience, the Caribbean sounds signaled American familiarity—by virtue of an ironic 1950s affinity for the “foreign” imported sounds of a Caribbean spatial imaginary.39

“Rumba”
In Southwest Louisiana the so-called 'rumba' rhythms emanating from Cuba via New Orleans were a vehicle for a certain ambiguous musical diversity. Across the nation in the 1950s a “rumba rhythm” craze took off after New Orleans musician Dave Bartholomew recorded his 1949 “Country Boy” based on the 3-2 clave rhythm. The Caribbean sound was a hit, and ignited a craze that infected bass lines across the popular music landscape of the fifties. (As Robert Palmer writes, "New Orleans producer-bandleader Dave Bartholomew first employed this figure...and subsequently helped make it the most over-used rhythmic pattern in 1950s rock 'n' roll.").40 This rhythmic injection has been said to have reunited African American popular music with its African roots ("re-Africanized" is the term used by scholar John Storm

39 Some sources, including the All Music Guide to American Music have called “Bon Ton Roula” the “first” Zydeco record, and their reasoning usually centers on the snippets of French language in its lyrics. Others consider Clifton Chenier’s 1955 “Zodico Stomp” the first zydeco record.
40 Palmer 1995, 60; In light of the ubiquitous usage of pseudo-Caribbean inflections in 1950s popular music, in a 1959 corrective, ethnomusicologist Daniel J. Crowley sought to define calypso (and what wasn’t calypso) precisely. He declared: “The Problem: ... The recent "calypso craze" which accounted for one-fourth of popular record sales and wherein one Belafonte album sold nearly a million copies... Calypso has been subjected to twisting of facts, unqualified generalization, and bald prevarication...” (Crowley 57).
Much as the arrival of Afro-Caribbean traits rejoined New Orleans rhythm & blues with elements from its past, so too did this expanded *rumba* element—also referred to alternately as *rhomba, mambo, mombo, congo, jungle*, and *voudou, voodoo*, and *hoo doo*—help in some ways to unify musical impulses in Southwest Louisiana. South Louisiana musicians immediately used it to make hits of their own.

The same year that Dave Bartholomew put out “Country Boy”, Southwest Louisiana native Clarence Garlow recorded his “Bon Ton Roula” that also featured a two-celled 3-2 clave rhythmic underbelly. By 1956 more had followed: that year New Orleans musicians Fats Domino and Eddie Bo put out “Blue Monday” and “We Like Mambo” respectively. Meanwhile, Excello blues acts put out similarly successful mambo/rumba blues tracks. Kid King’s Combo’s “Banana Split” popped in May 1953, reaching #6 on the U.S. R&B Singles chart, and The Gladiolas’ “Little Darlin'” hit #2 when The Drifters covered it in 1958; and from Jay Miller’s house Guitar Gable and his band The Musical Kings made the surfy swamp pop instrumentals “Congo Mombo”, “Guitar Rhumbo”, and “Gumbo Mambo”.42

Twelve years later the East-Texas-born, Southwest Louisiana-raised Charles Sheffield made the regional hit “It’s Your Voodoo Working” which not only employed Caribbean-borrowed musical elements—ghoulish sax solos, A-

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42 Clarence Garlow, “Bon Ton Roula” (Macy’s 45-5002-A) (1949); Kid King’s Combo, “Banana Split” (Excello 45-2009-A) (May 1953); The Gladiolas, “Little Darlin’” (Excello 45-2102-A) (Dec 1956); Guitar Gable & The Musical Kings, “Congo Mambo” (Excello 45-2082-A) (June 1956). Additional to June’s “Congo Mombo”, Guitar Gable’s band also put out “Guitar Rhumbo” (Exc 45-2094-B) that October, 1956 and “Gumbo Mambo” (Exc 45-2122-A) the following fall, in September 1957. Having only leased four 45rpm records to Excello in those two years, it is noteworthy that three of Gable’s four records have an exotic/jungle-themed number on them.
flat minor key, multiple superimposed percussion lines—, but carried the theme into the lyrical narrative too: “I fell in love with you body and soul...It’s your voodoo working.”43 This song straddles two thematic usages of the Caribbean, the first matching the exotic novelty of Garlow’s hit, and second, as a surrogate for comical spookiness—a common trope for Caribbean music in sixties pop, which beyond R&B groups is often seen within surf rock appropriations of island instrumentation and motifs.44 Around the same time, the queen of Gulf Coast blues piano Katie Webster recorded but never released the saxy, grooving “Don’t You Know,” whose employ of Caribbean elements falls wholly within that sixties spook motif domain, abandoning any basis in, or relation to, the geographical Caribbean.45

In 1949, 1959, and 1961, when Clarence Garlow, Katie Webster, and Charles Sheffield recorded these songs, they were exemplifying the sort of creativity that I argue displays an embrace of regionalism while participating in a decidedly non-local musical aesthetic, one that signaled an avant-garde insight into greater national trends. Specifically, I’m considering their use of the prominent “rumba rhythm” as having permitted the music to transgress social boundaries that their bodies could not, the black body itself being a tangible spatial parameter in midcentury Southwest Louisiana, as I discuss later in this chapter. Their disembodied records permeated protected white

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44 Another example of this kind of r&b, spooky-comedy, voodoo pop song is the 1959 hit “Love Potion No. 9” from The Clovers of Washington, D.C.—far afield from New Orleans’ musical orbit. That song from July 1959 hit #23 on both Billboard’s R&B and Hot 100 Singles charts. (Whitburn (2004), 124.)
45 Katie Webster, “Don’t You Know” (recorded 1959/1960, unissued; first issue on FLY LP 530 (1977 (UK)); first U.S. issue on Paula PCD-13 (1991 (US)).
private spaces, and in so doing, contributed to the blurring of raced social boundaries. These regional artists dispatched their tracks in a vehicle of Caribbeanness that spoke to an awareness of national pop trends and a willingness to participate in them.

Reconsidering, Expanding the Regional Southscapes, the recent work of cultural geographer Thadious Davis, whose work has greatly influenced my thinking in this arena, joined a critical wave in challenging the essentializing tendency of traditional regionalism studies. I follow her example of giving attention to alterity and difference within Louisiana “roots” forms; she takes from Soja’s “spatial imaginary”, bell hooks’ “politics of location”, and Paul Gilroy’s complication of the term "creolisation" to defy common tropes for thinking about southern raced spaces, especially in South Louisiana. Following her lead, I suggest that iterations of in-placedness like Garlow’s 1949 “Bon Ton Roula” can be beautiful examples of inclusive regionalism despite its concoction in a Houston studio of Houston musicians. The same is true of Sheffield’s 1961 and Webster’s 1959/1960 vampy tracks, played by a room full of South Louisiana session musicians, even while the songs were written and arranged by their Texas-born front(wo)man. These songs belong nevertheless to a

46 Davis’ conceptualization of blackness in South Louisiana also takes from John Lowe’s complication of the field of regionalism studies, in particular where he pays particular respect to Louisiana’s place “as a hub and generator of a new cultural configuration”, multi-leveled and distinct from other black-white binary racial systems in the Deep South. His call was to “break the old molds of traditional regionalism, but without disavowing the myriad southern aspects of Louisiana and its cultures.” (Davis 203, quoting Lowe, John. Louisiana Culture from the Colonial Era to Katrina. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008: 20.)

47 Writing credits for Katie Webster’s song go to Webster and J. Miller; the songwriting for Sheffield’s record is his name alone; Garlow is also credited as sole writer on his record. While J.D. Miller did pen a majority of his blues leases to Excello, he usually did so under the
Southwest Louisiana aesthetic, a place whose cultural output need not be bound by fixed geographical borders. I would like to contemplate, in other words, not just born-and-bred Southwest Louisiana musicians and A&R men, but also include musicians working in, passing through, leaving, and coming into Southwest Louisiana, as having contributed to a body of “Louisiana [blues] music”.

Prior region-based studies on South Louisiana have tended to follow a part/counterpart model to centralize one aspect of the culture. Early twentieth-century region-based scholarship sorted the state by exclusivity paradigms into an Urban City and Rural South binary, which mapped Louisiana’s social geography along an axis falling between urban New Orleans creole culture and ‘the rural rest’. Scholarships of the last quarter of the twentieth century centralized Cajun culture to such an extent as to exclude alternative groups, like these bluesmen acting outside of Louisiana French tradition. Looking to expand the work of this previous South Louisiana scholarship, this chapter and this dissertation make the case that in the 1950s pseudonym “Jerry West” for records intended for the blues market. Miller’s legal name appears on “from the vaults”-themed releases of previously unissued material, such as “Don’t You Know” on its 1977, 1989, and 1991 album appearances.

Davis 10. “two spatial configurations emerging from segregationist practices that are inextricably linked to the projection of blackness in the United States, or to the projection of the black body against the thing that will define it as black. The first is the Urban City…the city as center...black body invariably becomes elided with “the ghetto” as concept. The second is the Rural South, where space reemerges as important ... the black body can be made visible.” Davis 10.


“I am as well most interested in the ways in which the South as both literal and symbolic space produced social relations and constructed social identities or public expressions of power,” Davis 15; “The social structures of segregation and inequality in the “separate but equal” era, for example, become a physical frame and a spatial lens...” Davis 15; “Southscapes presses the social significance of space without the assumption of urban alienation or rural class conflict as the major tropes for thinking about southern spatial-racial matters since the 1970s.” Davis 15; “a spatial hermeneutics that takes both cities and rural communities as aspects of a multipronged postmodernity.” Davis 15.
and 60s, the Southwest Louisiana (SWLA) and Southeast Texas region was indeed home to a robust musical rhythm & blues-based subculture, one that I group under the nomenclature *swamp blues*, and comprises many kinds of black voices who did not necessarily identify by usual regional parameters.

My large argument is to conceive of the SWLA swamp blues as being neither derivative of New Orleans culture nor of the Cajun music belt that has been so widely painted over the rest of South Louisiana. Many writers on South Louisiana music cultures prior to the twenty-first century have been popular enthusiast-historians, and scholars have surmised that in combination with an absence of comprehensive scholarly writing, these lay histories have contributed to myopic views that either favor one cultural context over another, or flatten the complexity of ethnic and racial networks in the southern half of the state.\(^5\) My interest here is not in laying out that spectrum of networks in South Louisiana, as they are vast, varied, and explored thoroughly in the work of the cultural geographers I have mentioned above, among many others. I will instead précis that the synapses firing between race, ethnicity, class, musical creation, performance, participation, and consumption here are more complicated even than the well-explored three-tiered caste system remnant from New Orleans Creole culture. The interconnections are more complicated than the binary racial thinking of

\(^5\) Brasseaux, Fontenot, and Oubre. *Creoles of Color in the Bayou Country*, 1994: 3; also quoted in James H. Dorman. *Creoles of Color of the Gulf South*, 1996.; the most prominent of these self-educated historians include the British *Blues Unlimited* cohort whose contributions I explore briefly in Chapter 2 and in greater length in Chapter 4, other British devotees at magazines like *Blues World*, *Blues-Link*, and the later *Juke Blues*, American folklorists like the Lomaxes, Samuel Charters, founders of blues magazines *Living Blues*, *Blues Revue*, *Blues Access*, *78 Quarterly* and later founders of blues and folk-oriented record labels such as Arhoolie, Alligator, Bear Family Records, Blue Horizon, Charly, Flyright, Sonet, Wolf, Yazoo, and more.
nearby Deep South states, and here I remember Paul Gilroy’s testimony that terms like “syncretism” and “creolisation” are “manifestly inadequate” theoretical notions to describe the complex interstices from which Louisiana musicians and songwriters make utterance.

In an archeology of her notion of “Southscapes”, Davis looks to early-twentieth-century works that acknowledge a special fluidity among Louisiana’s cultural flows, and to the compounded legacies of Spanish and French colonial, Native American, and African cultural retentions in Louisiana that formed a long-known specificity to the “matrix of experience” (which she says nevertheless is still fraught with entrenched “residues” of the binary black-white system) within those cultural flows. But the placedness of South Louisiana is more than an identifying rubric replacing one simplified cultural label (Creole, Cajun) with another (non-French Creole). Spatial theorist Tim Cresswell builds upon de Certeau’s understanding of place as a locus beyond geography, of simultaneous coexistence and stability, and further whittles its metaphysics to an instantaneous “way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world.” That is why the golden era of swamp blues is fundamentally tied not just to the immediate current events of record companies transitioning to chase smaller markets including the blues, and the resulting bubble for independent record-producing; of the political transition from segregation to integration that affected the composition of studio session
bands across the South; and not just to the industrial boom benefitting the SETX-SWLA corridor.\(^5\)

The swamp blues are a product of much more microcosmic historical waves, including the long history of laborers populating the state and their blue collar music-making. The swamp blues are a product of Highway 90, which from 1937 to 1957 was the main corridor between rural hometowns where jobs for black laborers were vanishing and the urban petrochemical plants offering work; the lay of Highway 90 was built upon the forest-cleared, dirt-hauled, water-diverted, flattened and bulked plateaus of the railroad. That railway path was a milestone in man’s defeat of nature in the ubiquitously wet Louisiana, because of its triumph over the largest wetland swamp in the country, the Atchafalaya basin, whose presence effectively divided East-West transportation into blocked halves. The basin had been thought of as impassible until the Civil War demanded its construction for the relay of supplies from the New Orleans port to East Texas.

More than the product of contract oil plant labor shifts that were congruous with nighttime music-making in the Golden Triangle towns perforating the open land from Houston to Lake Charles, the swamp blues sprouted from interweaving cultural and industrial flows between SETX and SWLA going back a century. Beyond the natural connectedness of culture and

\(^5\) On lacking proper theoretical vocabulary for South Louisiana’s culture and its cultural “matrix of experience”, see Gilroy, Paul. *Black Atlantic*, 1993: 15; Davis 6, and 204-5.; The theoretical literary history Davis builds upon for her concept of “Southscapes” refers to “acts of recovery and correction” that reframe creolization with a Louisiana central point written by Rodolphe Desdunes (1911), Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1916), and Marcus Christian’s work under the auspices of the Federal Writers’ Project during the 1930s and 1940s. See Davis, 190-192.; For Tom Cresswell’s interpretation of place, see Cresswell, Tim. *Place: A Short Introduction*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2004: 11. quoted in Davis 6.
geography, the swamp blues are a musically unconsolidated grouping of recordings that articulate, to borrow from Cresswell’s words, the many ways of seeing, knowing, understanding placedness in South Louisiana, as African-American musicians in a place overwhelmingly represented as Cajun and Afro Creole; and many other varied iterations of identity enunciated, and taped, at the Goldband Recording Studios in Lake Charles and Jay Miller’s recording facilities in Crowley.

**Garlow and the Parade Beat**

Clarence Garlow, Charles Sheffield, and Katie Webster establish themselves squarely as Louisiana musicians in different ways. For Garlow, who was born in Welsh, Louisiana—halfway between Lake Charles and Crowley on Highway 90—but lived in Beaumont, TX from early childhood, the whole of “Bon Ton Roula” hinges semantically on the Louisiana catchphrase and social philosophy “Let the Bon Temps Roulez.” He uses half-French language interjections “Eh toi, Look here, eh”; references to place, “in Louisiana...cuttin’ cane” and “go way out...to the Zydeco”; and the Cajun standard “Let the bon temps roulez”, in addition to stating clearly “I’m one smart Frenchman...I got a Creole gal.” Musically, other than the invigorating, and vaguely ‘wild’ drum pickup, which I discuss in a moment, there is not much to differentiate the track from any other 1949 jump blues single.
What had been the rumba craze of the late forties eventually led to a full-on jungle exotica craze in the late fifties and sixties that forefronted a free-wheeling, percussion-heavy mock-primitivism in novelty pop music hits.\textsuperscript{53} In this early hit, similarly, the most immediate and governing musical element of Garlow’s otherwise straight jump blues number is also the element I find most indicative of place: the drummer’s propulsive “parade beat”. The pattern Johnny “Fast Stuff” Marshall plays on “Bon Ton Roula” is evocative of

\textsuperscript{53} Kajikawa 138.
the outdoor tradition pervasive in Louisiana, both during Mardi Gras season and throughout the year. When marching bands appear at roughly even intervals throughout a procession, the bass and snare may be heard blocks before the band is in sight, and their trill patterns continue long after the marchers have passed. At some holidays and celebrations, then, it is possible to hear propulsive drum sections almost constantly over the course of the half-day's event. New Orleans sax player Red Tyler explained how this percussive earworm spawned many rhythm & blues compositions and became a constant of the New Orleans sound of the 1950s: “we always heard that beat in the back of our minds,” he recalled, “always tying in from that second-line feeling, even when we’re not playing it.”

Garlow likewise credits that street drumbeat in his account of how “Bon Ton Roula” came to be written in the Macy’s studio in Houston. His drummer, Johnny “Fast Stuff” Marshall, “loved that Pan American [sic] beat, calypso”, Garlow recalled,

“And you know how musicians clown? He was a younger clown with the drums. Calypso beat. And I’d tell him, “Johnny, cool, it. Let me think. I’ve got to try to think. I’m trying to think of something to write.” ... And [pianist Mildred Smith] started playing behind the [drums], you know, da-da-da-da-doo-doo, da-da-datndoodoo,” you know that old number? So she’s fooling around with that, and then I looked around and they said, "We’ll stop." And I said, "No, don’t stop. Keep that up. Keep that beat you got, Johnny, right there." I said, "Mildred, just keep playing behind that."

Well, I had a guy with me [Wilmer Shakesnyder on sax]... So I told Shake and another boy with me, I said, "You guys get me some kind of a riff behind that; let me see something. Just set me a little riff on that thing."


I say, "Okay, I’m going to try it on for size. Play it down six bars and break it, just follow me." Okay, so I wrote down there [sings], "Do you see me

there, well, I ain't no fool. I watch my French, never been in school. You want to get somewhere in the Creole town, you stop and let me show you your way round. You let the bon ton roulez ... Now don't you be no fool-eh. Let the bon ton Roulez.”

Garlow was the impresario, and this jump blues track, then, signifies place by reference to the sounds of a South Louisiana community tradition—a parade beat, street-drums sound that resides in the in-between spaces of the overtly Caribbean-influenced New Orleans to the east, and oil-refined East Texas to the west.

**Voodoo Music as Louisiana Pop**

Sheffield’s enunciation of place functions differently. In “It’s Your Voodoo Working,” he describes the physical and psychological effects of his Voodoo-practicing romantic partner; if his lyrics and musical effects seem similar to other spooky-themed novelty songs of the sixties (“Love Potion No. 9”, Ernie K-Doe’s “Mother-in-Law”)\(^5^6\), the similarity may be related to more than a shared pop aesthetic. Musicologist Loren Kajikawa has argued that sharing musical aesthetics, and the Voodoo in particular, is a means of “imagining and rebuilding connections” among musicians or musical cultures not physically together.\(^5^7\) This common-tongue spook factor heard in Sheffield and Webster’s songs may be considered part of a larger discursive web within black popular music, one where the alterity of Caribbean sounds has become a common resource for African-American musicians who stretched the

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\(^{55}\) Govenar 370.

\(^{56}\) Other contemporary Voodoo songs: "Voodoo Voodoo," Lavern Baker; "Voodoo Doll," Amelia; "The Voodoo Man," The Del Vikings; "Voodoo Eyes," The Silhouettes; "Witchcraft," The Spiders; "Witch Doctor," David Seville.

boundaries of the rhythm & blues genre, and with that the fixedness of
blackness as a musical identity, in the long sixties.

“It’s Your Voodoo Working” is representative of the regional, racial,
musical, and generic dynamics at work in the Southwest Louisiana studios of
Eddie Shuler and Jay Miller to the extent that it checks social boundaries
while grounding itself firmly in Louisiana soil. David Brackett’s words on
genre and the musical utterance in black popular music reify this point:
“enunciations refer to particular moments and specific spaces, emphasize
embeddedness in a discursive web, and imply a distinct cultural position”, he
says. In other words, “It’s Your Voodoo Working” is a distinct aural
phenomenon of Jay Miller’s studio space and the roster of studio musicians
who came together there; the performance is the direct result of the particular
network of professional musicians coming together during a period of peak
frequency between 1957 and 1964 when the best swamp blues records were
made. The swamp blues themselves are embedded in within the social syntax
of Southwest Louisiana, where black musicians shot off tight ensemble
rhythm & blues, rugged downhome blues, hard, Chicago-styled electric guitar
blues, rockabilly, swamp pop, Cajun, Creole, and Zydeco records without
code-switching. That is to say, swamp blues musicians worked within a multi-
generic discursive musical web that was fundamentally regional, but never in
isolation from national popular trends. Their “distinct cultural position” was
not just jack-of-all-trades musicianship, but a secure foundational position of
South Louisiana musicianship—a cultural position with specificity of place—
from which they explored wider configurations of identity, permanence, mobility, and representation through the swamp blues.

Charles Sheffield, “It’s Your Voodoo Working” (1961)

Intro

V1
I fell in love with you body and soul
My hands feel sticky and my head’s ice cold
My sugar tastes sour my salt tastes sweet
I wanna lay down but I just can’t sleep

REFRAIN
It’s your voodoo working
That’s your Voodoo working
Round and round same old thing
A heartache, misery, trouble, and pain

REFRAIN
It’s your Voodoo working
That’s your Voodoo working
It’s your Voodoo working
Voodoo Working and I can’t get a little

Ghoulish falsetto vocal wails,
revving sax solo

V3
Slow down baby you’re going too fast
Your love is Voodoo and I just can’t last
I cried last night and the night before
20 long hours, my eyes are sore

REFRAIN
It’s your Voodoo working
That’s your Voodoo working
It’s your Voodoo working
Voodoo working and I can’t get a little

Ghoulish minor sax wails

Fadeout

Figure 4. Lyrics to “It’s Your Voodoo Working” with brief musical annotations. This song’s full text, including musical description, may be found at the end of this chapter.

Entertainers picked up on the commodity potential of New Orleans Voodoo quickly, and that goldmine panned out in their favor. In New Orleans, Voodoo was a veritable entertainment by the forties, and its regional association radiated outward to encompass all of South Louisiana by 1960. If Sheffield were working toward a Voodoo-as-exoticism aesthetic, it is worth noting that even while contemporary tour guides to the state pointed out Voodoo neighborhoods, souvenirs, and landmarks, appeals to the exotic are emphasized in coverage of the Southwestern Cajun culture. Indeed, the WPA’s American Guide Series’ 1941 tour guide to Louisiana—not a product of
Louisiana, mind you, but a publication out of New York—describes the white minority community as a “foreign” people just beginning to acquire English language skills: “today, their use of [English] is amusing and picturesque, to say the least.”\textsuperscript{58} In other words, to wartime America, faux Voodoo culture was easier to swallow than Creole and Cajun culture as a natural element of the American landscape. Had Sheffield included recognizable Creole musical tropes, the argument is strong that his record would have been perceived as less palatable, and the record could have even been limited to the folk market. When Sheffield reached instead toward Voodoo, he was making his music more American, that is to say, more black American, and thus he gave his record a greater chance to succeed. Interestingly, Sheffield’s enunciation of the lyric symbolizes his joining of musical styles: the verses describing his afflicted state are syncopated and start with micro-pickups, while the refrain actually inferring that “It’s your voodoo working” are sung in straight 4/4 time.

The same principle is true for Katie Webster’s “Don’t You Know”, whose Voodoo elements are restricted to the musical and do not seep into the verbal narrative. Even though her song was not released and thusly cannot be assessed by its commercial performance, it is noteworthy that the veteran Webster believed that Voodoo aesthetic had commercial potential, and notably that the Voodoo musical aesthetic could be disembodied from a matching Voodoo text to give its presence a literal, lyrical justification. Voodoo music no longer needed a Voodoo thematic context in the American

\textsuperscript{58} \emph{Louisiana} 92; Means 222.
pop music landscape. By 1960, Voodoo music had been incorporated into mainstream pop.

Katie Webster, “Don’t You Know” (1959/1960)

Intro
Sax and bass drum vampy pickup
Piano, staccato electric guitar join E maj riff

V1
Don’t you know
Don’t you know my love is true
Don’t you know
Don’t you know my love is true
And if you leave me baby I don’t know what I’d do

V2
Please come back!
Let me hold you in my arms
Please come ba-a-ack
Let me hold you in my arms
And if you do that baby I’ll never do no harm

Sax solo, backed by trilling boogie piano;
band continues in groove

V3
Can’t you see
That our love was meant to be
Can’t you se-e-e
That our love was meant to be
And if you leave me baby I’ll never, never be free

Don’t you know
Don’t you know my love is true
Don’t know you kno-o-ow
Don’t you know my love is true
And if you leave me baby I don’t know what I’ll do

Outro
Don’t you know
Don’t you kno-o-o-ow

Fadeout
Don’t you know
Don’t you kno-o-o-ow

Figure 5. Lyrics to “Don’t You Know” with brief musical annotations. This song’s full text, including musical description, may be found at the end of this chapter.

By the text alone, nothing in Webster’s song points to Voodoo novelty, or Caribbean exotica. Webster’s Voodoo comes in mostly at the harmonic and melodic level, buoyed by an ensemble band playing Voodoo-like gestures in a major key. If destabilized harmony is fundamentally discomforting in music, and if that harmonic instability is at the heart of musical eeriness, then the greatest disparity at play in “Don’t You Know” is that the band plays the song in E major while Webster sings in E minor throughout. In fact, she is in the band herself, playing a funky, calliope-like I-IV-V twelve-bar blues piano against her own incongruous vocalization. More specifically, Webster’s
melodic contour exclusively traces the dominant-minor-six, in this case the G-minor-6. This inversion of the diminished 7 is a commonly used and basic chord to signify fright, so her exclusive vocalization on this chord is orthodox to musical spookery. Voiced differently, it is also the diminished E-minor-7, but Webster’s lines consistently begin on G, thus throwing the tonic center into question such that when she does close the song on E, the listener still does not achieve resolution. Her most climactically frightful tetrad is the last iteration of “Don’t you know”, stretching it out along (Don’t) G- (you) A-(Kno-) B♭-A-G-A-G- (-ow) E-D-E. Even though she ultimately lands on what should be tonic E, to the listener it does not feel like the key center, but eerie, and inconclusive.

Figure 6. Transcription of closing vocal Gm6 line in "Don’t You Know"

The track opens with a fortissimo tenor sax and bass drum pickup vamp from infamous South Louisiana saxman Lionel Torrence (Prevost) and drumming warhorse Warren Storm, with the sax blaring a stepwise ascent from dominant B to tonic E. The recording I have is from a Flyright 1977 reissue, part of The Legendary Jay Miller Sessions series that I discuss at length in Chapter 2. Like for many of the songs released in that series, the masters had been lost or the acetate quality too poor, so “Don’t You Know” is among many other recordings of recordings in the series. As such the audio quality, while impressive on a visceral level, does not provide for clear
discernment of instruments and lines. Webster’s piano doubles the bass guitar line, which itself is redoubled at times by the baritone sax—all these lines merely phonating the same rhythmic revving trill of the opening drum riff. So the track may begin with the sax and bass drum alone, or it may open with saxes, drum, piano, and electric bass all grinding the same high-energy propulsive blastoff into the listener’s brain; either way, the case for Jay Miller’s renown as a producer of energetic ensemble blues is a good one.

At the downbeat, the piano and smooth-timbered, surf-style electric guitar joins in with a peppy Alberti bass arpeggiated E7. As the verse proceeds, the guitar timbre is so smooth its marcato ostinato is easily mistaken for an electric organ. The full drum kit has folded in, heavy on snare somersaults, and Katie Webster’s voice enters, in belting mezzo-soprano, singing in E-minor melodic contours in contrast to the band’s E major. “Don’t You Know” is a twelve-bar blues, moving to subdominant in bar five, and back to tonic in bar seven, in time for the IV-V-I concluding B punch line of the AAB verse. After the second verse is the sax solo superimposed over a trilling boogie piano, while the rest of the band continues in the groove. Webster belts every line with such ferocity that imitating her inevitably causes anyone else’s voice to crack or rouse throat pain. The indomitableness of the band and frontwoman make the wraith of an outro—on the frightful dominant minor-6—even more compelling. Upon the minor-V6 melodic line, that quintessential pop “fright” chord, Webster’s fortissimo true belting evaporates into not just a ghoulishly-sung subito piano, but she heightens the effect by switching to her whispy upper register, with each (blue) note of the tetrad
sung alternately with *tenuto* and light vibrato—an effect recognizable in even the most elementary and cartoony ghost.

**The Spacialization of Race, the Caribbean Spatial Imaginary, and the Fourthspace**

Thadious Davis and David Sibley use the idea of a “landscape of exclusion” to describe the very real process by which sanctioned spatial separations strengthen social boundaries. More clearly, segregated nightclubs and other performance venues in Southwest Louisiana enforced unyielding social divisions upon the black body, even as white musicians did their best to imitate the black voice and the black musical utterance in those white-consecrated public spaces. Recorded music offered another bypass to the black voice, as the ascendance of jukeboxes and in-home record playing permitted black voices into the exclusive listening zones of the private white home and the public white-serving nightclub. Where recorded black music calls for private acts of consumption, its live performance demands the public work of participation. To the main record-buying demographic of middle-class white youth, recorded black music was more palatable, more convenient, and more discreet than its fleshy counterpart.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Foucault’s “confinement and concealment of the poor” could arguably be read onto the safety of black records in comparison to the discomfort of black performance: black voices confined to the record, black bodies concealed by the audio format.; Davis 12, 27, 187, and 293. Davis 27 quotes Sibley “The Binary City”, 244.; ”More than a means of drawing personal boundary lines or zones of preference, these projected stereotypes [of black bodies] entered into the public sphere in terms of legal mandates, official sanctions, and social practices, all of which resulted in protections for “white only” exclusive zones that had the power both to define racial blackness and to effect civic punishment for being black.”; “spatial exclusion functions to maintain social boundaries.” Davis 27; “The South imagined and constructed as a largely rural space... much representations of the rural have been used to assuage anxieties about the new, the urban... The antagonism between the rural and the urban connected to the historical and spatial antagonism between blacks and whites, the struggle over occupying the same space, the segregated space in the public sphere...” Davis 12.
The stigma attached to rock ‘n’ roll in the 1950s had passed for sixties youth, but the taboo on attending majority-black music events still lingered strong among the prim middle-class white youth of segregated South Louisiana. The presence or absence of the black body under segregation demarcated aesthetic boundaries in the region, especially in realms of public music-making and private music consumption. The listening locale, environment, and medium were key determinants of whether black music were permitted to enter the public or private space. A live, African-American-owned nightclub, filled with dark-skinned bodies was an impasse to white audiences. Personally owned records (an economy of the black body) within private white spaces had much more mobility, more exposure to potential audiences, and more sales potential. Assuming the buyer enjoys these rhythm & blues, to own a swamp blues sound recording is to own a pleasurable experience; owning is comfortable, easy, and limits social transgression. The occasion of attending a live, public performance of black rhythm & blues, on the other hand, required more effort on the listener’s behalf: either (1) crossing town to where the small smattering of black nightclubs were, across the tracks in North Lake Charles, and entering black-owned and black-filled spaces. The alternative was (2) hiring a black band to play a private event, like the fraternity parties at McNeese State University in Lake Charles and at LSU in Baton Rouge did when they hired Slim Harpo, Lightning Slim, Otis Redding, and their bands for Saturday night dances.

Compared to the permanent ownership of black performance, to hear black performers at a black club would be tantamount to renting that
performance, the listener’s access to repeated listenings limited, and accessing the performance would be a sacrifice of the listener’s time. The commercial potential for any swamp blues record lay in its sales potential, which for Eddie Shuler was through his own Goldband label and in shops across the state, and which for J.D. Miller was mostly through Excello, which was sold in record stores across the South. Sales potential is at least to a certain extent dependent upon the record’s exposure to a broad record-buying audience. I believe that this necessarily expanded audience could not have been achieved with live musical performance alone, but instead only by the dispersal of recorded musical material. The swamp blues had to be on record in order to thrive.

Where the public visibility of raced subjects in this era had a corraling effect on social boundaries that in turn confined cultural production, in the case of musical production, the invisibility, or disembodiment, of those same subjects permitted the elision and gradual breakdown of exclusionary boundaries. Indeed, as juke boxes and local radio programs in Southwest Louisiana increasingly delivered the sounds of non-Creole African Americans into confined white private spaces, these musical iterations of black expressive culture were effectively blurring the social boundaries connecting, and heretofore constraining them.

Using a perceived “Caribbean” or “Voodoo” aesthetic as a means to complicate their perceptions as “black” musicians under the binary race logic of the recording market, Southwest Louisiana musicians such as Clarence Garlow, Charles Sheffield, and Katie Webster used an alternative, or exotic
rhythmic basis to push the boundaries of traditional black (musical) identity. Dave Bartholomew and Fats Domino themselves had spent years “searching” for signature (or singularly marketable) musical identities, Domino’s biographer tells us, when they ultimately both “f[ou]nd it in rhythm. He [Bartholomew] told his horn section to play a rhumba pattern, a simple riff [;] that would become his trademark copied on countless records.”

Just as Bartholomew and Domino settled on a specifically “Caribbean” musical component to diversify their identities as African-American popular musicians in New Orleans, these and other SWLA musicians offer up “Caribbean”- and Voodoo-seeming music as an overlay to South Louisiana’s already-particular brand of non-blackness to further complicate personal musical identities—identities that incorporate the social significance of space, like for Garlow: Louisiana Creole musicians, in urban Houston, who were aware of current trends in pop music, recording athletic rhythm & blues records. Or, wherein cross-cultural formation is most evident like with Sheffield: an East-Texas bred but Louisiana-rooted singer fronting a Crowley, LA-based band, together pushing the boundaries of what constituted regional rhythm & blues. Or, last, the polymorphous, attention-commanding Webster: a Houston-born prodigy relocated to Southwest Louisiana, herself an icon of the cultural possibilities wrought by flows and fluidity, playing a partially improvised groove with a roster of local sessioneers at the end of a long session.

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60 Coleman 46.
Davis points out that articulations of identity in South Louisiana have historically borne a built-in understanding of an inherent existence as a Thirdspace identity; in other words, that Louisiana blackness has existed in an always-already political liminality not white, not American black, not Cajun, and not black Creole. I believe these artists, Louisiana-born or -bred, but living and recording popular music rhythm & blues records in studios from Texas to California, employed what they perceived to be sounds of the Caribbean like a meta-Thirdspace, expressing a desire to break the specific bounds of what being black in Louisiana could mean. To Garlow, Sheffield, and Webster, the Caribbean aesthetic offered the possibility of an exaggerated Thirdspace, a Fourthspace, so to speak, beyond geographical Louisiana and abstracted even from the Third-, for testing elasticities of representation, subjectivity, and in-placedness.

I believe the perceived-Caribbean and its sounds represent to these SWLA musicians not a real space but an imaginary one where SWLA’s particular brand of nonblackness harnesses the transformative veil of Caribbean-ness, or of Voodoo, in an imaginary capacity, stretching it into an imaginary space. This musical margin is a place to complicate the stark bifurcation of the mid-century record market, and not just in the context of the greater, national popular music market, but also within the local, non-commercial, cultural context, where despite the long history of unique racial
hierarchies in Louisiana, in the local culture industry of South Louisiana there lingered a distinct aftertaste of the Jim Crow black-white racial binary.  

Conclusion
Karl Hagstrom Miller has shown that southern music came to be compartmentalized according to race at the turn of the twentieth century in a process he called “segregating sound”. One result of this artificial “musical color line”, as he calls it, was the redefinition of southern music as an isolated and unchanging repertoire of songs and styles; a second result was the sudden allocation of (newly) raced sounds to matching raced bodies. This split was closely tied to the burgeoning record and radio industries from about 1920 until about 1955, when rock ‘n’ roll had traction enough to draw white teens first to listen, then to flock en masse across the race records color line. Testing that musical color line, the output from gulf coast artists like Charles Sheffield, Katie Webster, and Clarence Garlow exhibits a musical sensibility separate from but not untouched by the influences of New Orleans' famed, and problematically characterized “melting pot” culture. Songs like “Bon Ton Roula”, “It’s Your Voodoo Working”, and “Don’t You Know” further complicate and mobilize the possibilities for the representation of African-American identities in the state.

Where other region-centric “roots” musical output in Southwest Louisiana like Cajun and Zydeco tended at the time to aim at an insular, in-group consumer market and audience, and tended to seek musical inspiration and collaboration mostly internally, SWLA musicians reconfigured what could

61 Davis 6.
have been a dynamic of racial exclusion and segregated sounds into an imaginative Third-, or even “Fourth” space for black musical creativity, innovation, and influence. Beneath these conscious changes is an undercurrent of savvy that points to a commercial awareness among swamp blues musicians whose records were profit-oriented business endeavors, in a characterization that is in opposition to the folksy, anti-commercialist artifact the swamp blues have symbolized in most writing on them before now. The fundamental commercialism of the swamp blues, and the business end of their creation, from leading artists and the session musicians under contract to back them, to the independent record industry and two Southwest Louisiana record men who were so crucial to developing them, is the subject of my next chapter.
Table 1. Clarence Garlow, “Bon Ton Roula” (1949) (3:05)

**Intro**
:00 parade beat drum intro (plays throughout)
:05 descending G7-no-3 on tenuto electric guitar

:09 Eh toi look here, eh

:13 descending guitar motif resumes
:17 saxes, piano join, saxes in counterpoint to voice:

**V1**
You see me there well I ain't no fool
I'm one smart Frenchman never been to school
Wanna get somewhere in a Creole town
You stop and let me show you your way 'round

**REFRAIN**
You let that bon temps Roulez
*legato sax response*
You let the mul-ay boul-ay *sax response*
Now don't you be no fool-ay *sax response*
You let the bon temps roulez. *sax response*

**V2**
saxes resume counterpoint role
I got a Creole gal she's one fine dish
But she's got ways like the old grown fish
She don't do nothin' but raise sand all night
But when it comes to lovin' she's a-much alright

**REFRAIN**
We let the bon temps Roulez *sax response*
We let the mul-ay boul-ay *sax response*
Now don't you be no fool-ay *sax response*
We let the bon temps Roulez *sax response*

**V3**
You want to have yourself some real fine fun
Go down in Louisiana and you get you one
You find her cuttin' cane all down the line
*all instruments silence:*
I've got a cotton picker she's a'really fine *parade beat drum picks back up halfway through line*

**REFRAIN**
*all instruments join back in on downbeat “bon”*
We let the bon temps roulez sax response
We let the mul-ay boul-ay sax response
Now don't you be no fool-ay sax response
You let the bon temps roulez sax response

**Instrumental Solo**
1:41 piano boogie solo and melodic counterpoint electric guitar solo
1:45 electric guitar leads, in syncopation with piano, drums
1:56 piano recedes and guitar foregrounded
2:11 piano restored to equal level with guitar
2:20+ Professor Longhair-style piano riffs

**V4**
At the church bazaar or the baseball game
At the French La-La it's all the same
If you wanna have fun now you've got to go
country inflected
Way out in the cou-untry to the za-y-dee-co.

**REFRAIN**
Now let the bon temps roulez
Now don't you bee no fool-ay
We let the moul-ay boul-ay
You let the bon temps roulez

**Outro**
2:52 fadeout

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Table 2. Charles Sheffield, “It’s Your Voodoo Working “ (1961) (1:56)

**Intro**
:00 sixteenth-note drum kit pickup
:01 skeletal chopsticks, white noise, ongoing shimmying cymbal, electric
  bass, muted mezzo-piano piano
:07 8va saxes pickup to verse
:08 as voice enters, sax line now doubles over chopsticks ornament,
  handheld shakers double the cymbal’s white noise. The emphatic saxes
  make the formerly “skeletal” chopstick effect now a pastiche of itself

**V1**
I fell in love with you body and soul
My hands feel sticky and my head’s ice cold
My sugar tastes sour my salt tastes sweet
I wanna lay down All instruments silence:
but I just can’t sleep drum trills back in
REFRAIN
It’s your Voodoo working
That’s your Voodoo working
Round and round same old thing All instruments silence:
A heartache, misery, trouble, drums, sax and full band rejoin:
and pain

REFRAIN
It’s your Voodoo working chopsticks back to prominence and skeletal
leitmotif returns
That’s your Voodoo working
It’s your Voodoo working
Your All instruments silence:
Voodoo Working and I can’t drums trill full band back in:
get a lift

Instrumental solo
:51 falsetto male wail, band continues groove
:55 revving sax solo steps in over wail
:59 wail repeats, sax continues
1:03 sax prolonged V7 as drums, rest of band trill up energy in
heterogeneous sound ideal toward return of the voice

V2
Slow down baby you’re (1:08 stray electric guitar, possible string break)
going too fast
Your love is Voodoo (1:10 stray electric guitar again) and I just can’t last
I cried last night and the night before All instruments silence:
20 long hours, my eyes are sore drums trill full band back in

REFRAIN
It’s your Voodoo working skeleton-kneed chopsticks noticeable again
That’s your Voodoo working
It’s your Voodoo working All instruments silence, calmer:
Voodoo Working and I can’t get a lift drum trills full band back in

Outro
1:33 falsetto wails, now whisperier, lead fadeout
1:37 sax slip, band begins falling apart
1:41 last wail, fadeout

Table 3. Katie Webster, “Don’t You Know” (1959/1960) (1:56)

Intro
:00 Sax and bass drum pickup vamp, ascending stepwise from Dominant to Tonic E
:03 piano and smooth timbered, surf-style Alberti electric guitar; snare-heavy drum
:09 voice enters singing in E-minor melodic contour, in contrast to the band's E-major

**V1**
Don’t you know
Don’t you know my love is true to dominant B major
Don’t you know
Don’t you know my love is true tonic
And if you leave me baby I don’t know what I’d do

**V2**
Please come back!
Let me hold you in my arms
Please come ba-a-ack
Let me hold you in my arms
And if you do that baby I’ll never do no harm

:46 sax solo, backed by trilling boogie piano; rest of band continuing in groove

**V3**
1:08 Can’t you see
That our love was meant to be
Can’t you se-e-e
That our love was meant to be
And if you leave me baby I’ll never, never be free

Don’t you know
Don’t you know my love is true
Don’t know you kno-o-ow
Don’t you know my love is true
And if you leave me baby I don’t know what I’ll do

**Outro**
Don’t you know
Don’t you kno-o-
1:45 minor-V6 melodic line, the quintessential pop “fright” chord, sung furthermore in her subito piano, upper register with each (blue) note of the tetrad sung alternately with tenuto and light vibrato
-o-o-ow
Don’t you kno-o-o-ow spooky upper register Gm6/Emaj
Don’t you kno-o-o-ow spooky upper register Gm6/Emaj
1:54 fast fadeout
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CHAPTER TWO
RECORDING THE SWAMP BLUES

“Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art...”62 Theodor Adorno

“My approach was downhome. Get down in the grass, and in the mud and sand, and scrape the ground. Make it as homely as possible. Instead of having that slick city, “city” sound, I had that swamp sound. It was kinda like comin’ out of a mud bucket.”63

Eddie Shuler

This chapter introduces the collectivity of music I call the swamp blues, which actually include many blues-derived playing styles, including rhythm & blues, rock & roll, urban blues, and jump blues. My discussion emphasizes the phenomenon surrounding the music that came from Jay Miller and Eddie Shuler’s studios, in conjunction with five brief biographies of musicians whose music helped shape this repertory of swamp blues music(s), though I hesitate to define the swamp blues in musical terms. At the core of my theoretical framework is a desire to depict the open-ended, fluid nature of popular music-making, especially African-American music-making in blues styles, in South Louisiana between 1950 and 1969, and the impact that music-making had on the notion of selfhood of its proponents. While it is tempting to analyze and divide this music and musician by coherent styles, the time and area under discussion resists such compartmentalization. Indeed, even if considering stylistic traits on a song-by-song basis, the same musicians sprawl several

62 Adorno and Leppert: 240.
contiguous, but clearly different, styles including traditional 1950s rhythm & blues, the French-tradition-informed swamp pop style, jump blues and rock ‘n’ roll, and Jimmy Reed-styled urban blues.

The primary musical associations of indigenous music in Southwest Louisiana are Cajun; in the second half of this chapter I suggest an expansion on that myopic history that restores an intertwined yet unique African-American popular musical history to the story of SWLA culture. I explain how Cajun culture became a cultural monolith, the structures in place that helped to make it overshadow other indigenous musical cultures of SWLA, and how, thanks to its explosive success in unveiling and honoring one of the last pure isolated American minicultures, the misnomer never came to be rectified in scholarship nor in the public eye. “Heritage” came to be synonymous in SWLA with Cajun French; “local music” with Zydeco and a Cajun antecedent.

This dissertation focuses on the rhythm & blues music that channeled through two figures in the Louisiana recording industry, Jay Miller and Eddie Shuler, in the 1950s and 1960s. I define the swamp blues—and rhythm & blues, in this circumstance—as the popular market-oriented, English-language recordings made in the Crowley, LA studios of Jay Miller and the Goldband Records studio belonging to Eddie Shuler in Lake Charles. This music was primarily made by black musicians and marketed with black frontmen, in front of typical 5-piece ensembles comprising one or two guitars (usually electric), electric bass, piano mostly from Katie Webster, sax from Lionel Torrence, frequent harmonica, and sundry percussion, especially from Jay Miller. For the purpose of this retrospective study, both Shuler or Miller's
marketing intentions for the records—whether they labeled and packaged them for blues, roots, rockabilly, or rock audiences—are secondary to the musical organization, the role of the producer-musician relationships, and other logistics and business practices.

Where in my first chapter I explore the economic forces that seeded the swamp blues and between whose pauses a decidedly non-French musical culture (/not-culture) sprang up in the middle of Louisiana, and representations of place and place-based identities within the swamp blues, in this chapter I explore the influential role of the record industry, producers, and studio in shaping both the sound of the swamp blues and their failure to hit the mainstream. I explore their inversed longevity and underground success abroad in my fourth chapter.

In this chapter I overview a short window in the history of the recording industry in Southwest Louisiana, in order to debrief the transition in which TV repair stores like Eddie Shuler’s Eddie’s Quick Service T.V. and electrical contractors like Jay Miller’s M&S Electric had entrée into the height of independent record labels in the 1940s-1960s. Intertwined with the world of independent recording studios in midcentury America are the important roles of radio and jukeboxes (and juke joints) first in competing against, then supporting, and continuing the local record industry.
Recording Industry in SWLA ca. 1960

Like the recording industry elsewhere in the nation, artists in these studios had little authority or rights when it came to their music once it had already left their bodies, either by voice or by hand. Media theorists have pointed to a systemic power structure within the industry that lifted authority from musicians and placed it, in excessive disproportion, in the hands of producers like Shuler and Miller. Scholars have termed this murky arena of dense power the culture industry’s “black box.” Within the black box, says scholars like Cottle (2003) and Frith (2000), musician labor is futile, and their autonomy is all but absent. Inside the black box, black voices, black labor, and black music were converted into an economy of blackness whose currency was held almost exclusively in white hands.

Upon studying the results of a long-awaited study in the U.K. to
examine the economic impact of the music industry.\textsuperscript{64} Simon Frith discovered the perceived power held by the record industry over its artists was not opaque, omnipotent, and monolithic, but more accurately that power came from a series of mini-industries linked by what he termed “chain(s) of deals”.\textsuperscript{65} Furthermore, by the year 2000, Frith observed two changes in how the public conceived of popular music. First, the age of digital reproduction had rendered what had been considered frivolous, inherently ephemeral entertainment of the 1950s and 1960s into items of intellectual artistry. Second, the creative source, creator, and owner of the music had consolidated thanks to a developing recognition of artist-creators as businessmen and – women. In contrast, in the early days of rock’n’roll, when singles in particular had been barely more than fodder for teens—quickly consumable and forgotten—their production had been through cheap manual (musician) labor. This latter scenario was often the case in J.D. Miller and Eddie Shuler’s music factories.\textsuperscript{66} Many swamp bluesmen recalled that they saw little or no monetary gains from their music, much less artistic recognition, amidst the


\textsuperscript{65} Frith (2000), 390.

\textsuperscript{66} Frith summarizes his revelation that the industry’s impenetrable facade was showing its first cracks in his 2000 essay, “Music Industry Research”, an article that summarized the conclusions of a sociological and economical MEMC study on popular music in Britain. He pointed to an opening of the music industry ‘black box’ that broke down the industry’s invincibility, partly as a result of the digitization and (illegal) file-sharing revolution that was quickly severing large chunks of the music industry’s power at a time. (Frith (2000): 390; Jones 50) Frith verbalizes that shift in the perception of the popular music industry clearly: “what is at stake is the ownership of titles rather than the exploitation of labour power”. While not fully disassembled by far, its deterioration had begun.
flash-in-the-pan nature of success within the industry and its quick-moving chains of deals.

A typical Goldband project concentrated its energies foremost on quick turnaround (thus, fast profit) by piggybacking the stylistic zeitgeist as defined by the pop charts. Shuler releases are likely to be poorly balanced, with the lead singer overmiked, and the backup band unmiked, untuned, and their timing, arrangement, and solos unrehearsed. Further adding to the jumble is Shuler’s unskilled mixing, which often led to a flat rhythm section with far too much treble and almost no bass EQ. He had a three-takes max policy. Shuler later called his method “straight ahead”.67

J.D. Miller’s approach differed in that while his primary interest in the record business remained financial, Miller frequently mentioned enjoyment in good record making, and kept high production values. At the material level, he liked sparse instrumentation—guitar, harmonica, and drums—, and noteworthy supplemental percussion, frequently created by the jack-of-all-trades Lazy Lester. The uncredited Lester decorated arrangements with clever, ornamental effects made by woodblocks, temple blocks, bongos, coffee cans, cardboard boxes, coke bottles, newspaper on Shetland pony saddles or Lester’s lap, or by rapping the studio walls. Miller’s signature touch was to drown parts of the music in heavy post-production echo and reverb, and then to close the song with a fadeout. The result of a Miller production was a clean, and strong, although distant utterance of the blues.

From 1955 he leased the majority of his blues output to Nashville’s

Excello records, where that signature ‘wall of sound’ production aesthetic constituted what would later be referred to on occasion as the consolidated ‘Excello Records sound’. In some circles, another misconception regarding the Miller-Excello relationship puts the studio under his ownership. For many years as the ‘Excello Sound’ has become a familiar entity on the American popular soundscape, uses of this misnomer frequently refer to the J.D. Miller-organized ‘swamp sound’.

**Radio and the Honky-Tonk Corridor**

“...put a nickel in the juke box, hear a Cajun band.”
Clarence Garlow, “Route 90” (1954)

Throughout this time, postwar Cajun radio brought American popular music into intimate spaces of SWLA. Cajun scholar Ryan Brasseaux says that this era of technological engagement led Cajuns to imagine themselves as part of the American mainstream. Crowley had been the epicenter of commercial Cajun music before the war, but with the increase of industrial jobs in the plants of SETX and Lake Charles after the war, the locus of music-making shifted westward down Highway 90, toward the Golden Triangle. A swathe of honky-tonks had been cropping up in the Golden Triangle since the 1901 Spindletop gusher, but it was not until the late 1940s that the area began to be referred to as a collective area of vice, accumulating names like “the Strip”, the “Honky-Tonk Corridor”, and “East Orange”.

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68 Joos 138.
70 “East Orange” was not a town but a district on the Louisiana side of the Sabine River, directly across from the oil town of Orange, Texas, where gambling, saloons, at least eight nightclubs, and one steamboat billed as “America’s Largest Floating Dance Pavilion” dropped
All of these nightclubs across “East Orange”, Orange, and Port Arthur, with their heterogeneous audiences of Cajuns, black Creoles, Texans, Midwesterners, and East Coast transplants from New York and Pennsylvania offered crucial performance opportunities for local musicians as a testing ground for new musical styles—the swamp blues, proto-zydeco, Cajun Western swing (string-band Cajun) and modern amplified (accordion-centered) Cajun alike. The countless clubs with jukeboxes drew young and aspiring musicians, like the future Juke Boy Bonner, to come listen to the barrage of new records arriving to the juke players at an exponential rate. In consequence of the heightened musical activity in this seedy Golden Triangle, radio airplay was diverse there, and with the ascendance of the deejay and the decline of live performance radio shows, shock jock-styled radio shows were many, and filled with the vim and vigor that young teenagers in particular—a key record-buying demographic—found attractive.

If there was any element of rhythm & blues music that helped to ease the transition from live performance radio to the record format, it was the small ensemble, which mimicked the live electrified swing bands they were replacing in instrumentation, fullness of sound, the solo-ensemble dynamic repartee, and structural reliance upon a boogie rhythm section. In these rhythm & blues outgrowths of swing- and jump-band ensembles, saxes began to have more solo appearances, backed by acoustic and electric guitars with increasing solo roles as the 1950s progressed. Throughout the South these

anchor. For more on the shift of cultural activity from Crowley in the 1930s to the Golden Triangle in the late 1940s, see Ryan Brasseaux (2009): 126-128, 185, and 277 n.21.
kinds of bands played to African-American audiences in African-American juke joints in the 1940s and 1950s; what is interesting about the SWLA-SETX “Honky-Tonk Corridor” is the abundance of white juke joints that featured black bands. This black band/white audience format carried east, out of the Corridor, to become common in the comparatively urbane areas of SWLA surrounding Lake Charles, too.

Shock jocks all over the U.S. had a performative style characterized by unpredictability, adrenaline, and the almost exclusive airplay of rhythm & blues records by African-American musicians, even if the shock jocks were white themselves. In small markets, deejays became important gatekeepers to the success of local independent records, since most of these labels lacked nationwide distribution (Jay Miller was a notable exception in the widespread availability of his records, through Excello). Many narratives of the paradigm shift enacted by rock ‘n’ roll’s seduction of American teenagers imply that as these first baby boomers listened to these records and came of age, they combined the music of their parents and grandparents “unwittingly” with the infiltrating national pop waves to create new genres, such as swamp pop in South Louisiana. That narrative does more than rob one and a half generations of young musicians—black and white—of agency; it also retroprojects oblivion onto historic actors who were very aware of, and influenced by popular rock’n’roll records from major labels.

Some of the biggest influences to African-American musicians along the gulf coast were, for rhythm & blues ensemble musicians early on, the

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71 Lornell 335,57-58., Turley 249.
visceral blues shouts of Big Joe Turner and his ensemble. Many of the session players for J.D. Miller and Eddie Shuler developed their styles from modes like his, like Katie Webster, sax players Lionel Torrence (Prevost), Danny George, and Leroy James; singers and rhythm players Ashton Savoy (guitar), Tal Miller (piano), Al Smith (guitar), and Al Foreman (guitar). For solo bluesmen like Lightning Slim, Juke Boy Bonner, Lazy Lester, and Lonesome Sundown who would continue playing in country-inflected downhome styles, their models were John Lee Hooker, Lightning Hopkins, and Guitar Slim’s talking blues race records from the late forties (Slim’s were electrified, and recorded half a decade later). The cutting edge, aggressive and electrified blues of Jimmy Reed and Howlin’ Wolf influenced frontmen-led rock’n’roll-style ensembles like Guitar Gable’s band (who backed Mr. Calhoun, “Left-handed”/“Blue Charlie” Morris, and early Slim Harpo sides); Silas Hogan’s band the Rhythm Ramblers, and Slim Harpo’s band the King Bees, who played with him live but did not record—all these in addition to the regular studio players.\textsuperscript{72} The frontmen with their own bands who have obvious Jimmy Reed inclinations in their singing and own guitar playing include Clarence Garlow, Ashton Savoy, Charles Mad Dog Sheffield, Lonesome Sundown’s later recordings, Jimmy Anderson, and Slim Harpo among others. Katie Webster, younger than most of the swamp blues players, was unique in coming of age during the rock’n’roll takeover of the 1950s. She spent her teen years copying

\textsuperscript{72} J.D. Miller believed that Guitar Gable’s band was the “most reliable” r&b band around in the late fifties, and as such he called on them for many blues sides cut then. Guitar Gable was a prominent swamp pop musician, and a few of his band members went on to make prominent swamp pop hits themselves, including the alto sax player Bernard Jolivette, better known under the recording name King Karl. See Bruce Bastin’s sleeve notes to FLY LP 599 (UK 1984) (Bastin 1984, n.p.).
the piano (Fats Domino), singing style (Little Richard, Chuck Berry), and later
gospel-influenced arranging (Ray Charles, Sam Cooke) of those ephemeral
radio hits. She is further set apart from the rest of her cohort by her
auspicious beginnings in the Sanctified church and classical piano lessons, as
I discuss later in this chapter.

**Behind-the-Scenes Work of Black DeeJay: Clarence Garlow**
The fight for airplay was real, and a major variable in Miller and
Shuler’s hit-record formulae. Shuler courted Lake Charles deejays first, then
black radio stations in Beaumont. Beaumont, the biggest city of the Golden
Triangle and arguably the seat of Golden Triangle civility, functioned like a
radio ground zero at that time for new record exposure. Because the radio
audience was comprised of so many single male laborers, who had to the area
come from Cajun, black Creole, Western, and Midwestern homes, musical
taste was diverse. Thus, radio shows enjoyed a hey day of true musical
heterogeneity. Between the almost constant influx of new workers and the
ephemerl nature of hits in those days, Beaumont, TX became a perfect
testing ground for new sounds. Eddie Shuler remembers importuning for
airplay at KJET, which marketed itself as the radio station of the largest niche
market. In the 1956 Beaumont City Directory, one advertisement read:
“Sabine Area’s Only Station Programming to Over 184,000 Negroes.”\(^\text{73}\) For
decades, if a record failed to find an audience there, back to the drawing

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\(^{73}\) Robertson 31, quoting a KJET advertisement from the *Beaumont City Directory 1956*,
Alphabetical List of Names, 267, 299, and Buyers’ Guide, 42.; By 2008, the KJET call letters
no longer existed on the AM or FM dial in Beaumont. The former KJET-1380, which was a
favorite for R&B music targeted to African American listeners, is now KRCM-1380 in
Beaumont, a Fox News all-news station. The KJET FCC license now belongs to the South
Bend [Seattle], WA radio station ‘105.7 The Jet’.
board. More often than not, however, the Golden Triangle demographic helped boost new music from independent producers.

Other important rhythm & blues testing ground stations courted by local recordmen were KCOH Houston, the self-proclaimed oldest black radio station in Texas and the Southern U.S., KALO Port Arthur, KAOK Lake Charles, KPLC Lake Charles, and KTRM Beaumont, legendary home to the “Big Bopper” J.P. Richardson. Like many famous rhythm & blues deejays of this era, Richardson was a white voice-over deejay with a black on-air persona. The most prominent model for this kind of evening deejay minstrelsy was probably Nashville’s WLAC, with its famous 50,000 watts broadcasting across the South, most of the eastern and Midwestern states, southern Canada, and select Caribbean islands. (In daylight, the signal reached parts of five states; their after-dark “skywave” signal reached twenty-eight states and beyond.) It gained notoriety as the “nighttime station for half the nation” with four rhythm & blues shows ostensibly intended for black audiences in the Deep South, but that were particularly popular among white teenagers. The shows lasted one to two hours each, airing consecutively from 8pm to 2am CST, Monday through Saturday. That made for thirty-six hours of rhythm & blues shows, hosted primarily by four middle-aged white deejays. Their suave commentary, easy colloquialisms, gravelly voicing, and double

74 Much like in blackface minstrelsy a generation prior, Richardson’s mainstream success spawned copycats, white at first, and later black. African-American deejays did not fully return to prominence in SWLA until the soul era.
entendre readings of advertisements turned the station into a Mecca for audio dials. 75

Several local deejays made names for themselves as scouts for local talent. Among them was the early swamp blues recording artist (and Beaumont entrepreneur) Clarence Garlow, whose KJET “Bon Ton Show” was a mainstay of the SWLA and SETX r&b scene. In addition to his radio work, the entrepreneurial Garlow had grocery stores, cafes, motels, a drive-in, and nightclubs (among his most popular was the confusingly titled “Bon Ton Drive-In” nightclub, which held 150-200 a night—too small a venue for his own performances, Garlow would gush, but just the right size for smaller acts like Clifton Chenier’s band). About 1955 he became assistant engineer, then chief engineer at KJET, and continued hosting radio shows (their titles always including “Bon Ton”) in Beaumont at KJET, KLVI, and KZEY, excepting a stint spent in California in 1953-1954 recording with Aladdin and Flair.

Amidst these other ventures, Garlow was a lifelong songwriter, including the regional classic “Please Accept My Love”, originally recorded by Jimmy Wilson for Goldband but covered by everyone from Johnnie Allan to Elton Anderson. Eddie Shuler summarized it well when he said the professional-mannered Garlow was nothing short of a music business “supertalent”. These radio show, nightclub, and other outlets are important for the connective tissue they were between swamp blues players and studio sessions or recording contracts. Beyond the songs he brought to Shuler, Garlow also brought in Charles “Mad Dog” Sheffield, Al Smith, and Guitar Junior.

Additionally, Garlow always had some concatenation of musicians to play behind him (J.D. Miller said Garlow’s pickup bands were never very good), and they entered into rotation at Goldband too: James “Ice Water” Williams played bass for Big Chenier and Classie Ballou in 1957; Little Brother Griffin drummed for Clifton Chenier in 1955, Guitar Junior 1957-59, Elton Anderson 1959-60, Juke Boy Bonner 1960, and Boozoo Chavis in 1964.76

Clarence Garlow was one of a handful of African-American deejays around SWLA and SETX who acted as booking agents and studio buffers to local musicians, including Bob Lutcher, brother of the singer and pianist Nellie Lutcher, who first brought Jimmy Wilson to Goldband. This deejay also had a nightclub where he booked Miller and Shuler artists, like Guitar Gable’s band who was paid $200 to play at “Bubba Lutcher’s” one night in December 1956. Willie “Bill Parker” Guidry was another behind-the-scenes actor in the local deejay, band-leading, and managing scene. Another former Garlow drummer, Bill Parker sessioned for Goldband, then later recorded in his own right with his Bill Parker’s Showboat Band that included Katie Webster for a while around 1959-1960. Former Garlow guitarist and Goldband session player Chester Randle also played with Bill Parker. A cement finisher by day, Parker’s work took him to Texas, Oklahoma, and elsewhere for two-week stints, after which he would return to Goldband with new artists he had picked up along the way. In this way Parker was responsible for bringing in

76 Broven 106, Govenar 371, Wood and Fraher 104, Shuler 1993, n.p.; recording session personnel and dates from Leadbitter and Slaven BRSD.
Jesse “Blues Boy” Palmer, and two rare black female artists in this era at Goldband, Little Miss Peggy/Peggie, and Ola Vaughn.77

On the other side of the Mississippi, WXOK Baton Rouge had the black deejay Ray Meaders, air name “Diggy Do” who would eventually connect Lightning Slim and J.D. Miller.78 Record veteran Floyd Soileau recalled that in Ville Platte, a small town north of Opelousas on Route 167, KVPI had been influential in seeding the audience for rhythm & blues in South Louisiana. The 250-watt station reached as far as Lafayette, gripping the area with a show called “Juke Junction” that Soileau recalls was the first to play black rhythm & blues. The success of Bootsie Cappelle’s hosting on KVPI influenced other stations to follow. After his “Sea of Love” star had faded, Phil Phillips eventually hosted at KJEF in Jennings, where he introduced himself as the “king of the whole black world!”

Due partly to these deejays’ realms of influence, radio airplay—especially from airplay-reporting stations that contributed to chart rankings—became a crucial determinant to the success of new records in SWLA. Jay Miller, Eddie Shuler, George Khoury, and Floyd Soileau all sold records in addition to making them. Jay Miller just had a few shelves at the front of his M&S Electric contracting shop at first, and the same with Shuler, but the

other two record men had sizable record storefronts devoted to record sales. During the halcyon days of recording in SWLA, George Khoury’s sales, for instance, were deemed significant enough for *The Cash Box* to frequently list his top ten sellers. Swamp pop legend Rod Bernard reflected on the not-always-congruent nature of record sales in South Louisiana and what charted elsewhere in the country: he told John Broven, “South Louisiana was a unique area, the things that sold here a lot of times didn’t sell anywhere else. And things that were selling everywhere else weren’t selling here.” Perhaps the mixed-bag top ten at Floyd’s was worth mentioning in *Cash Box* because it appeared to operate autonomously in comparison to the rest of the country’s top selling charts.

I do not mean to present the false assumption that hot acts all over the country were unknown to Louisianian buyers. To the contrary, the musical recordings under study bear conscious evidence of their vogue. Two of the most obvious examples are Ray Charles and Jimmy Reed: in July 1959, Ashton Savoy made his instrumental “Rooster Strut” as a loosely-based rural interpretation of Ray Charles’ “What’d I Say” that had come out in March of that year. Katie Webster, who played in Savoy’s band then and is featured in “Rooster Strut”, frequently played Ray Charlesian piano passages here and later with Bill Parker’s Showboat Band (“All Day All Night” GB-1110, 1960), along with fellow sessioneer Tal Miller. All of Miller’s “Big Four” mimic Jimmy Reed in voice, guitar, or both: in particular Lightning Slim’s “I Love to Hold My Baby’s Hand” (Excello unissued) ca. 1959, Slim Harpo’s guitar passim, Lazy Lester’s “I Hear You Knockin’” Excello 45-2155, 1959, and
especially Lonesome Sundown’s “Bad Woman Blues” (Excello unissued)/”Hoo Doo Woman Blues” Excello 45-2259, 1964. As I mentioned briefly above, other swamp bluesmen like Boogie Jake’s “Early Morning Blues” (Excello unissued) 1957, Charles Sheffield’s “Clear My Nights of Misery” GB-1045, 1960 and “Shoo Shoo Chicken” (Excello unissued) ca. 1960, Guitar Junior’s “I Got It Made (When I Marry Shirley Mae)” GB-1058, 1957, and Juke Boy Bonner’s “I’m Not Jiving” (Goldband unissued) 1960 also lift their vocal timbre and guitar licks straight from Jimmy Reed’s records.

Making the national song charts, it is worth noting, was not an end in itself for many South Louisiana musicians. Between the disconnect of regional and nationwide popularity, payola or other currying of favor among deejays, and the unreliable reporting of black record sales to white customers—who tended to have more expendable income, and thus purchasing power, than black teens—, the Cash Box and Billboard charts were not necessarily accurate representations of what America was buying.79 And yet, because the swamp blues did not represent the experience of any one community in time or place, much less did they stand in for the anti-commercial folk experience of a specified group. The swamp blues were not symbolically resonant to African-American communities in the same way other contemporary styles

79 Out of a fear of racial prejudice among customers who might perceive the store as catering to an undesirable demographic, after desegregation, the reporting of sales numbers may have been skewed along the racial divide. Record store sales reporting—a direct contributor to Billboard chart ranks—from stores located in traditionally white areas may have been biased toward inflating the sales of white recording artists while downplaying the popularity of black music. In truth, black record sales likely were higher than reported. For more on the disconnect between musical sales, juke plays, song popularity, and industry recognition in the mid-twentieth century pop market, see Miller, Karl Hagstrom. Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010 and Wald, Elijah. How the Beatles Destroyed Rock ’n’ Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
were, like Motown soul or even South Louisiana Zydeco. Instead, they were commercial constructions.

Often, they were attempts at joining the slipstream of nationwide hits by Jimmy Reed (followed by Slim Harpo), Ray Charles (mimicked by Ashton Savoy, Tal Miller), Muddy Waters (Lonesome Sundown used the same Muddy Waters guitar lick from “Still a Fool” to open a dozen songs, including “My Home is a Prison”), T-Bone Walker, Howlin’ Wolf (Charles Sheffield’s opening lines, though Sheffield’s music is funkier), and Lightnin’ Hopkins.\(^8\) Swamp bluesmen themselves or Shuler and Miller penned imitations in a testament to not just the frequently, fundamentally commercial orientation of the swamp blues, but also to a recognition among these SWLA musicians that popular music was an ephemeral industry, sometimes best capitalized upon by creating intentional fleeting blips for a regional radar.

In the late nineties, articles, compilation discs, and festival materials began making retrospective aspirational claims to the existence of a swamp blues community; the historical problem with such coverage is not the claim to community itself, but rather the nature of the community they claimed existed. \textit{Blues & Rhythm} wrote “These Old Excello Guys Still Stayed in Touch,” and in \textit{Texas Monthly}, “Blues Brothers: The reteaming of four veterans of the Pt. Arthur music scene isn’t literally a family reunion, but it sure feels like one.” The titles of these pieces belied the origin of the swamp blues community in favor of basic environmental determinism. Instead, a commercial recording orbit in South Louisiana alone is what created swamp

\(^8\) Williams, n.p.
blues “community”.

Furthermore, this professional orbit was set in place thanks to the existence of mass media. Without the dissemination of Louis Jordan’s jump blues and other r&b offshoots of the late forties, Fats Domino’s rock ‘n’ roll followed quickly by Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Blind Boy Fuller, and Jimmy Reed’s new brand of solo blues in the fifties, and Californian wa-wa surf guitar in the early sixties, arguably, the swamp blues would not have existed either.81

**Royalties and A&R-Man Privilege**

Postwar recordmen commonly took songwriting credits on a black musician’s record, irrespective of any actual co-authorship or songwriting contribution. Small-scale independent studios running outside of large urban centers had the benefit of isolation, furthermore, in that itinerant artists had little say when their recordings went to pressing some weeks later. The traditional narrative attributes a naïveté to these musicians that prevented them from recognizing the implications of giving away those credits; the likelier reality is that musicians either stopped just short of an outright fight

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81 David Brackett has argued that in the twentieth century black communities dispersed, but were made more aware of each other through the circulation of music. For him, there is a direct correspondence and stable relationship between music and audience identity, in part because categories of popular music were mapped onto group identities in a process Karl Hagstrom Miller has called “segregating sound”, when music and identities were separated into poles around which the music industry has categorized ever since. Brackett builds upon Benedict Anderson’s nations of imagined communities to reveal how African-American audiences could organize around the circulation of recorded music, separate from a diasporic-based connection. See Brackett (2005) and K.H. Miller (2010). Author’s personal notes from Brackett, David. “Foxtrots, Hillbillies, and the Classic Blues: Categorizing the 1920s.” University of Pennsylvania Music Department Colloquium lecture. 31 January 2012.; Davis 11, 17; Minton 486; Wight, Phil. “These Old Excello Guys Still Stayed in Touch.” *Blues & Rhythm* 139 (May 1999):8-9.; Morthland, John. “Blues Brothers: The Reteaming of four veterans of the Pt. Arthur music scene isn’t literally a family reunion, but it sure feels like one.” *Texas Monthly* (Jul 1999): 68, 70.
(with their employer, after all) over credits, or they did fight, and rarely succeeded to set the(ir) record straight. Many of the artists working for Miller and Shuler have told such stories; Lazy Lester said Miller’s betrayal on royalty rights led him to leave music-making for nearly two decades. Goldband reportedly gave Guitar Junior such a distaste he left for Chicago. Katie Webster went moved to California in semi-retirement. The family of Juke Boy Bonner, who was frequently denied requests for payment by Shuler, filed suit against one Houston producer a decade after Bonner’s death. Lonesome Sundown turned to the church. Jimmy Anderson became a policeman. Big Chenier quit recording to run his Chenier’s Barbecue and Smoke House café full-time. Slim Harpo was unusual in fighting outright for his.

J.D. Miller frequently had his artists record covers of his prior successful records. For instance, in one of his earliest sessions, Miller had his premiere blues man Lightnin' Slim (Wild Bill Phillips on vocals) take a try at Boozoo Chavis’ 1954 instant Zydeco standard and take-off hit “Paper in My

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82 Where the scope of this chapter falls short of a thorough examination of the financial disenfranchisement of swamp blues musicians by their producers Eddie Shuler and Jay Miller, Weldon “Juke Boy” Bonner’s two letters, once a year, to Eddie Shuler are representative of the efforts made by many African-American musicians working in the area to receive payment; Bonner later said that each time he asked Shuler about money, Shuler put him off with claims that the records were coming, or that the machinery had a broken part that held up the process, or that Bonner needed to tour and perform more to market himself in order to get money rolling in, etc. For his part, Shuler claimed the moneys earned on the records rarely paid for the production, so there was no profit to speak of to pass along to the musicians. Both these sides of the story are verified in letters between musician and producer. In 1960, Shuler wrote “…we have not as of this date made enough money off of your record to pay for the pressing. […] the company cannot make advances, because advances against unearned royalties are similar to purchasing land at the bottom of the ocean. Which means you may never see it and if you do what good is it? Thanking you for writing, I remain…” In 1961, “I will let you know as soon as a record is being processed. At this writing we are still in the hole from the other one….” Shuler, Eddie. Personal correspondence with Weldon “Juke Boy” Bonner. 30 September 1960. Lake Charles, LA to Houma, LA., and 6 March 1961. Lake Charles, LA to Kenner, LA. Duplicates of the originals in possession of the SFC at UNC-Chapel Hill Goldband Recording Corporation Collection. Lomax, John Nova. 'Good Riddance to Bad Rubbish; Roy Ames, child pornographer and record producer, dies at 66' obituary. Houston Press Vol. 15, No. 35 (Aug 28, 2003), n.p.
Shoe”. Similarly, Katie Webster covered Mr. Calhoun’s “On the Sunny Side of Love” two months after it first hit in 1959. Slim Harpo (1960) did Lonesome Sundown’s “My Home Is a Prison” (1956-1957) Jimmy Anderson did Slim Harpo’s signature “I’m a King Bee” (1959) in 1962. The same was routine at Goldband: “Secret of Love” (Trey 1011-B) was recorded first by Elton Anderson in 1959 on Shuler’s short-lived, joint venture label with his son Wayne Shuler, Trey, then Jo-El Sonnier (GB 1195-A) in 1967, and two later Katie Webster versions, (GB 1261-B & GB 1262-B) ca. 1974 and (GB 45-8259-B) ca.1980. A second Goldband example is Sticks Herman’s “Lonely Feeling” released on Shuler’s swamp pop label Tic Toc 103-B in 1961, covered by Sonny Lamont (GB 1162-A) ca. 1966, and Danny James with the Fabulous Kings (GB 1194-A & 1196-A) in 1968. Last is one of Guitar Jr.’s classics, “Family Rules”, recorded by his combo (GB 1058-A) in 1957, and covered by Katie Webster (GB 1248-A) ca. 1973.

Outside of verbal permission from the original artist, one reason it was simple for the SWLA producers to have several artists record the same song was because Miller, in particular, did pen many that came from his studio. Setting aside his considerable success as a producer, perhaps Miller’s greatest commercial talent was as a songwriter. BMI counts 499 song titles to J.D. Miller, Jay Miller, and Jerry West (Miller’s blues-writing pseudonym). Comparatively, other swamp bluesman considered to be prolific songwriters, like Clarence Garlow, Slim Harpo, Katie Webster, or Guitar Jr., have 27, 55,
28, and 91 registered works with BMI respectively. For a few years in the fifties, Jay Miller’s income was bolstered by the success of his “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels”, which he wrote in 1952 for Acuff-Rose, and which Kitty Wells made a million-seller and #1 C&W hit. Jay Miller has probably gotten more industry acclaim than Eddie Shuler for songwriting and in the documentation of Louisiana music, Shuler’s songwriting career more than doubles Miller’s output. BMI accredits 787 work titles to Shuler, including joint credit on Garlow’s “Bon Ton Roula”, Boozoo Chavis’ “Paper in My Shoe”, “Secret of Love”, Guitar Junior’s “Family Rules”—even though, for instance, Guitar Jr. (Lee Baker, Jr.) recalled writing the song in a dream he had at age 17 in about 1950. According to Baker, Shuler had made no changes or additions.

Irrespective of the producer’s actual role in writing the song, Miller gave himself writing or co-writing credits on nearly every song from every blues artist, and Shuler did the same across genres. In Crowley, the producer often provided a subject, stanza, lyric, or an anecdote and left the music to the frontman and band to work up. Other times, Lightning Slim, for instance,

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83 See BMI database for “Garlow, Clarence J.”, “Moore, James H.”, five under “Webster, Kathryn” and six under “Webster, Katie.” Most of these are shared Jay Miller as “Jerry West”. Webster’s titles are also shared with Lionel Prevost (four) or Ashton Savoy as “Conroy” (two). Guitar Junior (Lee Baker, Jr.) had the longest recording career of all of these musicians, in great part because he has outlived them by several decades. He still performs in Chicago as Lonnie Brooks. He and Lazy Lester are the only still living swamp bluesmen from the original generation.


came in with a story and worked it into a song in a few run-throughs. The Flyright LJMS series contained a few such Urtext alternate takes that give insight to the recording process at Crowley. Because in-session composition was the norm in Crowley, especially with the blues players who specialized in the talking blues, like Lightning Slim, and those whose melodies sounded virtually the same across records, again like Lightning Slim, plus Lazy Lester and Silas Hogan, many of the Crowley recordings feature identical musical arrangements. Indeed Miller’s tactic was to record one song, re-record that song, and record it again, across session dates, fronting vocalists, and backup bands, until he felt a cut was hardy, and had at least some local commercial viability. Across these trial-and-error procedures, Miller curated the circumstances—actors, instruments, and occasionally the boozy fuel—that generated these songs. Even with the downhome bluesmen who tended to come to him with their own repertoire, Miller added his name. Examples from the BMI catalogue of downhome songwriters whose oeuvres are almost all co-listed with “Jerry West” are Cornelius Green (Lonesome Sundown) with 42 registered songs, Otis Hicks (Lightning Slim) with 30, Silas Hogan with 21, Moses Whispering Smith with six, and Leslie Johnson (Lazy Lester) with five.86

Adding to the song-credits tumult is the legal reality that Miller and Shuler each had their own publishing firms. Eddie Shuler created Kamar Publishing with Don Pierce’s advice (and Pierce was joint owner); Tek

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86 Lonesome Sundown’s songs are listed under the misspelled Cornelius Greene in the BMI database.; Moses Whispering Smith’s entries omit his given first name. Lazy Lester’s are mixed with another “L Johnson” in BMI.
Publishing was running by mid-1964. J.D. Miller published his blues through a songwriting contract he had with Acuff-Rose dating back to at least 1951. Once he began leasing blues to Excello in 1954, they handled the publishing through Excellorec. Miller published other titles under his Jamil publishing company, and some are Excellorec-Jamil jointly. To musicians, this seemed as though Miller and Shuler must have been hoarding cash. Not only would the songwriting royalties be split with Shuler or Miller, but there was also the very real legal gatekeeping of publishing rights, which Miller and Shuler inevitably owned solely and from which they received compensation in perpetuity in the reissue deals of the 1970s on.

Figure 8. Goldband Enterprizes promotional document advertising the studio’s services, persuading the reader “You’ll remember the top quality of our

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88 Leadbitter (1968), 9.
recordings long after you’ve forgotten the very nominal cost.” The rate is $18 per hour of studio time, which “(Includes A&R Man when desired)”, plus $2.50 for the tape. The improvised letterhead names the Tic-Toc, Goldband, and Tek labels, and the house Tek Publishing, Co. ca.1960. Courtesy of the Southern Folklife Center at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Producers wore several hats—as Shuler and Miller were apt to remind interviewers—acting as agents, managers, packagers, and promoters of swamp blues musicians. With each change of hat the musicians bore visual reminders of a certain business capital wielded by Miller and Shuler that the musician himself could not access. Within the record industry pipeline, small producers operating small labels fed individual record singles to bigger labels for leasing. Single musicians could not circumnavigate the blind process without the intermediary producer.

This sort of systemic power dynamic is personified in the spatial relationships between Shuler or Miller and their musicians during production. The engineer behind wall or glass at the helm, with a dashboard of manipulations at hand, the musicians grouped together in the studio, lumped and sharing microphones. I do not intend to interpret this operational division of people to be any more than it is—practical for the purposes of acoustics—but this spatial orientation does reiterate positions of dominance and subordination.89 This is not the only occasion that such spatial structuring of the musician-producer relationships occurs. In promotional visits to radio stations or record stores along Highway 90, to the nightclub gigs for which Miller or Shuler had booked their musicians, and in writerly credits on the 45-rpm records themselves, this position of the producer elevated above a camp of musicians is repeated.

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89 Massey 87.
Lake Charles-centered Swamp Blues Activity, ca. 1960: Eddie Shuler in business

“I liked my radio show, ‘cause it was getting me some good booking!”

“About three months later, I quit the radio show. I got to where I said I don’t need that thing no more.”

Eddie Shuler, 1990

Shuler’s blues artists lay at the periphery of his most retold success stories. When asked for highlights of his recording (and scouting) prowess, the names Dolly Parton, Iry Lejeune, Clifton Chenier, fell freely and immediately from Shuler’s lips. He never proclaimed expertise in blues music, however, merely that he had a signature approach to recording the blues—or rather, a tactic for recording black blues musicians. Despite being but one of two record producers working in the blues in the region, for whatever reason Shuler never put many eggs in that basket, and chose instead to prioritize other genres despite obvious interest in the blues overseas.

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90 Shuler, Eddie. Personal interview by Larry Benicewicz. 1990, Part I. Lake Charles, La. Tape recordings in possession of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette Center for Louisiana Studies. Accession number BE2.009. Eddie Shuler declared this loyalty to the radio station at 30:25 into the interview. Four seconds later in the same interview, at 30:29, he said he left the station.
Eddie Shuler was born March 27, 1913 in Wrightsboro, TX, a town about 75 miles east of San Antonio with a population of about 100. In the considerably more metropolitan Lake Charles, the twenty-nine-year-old Shuler began working part-time at a music store to supplement his day job as a dragline operator. At that store he met the members of a western swing-hillbilly-Cajun group called the Hackberry Ramblers, who taught him to play music, and joined them from 1943 to 1945, before forming his own similar string band, Eddie Shuler and the All-Star Reveliers. Shuler found his knack for promotion and sales, and set out on his own, leaving behind both the store and band where he cut his teeth. He borrowed $250 from his mother and opened Eddie’s Music House.

Eddie Shuler initially formed Goldband Records to release recordings of his own band, whose wider exposure through record sales or juke plays, he believed, would generate business. His lasting claim to Cajun fame would come a few years later, when he reluctantly gave in to repeated visits from a nearly-blind French accordion player Iry LeJeune, now memorialized in history as one of the greatest-selling Cajun musicians of all time. To preserve
the Goldband name from LeJeune’s potential failure, Shuler created the Folk-Star label to release him and his Louisiana “folk” music.

After two or three surprise, run-away successes with LeJeune on Folk-Star, Eddie Shuler cast his worry over the desirability of Cajun music aside and began releasing LeJeune on Goldband. Emboldened by the sales and the excitement of producing, in 1954 Shuler decided to stop performing and produce instead. He bought a one-track, portable wire tape recorder for $278, an investment that thrilled him because he was no longer bound to back-room deals with radio engineers to record him on the side. He continued recording the twenty-one year old godfather of Cajun music until his sudden death in a car wreck in 1955. Upon Lejeune’s death, Shuler was left with an overnight goldmine that put him on the map across the nation, and made him owner of the “cornerstone” repertoire for the Cajun music revival of the next decade.

Figure 12. Goldband’s first record, G-1011-A "Broken Love" (1946).

In 1952 Shuler’s company had undergone the first of two expansions in the fifties. At this date he moved from his old Eddie’s Music House store at
830 Broad Street to a former church at 313 Church Street where the Goldband Records sign still hangs today. The larger expansion occurred in 1955. He got into publishing, contracted new artists left and right, and for a time, hired out distribution. Later in life he would reflect upon this as a period of bravado in which his taste of success led him to believe he was too good to miss, and “overextended” himself, both in spending and in the accrual of new artists under contract. (“One time I decided that I was a record executive and...I should do like all other record companies, let the other guy go out and sell the stuff. I’d just sit back and smoke the cigars, have money coming in!”)\(^9\) After a sour two months, Shuler resumed distributing himself from the trunk of his Cadillac. He visited jukebox operators then individual record stores, selling anywhere from two of each genre to 900-1,800 records in one go.

Figure 13. Eddie Shuler posed with his Cadillac, trunk filled with records and cigar in mouth. On the rear he captioned the photo “Record Man Eddie Shuler.”

Gradually he set up an aggregation of buildings and lean-tos on the corner lot that one researcher called the “Goldband Complex” in 1984, a title Shuler himself thought was comically euphemistic. The pile of mismatched wooden additions housed his 16-foot by 30-foot recording studio, his “tower” where boxes were stored, his Eddie’s Music House record store, and the main bread-winner, a radio and television repair shop called Eddie’s Quick-Service TV.

Even though the blues constituted a large percentage of Goldband work from the mid-fifties on, Shuler never relied on them for income. Instead, his claims to fame from this era are Boozoo Chavis’ 1954 recording of “Paper In My Shoe”, Phil Phillips’ “Sea of Love” in 1959, and the 1959 hole-in-one first

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recording of thirteen-year-old Dolly Parton’s “Puppy Love”, thanks to
introduction by her uncle Robert Henry Owens, who was stationed in Lake
Charles cater-cornered from Shuler’s home.

**Eddie Shuler labels**

Shuler created and closed about seven subsidiary labels in addition to
Goldband over the years, with generally only two or three operational at any
same time. By Shuler’s accounts, Goldband went “commercial” in 1956, the
same year that Excello decided to back their (Jay Miller’s) Louisiana r&b
nationally. Under his fully expanded operation, he published the records
through four publishing companies that he set up for separate genres. The
first year or two had more variation, but by 1960 Goldband had entered a
groove: with a few exceptions, Longhorn Publishing was the branch for Texas
artists, Kamar began to appear on blues records in 1957, and Tek was reserved
for swamp pop and Cajun.94

Goldband was the first (1944/46) followed in quick succession by the
folk-oriented Folk-Star label (1949). Tic Toc (ca. 1961) put out two successful
swamp-pop ballads, ANLA (1968) was created for soul, although swamp
blues, swamp pop, and cajun and zydeco occasionally appeared on the label.
For a time, the diversifying Shuler maintained the business license on an
“Anla Graphics Printing” company, too. In the sixties, the bulk of Goldband’s
income was increasingly from Cajun. By 1970 nearly no black records sold.95

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94 Between 1960 and 1968, eight swamp blues records were published through Tek, but two of
those were reissues of pre-1960 material. See selected Goldband catalogue as printed in the
95 Even though the market for r&b was dead in the U.S., or so Americans believed, in the
seventies the blues in the U.K. were still going strong, as I discuss in my fourth chapter.
For years Shuler would explain that recording only brought in supplemental income, while “your catalogue...pays the rent”. Mail-order distribution was Shuler’s bread and butter from the sixties on. A 1981 *Billboard* piece vouched that Goldband’s primary venture were wholesales and “rackjobbers” in Louisiana, and into Beaumont, Orange, and Port Arthur, Texas—the same territory that had always provided Shuler with artists, material, and buyers.⁹⁶

**Crowley-centered Swamp Blues Activity ca. 1960: Jay Miller in business**

“This is a very difficult business. Chicken today and feathers tomorrow.”⁹⁷

*Jay Miller, 1991*

“In time, I learned about the record makers’ ways of doing business—good, bad, and indifferent.”⁹⁸

*John Broven, Record Makers and Breakers, 2011*

Arguably the most important—or at least for a time a British cult favorite—indie label owner and record man during the era’s height was J.D. “Jay” Miller. The research supports this going back to the earliest overseas investigations into American blues. There are twenty-give bibliographic entries in Robert Ford’s seminal *A Blues Bibliography* under Jay D. Miller by name, twenty-nine including publications on his record labels, fifty more when counting Excello entries that cross-reference him or entries on his contributions to a regional southern Louisiana blues sound, an additional five

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⁹⁷ Miller/Bernard, n.p.

⁹⁸ Broven 2011, 4.
obituaries, and none of those numbers including references to him in any artist entries. The earliest writing on him encapsulates his priority in any study on indie blues labels in their halcyon days: from *Blues Unlimited*’s (*BU*) 1963 coverage of independent record men in the South, it was written by John Broven and titled “The Southern Record Men. Number One: Jay D. Miller.”

From the earliest days of the British Blues movement, Leadbitter and Broven’s school explore and return to Miller—the man, not just output from his studio—in supplements to *BU*, stand-alone publications (1968) and other discrete coverage through 1976 when the rest of continental Europe picked him up. While my Chapter 4 concerns overseas writing on the swamp blues and comprehensive bibliographies are available in print elsewhere (Ford 2007, Komara 2006), an outline of Jay Miller’s typewritten trek across Europe is: the Swedish in *Jefferson* 37 (1977), the French in *Soul Bag* (1979) a few times before folding into Herzhaft’s first printing of his *Encyclopédie du Blues* (1979), and the Dutch in *Block* (1980) and *Goldmine* (1981). As soon as monographs on the blues began churning out, J.D. Miller featured in their pages. See, for example, Paul Oliver’s influential *Conversations with the Blues* (1965, 1967, 1997). A new spate of writing on J.D. Miller’s person appears in the 1990s among mostly second-generation enthusiasts and a few of the old guard hangers-on, in publications like *Blues & Rhythm* (1987), *Jefferson* (1990), *Louisiana Folklife* (1991), *Soul Bag* (1996) and retrospective

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monographs like *Portrait of the Blues* by Trynka and Wilmer (1996) and Oliver’s third edition of *CWTB* (1997). Several 1996 and 1997 published pieces came following Miller’s death in March of that year.\(^{100}\)

Jay Miller’s greatest commercial and critical successes in the blues idiom came from his “big four” artists, Lightnin’ Slim, Slim Harpo, Lazy Lester, and Lonesome Sundown.\(^{101}\) Lightnin’ Slim was the first bluesman he recorded and remained his all-time favorite blues musician decades later. In a 1991 interview with swamp pop scholar Shane Bernard, Miller said, “Now when I really got into the blues, my first one that I was crazy about was Lightnin’ Slim. Was always my favorite. And [through him] we got into these others, Slim Harpo, Lonesome Sundown, Lazy Lester…” The Crowley producer thought Lightnin’ Slim was the most talented musician and arranger of all the bluesmen he recorded, the most efficient among them in translating emotion and experience to music. He spoke of Slim as occupying a seat of primogeniture for having scouted and mediated these introductions. Perhaps unconsciously, Miller’s memory nevertheless seems to have attributed Crowley’s golden years, where great swamp blues recordings snowballed from 1955 to 1962, to Lightning Slim. History however has rewarded Slim Harpo with the greatest fame among swamp bluesmen.

Harpo has been credited with creating and encapsulating the “signature” sound of any South Louisiana blues music, even if Miller’s refined studio techniques of deep reverb, close frequency echo, and multiple layers of

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overdubbed percussion, in addition to the signature sounds from his consistent session musicians—like Katie Webster’s rolling boogie piano, Lazy Lester’s creative percussion, Lightning Slim’s hypnotic guitar pickups—are more responsible for the musical species codified in the Flyright *Legendary Jay Miller Sessions* series. In a thinly-veiled effort at canonization, in the 1990s a six-volume CD series titled *Louisiana Swamp Blues* depicts Harpo’s ascendancy: “Slim Harpo stands out from the other three kings of Louisiana (read: Crowley) swamp blues in his depth of texture, his non-reliance on the 12-bar format, his occasional starting on the IV, the complexity of the bass and guitar parts, and love all, he could write the best tunes.” ¹⁰² No mention of queens like Katie Webster, no mention of Slim or Sundown’s idiosyncrasies with time, or the high profile of Lazy Lester’s non-conventional percussion, or Clarence Garlow’s sixteen-bar evocations of T-Bone Walker or Lionel Prevost’s epic subjugation of the tenor sax. Because a Harpo song crossed over highest on the *Billboard* charts, and British blues rockers covered his works and spoke of his influence, all but a small contingency of British devotees would forget other names in the swamp blues. The rest of the history of the swamp blues would be distilled to the names Harpo, Miller, and Shuler.

¹⁰² Coleridge and Folterbauer, n.p.
Lightnin’ Slim (1913-1974)

Otis Hicks was the first local blues musician to score a hit with 1954’s “Bad Luck” recorded in J.D. Miller’s studio and released on what could be considered his trial label, Feature 3006 (1954). Hicks continued his successful record streak with Miller first on Feature and soon on Excello. Other Baton Rouge bluesmen followed him to Miller’s studio, including the rest of the “big Four”, in order, Slim Harpo, Lonesome Sundown, and Lazy Lester, and in 1959 Silas Hogan and band. Two members of Hogan’s band—harpist Sylvester Buckley and drummer Jimmy Dotson—would become standby stable musicians for Miller recordings through the sixties.

After learning to play the guitar from first, his father, and later his

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older brother in the thirties, Hicks did not begin to perform professionally until 1948. In the late thirties and early forties he cut his teeth at picnics, house parties, school dances, church events, and country supper fish fries around St. Francisville. In 1946 he moved thirty miles down the Highway 61 to Baton Rouge, where he began to make a name for himself playing locally in juke joints of North Baton Rouge, not far from the Exxon-Mobil plant that hired many black laborers. He also played on radio shows, and at other outdoor events. It was during these days that Otis Hicks met the harmonica player Schoolboy Cleve playing the same club dates and radio shows, and the two began playing together on radio dates. Cleve later said he played in all of Hicks’ early recordings until he began to have sessions in his own right in late 1956 for Feature, Reynaud, and Johnny Vincent’s Ace label (a local player for whom Lightning Slim would also record in the interim of his two Feature releases with Jay Miller). As we will see below, Cleve was absent on at least the two earliest Miller sessions. After a few relatively fruitless years of trying the circuit solo, he moved to the San Francisco Bay area in 1960, whereupon he quit the music profession.

In the early fifties, harmonica player James Moore, then going by the stage name Harmonica Slim, heard Hicks perform on a radio show and approached him. The two formed a lifelong professional and personal relationship thereafter. One local deejay named Ray Meaders, a future radio

104 Bruce Bastin’s sleeve notes to FLY LP 524 say he did not “take up playing guitar” until 1948, but that was the year he took it up professionally. Bastin corrects this chronology on FLY LP 583. Bastin (1976b), n.p., Bastin (1981), n.p.
105 Blues promoter Steve La Vere was in Taj Mahal’s dressing room in late 1969 when Cleve walked in, introduced himself, and gave this account of his—and Lightning Slim’s—recording career. LaVere, Steve. “Schoolboy Cleve!” Blues Unlimited 69 (Jan 1970): 22.
celebrity in the area known on air simply as “Diggy Do”, meanwhile became friends with Slim and brokered a meeting with J.D. Miller for him. As the history goes, after hearing Hicks’ radio performance, Miller agreed to record him thanks to the deejay’s intervention. Once in Crowley, upon hearing Slim in the studio Miller reportedly caught the blues bug through him. The detailed history is more nuanced than that, and its details are important for the insight they give onto how Miller’s infamous stable of knockout blues musicians came to be.

Actually, the radio station encounter with Slim had begun as an invitation from Meaders for Miller to listen to a seven or eight-piece band, whose brash horns had overshadowed the quiet guitar player in back. Miller had already begun to excuse himself when he heard the guitar player, spun on his heel and introduced himself. He asked the laid back, slow-speaking forty-year-old if he would like to make records, to which Slim replied “Yes, sir”, and Miller put Meaders in charge of getting Slim to the studio for a recording date. Later Meaders would make his way it onto that first tape: having never touched a drum set before, Miller was stuck and had Meaders play a leftover bass drum—or rather an “old piece of a drum” another band had left behind.

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106 Meaders worked for Baton Rouge radio station WVOK, which was part of a larger radio station chain owned by Stanley Ray, and all of whose call letters ended in O-K. The chain’s format included the disc jockey name “OKY-DOO-KEE”, so many deejays over several turnover “generations” were called by the same air name. “OKY-DOO-KEE” got shortened in many cases to “Diggy Do”. Ray “Diggy Do” Meaders, then, while an icon and celebrity of radio in and around Baton Rouge, was just one of many “Diggy Do” at related stations including WAOK and WLOK in Memphis, for example. If, and when, a “Diggy Do” disc jockey left the station, his air name stayed there, and was reassumed by the next deejay. For more on black-audience and white-audience, black-“themed” radio programming, see George, Marsha Washington. *Black Radio...Winner Takes All: America’s 1st Black DJs*. Xlibris Corporation, 2002: 97. For more on the connection between Miller and Meaders, and Meaders and Hicks, see Komara (2006): 613.
So he swatted the vestige for Slim’s first session and personnel documentation ever since has merely identified him as “Diggy Do.”

Hicks recorded for him three times in 1954, at first matched with Miller’s men and later bringing his own. Slim was one of a handful of black musicians who came to Miller’s studio already attached to a stage name that he would keep, and thereafter many musicians involved with the Crowley studio referred to him not as Otis, but as Lightning. Lightning Slim’s first release with Miller on Feature 3006 hit locally. The infamous first line from “Bad Luck”, “If it wasn’t for bad luck, poor Lightnin’ wouldn’t have no luck at all” would crystallize his reputation for subtly humorous self-pity and as a narrator of slow blues. The single was backed with “Rock Me Mama”, this one more upbeat and in the double-entendre vein. The regional success was so great, and Excello was so impressed, it motivated Miller to sign an exclusivity contract to lease all of his future r&b recordings to the Nashville label for broad distribution. One could theorize had it not been for Lightning Slim, the Miller-Excello blues factory might not have gotten its start as early as it did.

While the Excello contract was pending, before the end of the year Miller got Lightning back in the studio to record the follow-ups “I Can’t Live Happy” and “New Orleans Bound” (Feature 3008), followed by “Bugger Bugger Boy” and “Ethel Mae” (Feature 3012).\(^\text{107}\)

\(^{107}\) Broven 120-121.; Wirz, n.p.;
Lightning Slim as Cornerstone of the Blues Studio Band

The fellowship of session musicians who would create Jay Miller’s blues factory golden age did not yet know him in 1954. Miller had only recorded two black artists, a local named Robert King, and the Southeast Texan Clarence Garlow of “Bon Ton Roula” fame, who had brought his own band. After meeting and recording Slim, however, Miller needed, and had the incentive, to assemble some solid blues musicians to flesh out Slim’s solo country blues. Because of, and as we shall see, through Lightning Slim, Miller’s infamous roster of session men began to take shape.

Lightning Slim had professional relationships with several harmonicists. It would take a handful of haphazard studio arrangements before he would provide his own harpist. Ahead of his earliest, “trial” session with Miller, the producer had Slim work up a set to perform, and in the meantime Miller went on the hunt for a good harmonica player he heard was in Beaumont. On the recommendation of his deejay friend the Big Bopper,
Miller tracked down the wildcard appropriately called Wild Bill Phillips, brought him back to a hotel in Crowley for the night and told him to be ready for Lightning Slim’s arrival in the morning. Rehearsal would not be Slim’s strong suit, as each successive take of a song with him tended to produce totally different musical parameters and textual content. But in 1954, Miller did not yet know to accommodate Slim’s modus operandi, so pair him with Wild Bill he did.

Even though Lightning Slim had a band, more or less, with whom he played live regularly around Baton Rouge in the mid-fifties, his recorded backing band was another matter through most of his twelve-year tenure with Miller. Granted, one-by-one Slim did mediate professional introductions with many of the stalwarts of Miller’s future stable, including Cleveland “Schoolboy Cleve” White, the future “Slim Harpo” James Moore, Leslie “Lazy Lester” Johnson, and others cascading from there. But, for his first time, Miller paired him with the new Beaumont harpist, and as a last resort, Slim’s effective “agent”, their mutual friend the deejay Diggy Do, on drum.

After the success of the trial recording and its two resulting sides, as the anecdote goes, Miller found Wild Bill in jail again and was unwilling to pay the forty-dollar bail that he had paid for Phillips before. So for Slim’s second 1954 session, Miller’s plan-B was to provide a harp to a local bass singer named Henry Clement, who did not play the harmonica, with instructions to make musical filler. Drummer Sammy Drake took over for Meaders. For the third session, Slim brought his own man, Schoolboy Cleve with him for backup vocals and harmonica, again supported by Sammy Drake
on drums. Now under contract to Miller, Schoolboy Cleve (Cleveland White) was Slim’s harp player until late 1955, when Cleve went off on his own and Slim’s live-playing harpist, Slim Harpo, took the spot permanently. In 1957 when Harpo went solo, Lazy Lester stepped in on harmonica and additional nonconventional percussion, which included the famed rolled up newspaper. Lightning speaks to his harpists on many recordings, to the extent that his address “Blow your harmonica, son!” became something of a trademark. Although Leslie “Lazy Lester” Johnson had not been present on the first recordings when Slim called out, the call became associated with Lester in later years nevertheless.108

On one of his trips to record in Crowley, Slim had not been able to locate Schoolboy Cleve to bring to the session per usual; as luck should have it he met a harmonica player named Leslie Johnson on the bus. Not having heard him, Slim nevertheless invited Johnson to the Crowley studio, which was one stop short of his original destination in Rayne. After they made their introductions, and prior to Slim’s session, Jay Miller asked Johnson to step into the studio to hear him play. “Lazy Lester” would go on to record for Miller for a decade. Another of the iconic Miller stable musicians was on the bandwagon, through Lightning Slim’s mediation however coincidental it was.

**Slim the Celebrity, Musician**

About this time, Lightning Slim and Slim Harpo played together live regularly, and had amassed a significant following in Baton Rouge. Jimmy

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108 For more on the spectrum of backing musicians at Miller’s studio and their chronology behind Lightning Slim, see Bruce Bastin’s sleeve notes to Flyright’s FLY LP 520, 524, 526, and 533 from the LJMS series. (Bastin 1976b, Bastin 1976a, Bastin 1977, Bastin 1978a.)
Dotson, the future drummer for Silas Hogan’s band, gigged around Baton Rouge in the mid-fifties and recalled fondly of his time playing with the local celebrity bluesmen:

"The Baton Rouge blues scene in the '50s was nice, we had a following, we played from club to club. I played drums for Lightnin' Slim for a while and with Slim it fluctuated, I was a kind of utility musician. If they needed a drummer I'd go play drums, if they needed a bass player, a guitar ... I couldn't play any too good on any of them but I could fit in. But they had a tremendous following, Lightnin' Slim and Slim Harpo. They would go from club to club, sometimes we would play Sunday afternoon somewhere back over North Baton Rouge in the park area from two o'clock to six and the place would be full of people. OK then we would go across the river [to Port Allen] and they'd just line up in cars and follow us across the river! It was fantastic, it really was."\(^{109}\)

For all the positive attention Lightning Slim the musician garnered, like for many downhome bluesmen, the attraction was based in his vocal delivery and talent as a lyricist and narrator. Consequently, discussions of his oeuvre substitute his texts as a surrogate for musical discussion, and resort to words like “gloomy” “doomy” “mournful” and “weary” to describe his music likely because of the frequent lyrical use of “poor Lightning’s bad luck”, one of his most revisited subjects. If Lightning’s guitar work is discussed less, it is not because it lacks individuality. Generally his guitar appears in the literature with reference to his penchant for a minimalist line, after Lightning Hopkins, in contrast to the aggressive Jimmy Reed-styled playing heard most elsewhere in Louisiana. Beyond his unobtrusive guitar performance and wide-spaced grainy singing, the recordings generally feature few other musicians. On the earliest tapes, just harmonica and drums back Slim. As the years progressed, the band gradually grew to incorporate more piano, bass, additional vocals, and multiple percussion lines in the mid-sixties. This sparse instrumentation

is perhaps a legacy from his days playing outdoor parties around St. Francisville and Baton Rouge, when his accompaniment sometimes was limited to a cardboard box.

What few writings on Slim’s guitar have mentioned is that he played exclusively in E; anything that seemed higher or lower was either the result of capoing or retuning his guitar, or a re-mastering job that raised the pitch by a quarter-tone. The second most notable trait to Slim’s guitar playing is an idiosyncratic, ubiquitous accompaniment that he plays again and again, and that rarely veers from the same pattern. Indeed, several are the occasions that one of his songs gives the impression of being another, because he uses the same repeating six-measure guitar phrase typified in “Bad Luck” for intros, between verses, as ornamentation, and ahead of refrains, for most songs across his oeuvre, almost always in the key of E. Slim’s guitar vocabulary is small, and like many downhome blues players, he recycles motifs again and again. But this signature Slim guitar-line is more than a mixed bag of blues gestures: it follows a discrete layout and conclusion, anchored by two standout features—the first a lengthy three-measure opening gesture on E7 that ends in a sliding upstroke triplet pattern, and the latter a mid-phrase Em7 turnaround—that together take residence in the listener’s ear.

These two features I have just mentioned are very basic blues licks in E. Lightning Slim’s guitar-playing is very much in Lightning Hopkins’ Gold Star and Aladdin sessions era (born just one year prior to Slim, but with advanced popularity among African-American audiences in the late forties when Lightning Slim was being paid to sound like Hopkins at parties). Like
Hopkins, Slim plays electric guitar in a subdued fingerpicking style that alternates monotonic and alternating bass lines, such as the antecedent gesture I mentioned above which could be excised directly from Lightning Hopkins openings like “Grievance Blues”, absenting Hopkins’ virtuosic solos and signature non-diatomic opening slides. Slim’s bass likewise features stepwise walkups to the chord change, and regenerative, propulsive open tonic vamps (E7no3/A) ahead of verse lines. Like Hopkins but more extreme in Slim, his harmonic pace is notoriously unpredictable and hard to follow—another reason why rehearsals did not do much to benefit fellow bandmates, since consecutive performances from Slim would vary the harmonic structure or timing.

Slim generally plays in front of a small band in the Feature and Excello recordings, so Slim’s guitar does not need to provide the full range of rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic roles that Hopkins’ style does as a one-man performer. The instrument’s upper register does add melody, monophonic and pentatonic, between Slim’s sung phrases, often doubled by the harmonica. One of those tenor pentatonic riffs is the mid-phrase inverted arpeggiation of A7, that second of Slim’s two signature gestures in his guitar style. The gesture enters in the second half of the fourth bar, and generally repeats every four bars. Slim often absents the 3 in his guitar accompaniment, leaving the impression of E major in tact even as he plays the flatted-3 blue note. This consequent gesture enters on the upbeat after changing to the IV7 (A7), in a simple one-measure, swung-time turnaround. Notated, the three-tone, four-beat broken triad is a rootless first inversion Asus7, or a fourth
inversion Em7no5 set off by the low A from the guitar’s bass. Or, perhaps most simply, it is a swung $\flat_3-1-7-1-\flat_3-1$. Whatever the voicing, this simple, and common blues gesture, played on guitar and harmonica at the end of nearly every other phrase, becomes Slim’s signature.

Whatever form a listener’s visceral response to the music takes, whether toe-tapping, head nodding, rocking, or humming along, that body will undoubtedly feedback with a shuffling 4/4. Herein lies one source of Slim’s sweet-spot slow blues: though the music feels slow at the visceral level, it does not drag. This is because Slim’s usually slow blues are given the appearance of activity by his 12/8-time, fingerpicking guitar in broken triad triplets. The signature guitar underbelly I mentioned above repeats in spirals beneath the whole length of the song, but in its simplest form is an antecedent and a consequent pair, these two separated by an extended developmental revving up, still on an open E7, whose wide spacing lends autonomy to the two ear-catching tropes. The result is two musical bookends that can appear separately and singularly in memory.

Lightning Slim’s style is a near clone of Lightning Hopkins’ guitar in “Grievance Blues” and “Evil Hearted Woman” from the Gold Star sessions, and of his voice in “Shotgun Blues” for Aladdin. In these sessions from the late
forties, Hopkins’ vocal and guitar attack is less restrained, and more fricative (thanks in part to the less absorbent acoustics in Hopkins’ recording spaces at Aladdin and Gold Star on these numbers) than Slim performance and space with J.D. Miller in 1958. Hopkins’ drummer rounds out their more kinetic sound with an equal intensity to his playing style. Further to the two examples mentioned above, one of Lightning Slim’s often re-recorded songs, “My Starter Won’t Work” is an obvious send-off to Hopkins’ famous “T-Model Blues” whose first line is “my starter won’t start”. Despite the “work” in Slim’s title, his lyrics match Hopkins’. The rest of the song pairs off its metaphors with Hopkins’ model, too, matching Hopkins’ first verse punch line “I must have a disconnection all in my piston rings” with the eggcorn in Slim’s last: “Well I must be got some kinda bad disconnection somewhere in my piston rings.”

One reason Slim’s pattern is so easily put to memory is the hallmark slowness of his songs, which preserves each micro-beat for the ear to absorb fully, and reabsorb, at each iteration of the musical trope. The music is not just slow in tempo, either, but on an aesthetic level too. It has been said before that even Slim’s upbeat songs do not sound up-tempo so much as they sound

\[110\] In fact, in the released Excello recording (whose song authorship is credited to J.D. Miller’s blues-writing pseudonym—notably not to Lightning Hopkins nor to Lightning Slim), Lightning drops the ends off the last two words such that one could easily be convinced he says something closer to the nonsense “pistaray” than the original lyric. In later performances and recordings, such as at the official LP from the American Folk Blues Festival of 1972, Lightning’s last line is much more like Hopkins’ original than Slim’s 1958 revision, accidental though it may be, on Excello. I should note that although the Alabaman Walter Roland recorded a “T-Model Blues” in New York on July 17, 1933, his subject and lyrics both vary greatly from Hopkins’ recording made in 1948 at Bill Quinn’s Houston studio. (Roland’s are “Said it’s mmm baby: mmm baby mmm/ Say you know you do not love me: like I say I love you/ Say you know these here women: sure do treat me mean...”) Hopkins’ “T-Model Blues”, then, is indeed an original, not a cover.
like a slow blues being sung a little fast. That impression of slowness is often heightened, in Lightning Slim’s recordings and elsewhere, by Lazy Lester’s second-and-fourth beat woodblock, a signifier for country insouciance by its evocation of poking horse clops and associated Western shuffle. When Lester is not on woodblock, he still may appear in the same musical spaces on shakers, brushed snare or cymbal,111 or harmonica, still contributing the same lethargy—and self-proclaimed country sound—that would also characterize his music (Jay Miller did not christen him “Lazy” Lester for nothing).

Since most of Slim’s songs are in E, and since so many of them feature this signature accompaniment, the listener’s pitch recall cements the line in memory. Whittled down, the outline is two short licks. The result is a de-contextualized earworm, which the listener hears on loop, on its own, disembodied from any of Slim’s songs to contextualize it. In that way, the guitar lick might be considered to support a positive perception of Lightning Slim’s musicality, or at the least, it secures a discrete place for him in memory by pairing, if not a face to his name, a leitmotif to it. But the redundancy also blurs the listener’s ability to distinguish between and among a large subset of Lightning Slim cuts, thanks to a replaying, audio-memory loop that takes over the memorability of the refrain and song. This guitar pattern stretches the span of his career. It provides the guitar framework for the following roughly chronological list of songs, though this list is not exhaustive:

111 Lazy Lester never actually brushed any drums save once using a paint brush, although it sounds like it on “My Starter Won’t Work” (Excello 45-2142-A (1958)); he approximated that sound when he infamously brushed a rolled up newspaper on the drum. (Taft, Michael. Talkin’ To Myself: Blues Lyrics, 1921-1942. Routledge, 2013: 503.)
Table 4. Lightning Slim recordings with signature guitar underbelly and Em7 ornament.

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<tr>
<td>“Woke Up Feelin’ Bad”</td>
<td>“Bad Luck”</td>
<td>“G.I. Blues”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Bad Luck (alt tk.)”</td>
<td>“I Can’t Live Happy”</td>
<td>“Late in the Evening”</td>
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<td>“Those Neighbors of Mine”</td>
<td>“Ethel Mae”</td>
<td>“I Love to Hold My Baby’s Hand”</td>
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<td>“I Beg You Little Woman”</td>
<td>“Lightnin Blues”</td>
<td>“Wintertime Done Rolled By”</td>
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<td>“The Blues and My Woman”</td>
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<td>“Soldier Boy Blues”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“You’d Better Change”</td>
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Lightning Slim had begun to bring Slim Harpo to his sessions at Miller’s studio with more regularity by the mid-fifties, which eventually led to Harpo’s solo sessions beginning in 1957, despite Miller’s initial reticence. Lightning’s biggest successes were with the regional hit “Hoo Doo Blues” Excello 45-2131-A,1957, and his 1959 single “Rooster Blues”, which charted at #23 on the national R&B singles chart and marked the biggest success of his career. This instant classic opens with the barnyard-line

“Well the little red rooster told the little red hen,  
“I ain’t been to see you in God knows when.”  
Said the little red hen told the little red rooster,  
“you don’t come around, daddy, like you used to.”

The Big Bopper’s nearly simultaneous release “It’s the Truth Ruth” shares a full verse with Slim’s song, and some falsely accused Slim of lifting the lyrics from the Big Bopper song, in a unique reversal of the usual pattern of rock’n’roll songs thefting from the blues. In reality, J.D. Miller wrote the song,

112 The songs from this column appear on LJMS Vol. 5, Flyright FLY LP 524, 1976.
113 The songs from this column appear on LJMS Vol. 27, Flyright FLY LP 583, 1981 and The Excello Story, Vol. 2. Hip-O/Universal CD 40150, 1999.“Lightnin’ Blues” here from The Excello Story Vol. 2 not to be confused with the unissued five-minute talking blues “Lightnin’ Blues” or the early version of “Bugger Bugger Boy” titled “Poor Lightnin’ Blues” by Flyright’s compilers on FLY LP 524. This “Lightnin’ Blues” forefronts the harmonica with the guitar in a significantly lesser role, so the Em7 turnaround is absent throughout; the harmonic structure of the song is still the same as the others in this table. “You’d Better Change” also lacks the Em7 turnaround.
and the folksy text had been passed around in blues songs since the forties, and before that, in country music—specifically a Memphis Jug Band field recording titled “Move That Thing” from November 28, 1930—, and had appeared in medical journals as early as 1905 cited as a “Medical Standard.”

In the early sixties Lightning Slim was still gigging around with Slim Harpo as a twosome act, with Lightning just barely outshining Harpo in local popularity. Then in May 1961, in a matter of days their popularity reversed permanently. The following poster advertises a show at the High Hat Club in New Orleans on May 25, 1961—“Rainin’ In My Heart” had broken into the singles chart four days prior. This show capitalized on Harpo’s success first by booking the duo, and second, by upgrading him to top billing and emboldening his name. By the 29th, “Rainin’ In My Heart” had crossed over to the pop charts.

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115 Blues Link noticed the shared text in a 1974 issue and inquired to its subscribers whether anyone knew the cause for the similarity or the source text; The Netherlands Boppin’ Around publication suggested Slim lifted the lyrics from the Big Bopper in its eight issue (n.d.). The Memphis Jug Band recording was documented in Michael Taft’s Talkin’ To Myself: Blues Lyrics 1921-1942. Routledge, 2013: 464, and the Medical Herald (St. Joseph, Missouri) quoted the verse in full in its Vol. 25, No. 10 (October 1906): 465, and it appeared in The Texas Medical Journal. 21.11 (May 1906): 400.
Figure 18. Advertisement for a May 1961 show featuring Lightning Slim and Slim Harpo at New Orleans’ High Hat Club. At that date, Slim Harpo’s “Rainin’ In My Heart” had broken into the R&B Singles chart just three days prior. Four days later, it would cross over to the Hot 100.

In advertisements and joint ventures for the rest of their careers, Lightning’s star was perceived to be waning and Slim Harpo got consistent top billing. The two Slims continue to be mentioned in the same breath as the other, both as representatives of Jay Miller’s stable and of Baton Rouge blues fame. Figure 19 below is from a 1985 album released by the British Flyright label. Though in title it is devoted to the “Baton Rouge Blues”, Slim Harpo—pictured first—and Lightning Slim grace the cover. Of the fourteen songs on the record, Slim Harpo and Lightning Slim have one each. In contrast, the artists who are not visually represented at all constitute the majority of the
music on the album: Jimmy Anderson sings three songs, Baton Rouge icon Tabby Thomas and ubiquitous drummer-turned-frontman Jimmy Dotson have two each, and Silas Hogan, Henry Grey, Lazy Lester, and Boogie Jake fill out the rest.116

![Baton Rouge Blues album cover](image)

**Figure 19.** LJMS series album cover featuring Slim Harpo and Lightning Slim despite their disproportionate underrepresentation inside the album. Flyright Records, UK 1985.117

In the late sixties, Lightning Slim moved to Pontiac, Michigan, worked in a foundry, and rented a room at Slim Harpo’s sister’s boarding house. Slim later married Harpo’s sister. He eventually returned to performing after a local blues promoter located him, and booked him with Lazy Lester at the Chicago Folk Fest the next month, in January 1971. That performance led to European invitations to tour and a “second career” there. He returned to the American festival and “hippie ballroom” circuit, including playing the AFBF


Posthumous writing at Lightning Slim’s death equated his name and his legacy to everything from “rural dignity” to “swamp blues king”. In 1980 the Baton Rouge Arts & Humanities Council gave him cultural landmark status. The prolific French blues writer Gérard Herzhaft considered him the swamp blues as such in a 1996 retrospective.¹¹⁸

**Slim Harpo (1924-1970)**

![Image of Slim Harpo](image)

**Figure 20. James "Slim Harpo" Moore ca. 1960.**

*Rack-harmonica, guitar, voice, and songwriting.*

James Moore had been making music professionally around Baton Rouge since the late forties, billing himself as Harmonica Slim. Along the way he met and began playing with Lightning Slim, eventually going to back him

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in Crowley sessions starting in 1955. During his lifetime and after his death, Moore’s oeuvre enjoyed the most mainstream success of all of Jay Miller’s stable, charting four times on the national R&B charts, two of which crossed over to the Billboard Top 40, between 1961 and 1968. After playing behind Crowley blues primogenitor Lightning Slim for two years, Harmonica Slim, with worked-up songwriting oeuvre in hand, was ready for a solo session. Moore’s wife Lovelle, who co-wrote songs with him, recalled in a 2015 filmed interview “We passed uh, just a lot of bee hives; and he looked and he started humming; baby put that down. I’m a King Bee.”

In the studio, Miller was unimpressed with Moore’s singing voice and hesitated to proceed; Lightning Slim prevailed upon the producer, “Boss, I’m afraid he’ll quit me if you don’t record him”; Miller gave it another shot, suggested some workarounds to his lacking vocal timbre, and the stellarly nasal “I’m a King Bee” made it to record. Moore would need a better name for the record, though, because Harmonica Slim was already in use. Moore’s wife has said it was she who suggested he reverse the two names and add an “o” to Harp and Miller said it was he; whatever the case, Moore assumed the persona and even took to introducing himself not as Moore, but as Slim Harpo.

His first single “I’m a King Bee,” which hit July 1957 backed with “I’ve Got Love If You Want It”, never charted for Harpo, but it did enjoy great success in later incarnations. First the Rolling Stones covered it on their debut album in 1964, who were followed later by Van Morrison, Them, the Kinks, Aswell 410, Whitburn 172.
the band that would become Pink Floyd (1964), The Grateful Dead (live 1966-1972), The Doors (1967, 1970), Led Zeppelin (live 1970s), Otis Redding, Taj Mahal, Hank Williams Jr., Neil Young, Jimmie Vaughn, and Joan Osborne, among others. Kim Fields counts Harpo among a handful of blues harmonica players who enjoyed crossover success in the shadow of Jimmy Reed’s 1960 breakthrough “Big Boss Man”. Buster Brown’s “Fannie Mae” (1960) was a I-V shuffle held together with a harmonica hook, and the harmonica was the engine of both of Slim Harpo’s crossover hits, “Rainin’ In My Heart”, from 1961, and later “Baby Scratch My Back” in 1966. Six years after Harpo’s death, he would become an immortalized figure in pop culture when a Saturday Night Sketch titled “I’m a King Bee” aired in January 1976, featuring John Belushi singing Slim Harpo’s song in a bee costume.120

Harpo continued to run a trucking business throughout the sixties, servicing and repairing the trucks in addition to his nighttime gigs around Baton Rouge and the Crawfish Circuit. His son William Gambler recalled him also working full-time for a construction company earning one dollar per hour. He recalls one point when Harpo decided to play music full-time. He felt his music might have greater earning power and better provide for his family than manual labor.

By this time, Harpo had begun to begrudge the liberty with which Miller attached his own name to Harpo’s songs, and the two were embroiled in a full-fledged royalty battle just as the harmonica man’s 1961 “Rainin’ in My

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120 The King Bees guitar player Rudi Richard recalled when Moore first approached him to join his band, he was picking cotton with his father, and Moore pulled up in a Dinafore Buick, stepped out wearing a hat, and said, “Hi. I’m Slim Harpo.”
Heart” began to chart. It soared to the Billboard Top 40 pop chart, reaching #34 on the Hot 100 and #17 on R&B singles. After that success (and close call), Harpo never again permitted Jay Miller’s name to appear with co-writing credits on his records. Had any other Miller blues artist had this level of national and international exposure, the profits would have benefited Miller greatly; however Slim was one of few artists to keep those earnings himself by keeping Miller off the songwriting credit of the original release from 1957. Seeking an alternative recording arrangement, in 1961 Harpo tried to record a session for Imperial in New Orleans, but Miller intervened by writing to Lew Chudd, threatening action if any further measures were taken to record with his contracted artist. Harpo and Miller’s contract was upheld, and thus was established an “uneasy truce” between the two.121

Some of the blues musicians who recorded at Jay Miller’s in Crowley wanted to secure a recording contract with him. Among the benefits of a recording contract, in comparison to live gigging alone, were musical options afforded by the record format like layering percussion in studio, post-production engineering like the nearly ubiquitous heavy echo or reverb that coated Miller’s singles, and the opportunity to have a full-sized, rock’n’roll backing band. Some musicians preferred performing live, either with their own bands or alone, and Harpo was one such performer. Harpo enjoyed playing for an audience that was enjoying him; furthermore he enjoyed bending his music to please them. Rock ’n’ roll drum kits and lesser intensity

of emotion than the hard Chicago blues of Muddy Waters or Howlin’ Wolf makes Harpo’s music more accessible across genre, venue, and color lines. Peter Guralnick famously described Harpo’s intersectional voice as “if a black country & western singer or a white rhythm & blues singer were attempting to impersonate a member of the opposite genre.”

The next year, Slim Harpo introduced a veteran of the Baton Rouge scene, Silas Hogan, to Jay Miller, despite his own recent tension with the producer. In Louisiana, Harpo continued to repair trucks. Overseas, his indirect fame was snowballing. A young David Bowie played sax in a London band named “the King Bees” after Harpo’s song in 1964. In 1966 when the Rolling Stones covered it on their first album, Slim, sharing in the limelight from those sales, scored the biggest hit of his career with “Baby, Scratch My Back” which charted #16 on the Billboard Top 20 and #1 on the R&B Singles chart. His next big successes were with “Tip on In” and “Tee-Ni-Nee-Ni-Nu”, which charted in 1967 and 1968 and reached #37 and #36 respectively on the R&B Singles chart. Dr. John later recalled growing up listening to “Rainin’ In My Heart” and “Tee-Ni-Nee-Ni-Nu” like personal anthems.

Harpo’s success with “Baby Scratch My Back” only drove home the business dispute between the artist and the producer: writer and performance royalties went only to Harpo, and Miller received but a few pennies per record for production—missing out on this big paycheck on top of the tsunami of royalties that had come in from the Rolling Stones cover of “I’m a King Bee” the year prior. 1966 marked a pivotal turning point in both Harpo and Jay Miller’s careers. Harpo’s contract with the Crowley record man expired, Jay
Miller’s persuasive weight at Excello was decimated when his contact man Ernie Young sold the outfit, leaving Miller out to dry with the new owners, who immediately jumped on the opportunity to sign Harpo directly. Not only did Miller lose Harpo in the process, but he burned bridges with Excello and ended his relationship with the Nashville outpost.122

In the late 60s Slim Harpo asked Lightnin’ Slim, who was now in Detroit to tour together in the U.S. in a mini-package for white (rock) audiences; they were scheduled for their first European tour in early 1970. In the last week of January 1970, Harpo had pulled an engine from one of his trucks to perform a repair when it fell on his chest. The clean-living Moore reticently visited the hospital but was sent home with superficial wounds. In truth, he had punctured a lung, and on January 31 died of a heart attack resulting from the injuries.

**Jay Miller labels**
Jay Miller’s first two labels opened in quick succession. Fais Do-Do, which would come to be known as the first label in history dedicated to Cajun music, was formed in 1946; Feature, originally a country imprint, in 1947. He made his first recording at Cosimo Matassa’s studio in June of ‘46, and it sold so well he went to Gates Electric in Houston, bought a “temperamental” Magnachord wire recorder, and had opened his own makeshift recording studio in Crowley by October.123 In 1947 Feature got off the ground same way

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123 Miller (1991), n.p.; Broven 56; Interestingly, a partnership between the singer and accordion player Leroy “Happy Fats” LeBlanc, and Cajun fiddler Oran “Doc” Guidry would produce the first releases on both of Miller’s first labels, despite their intended devotion to
Goldband did, first featuring Cajun-western dance music from hillbilly bands in the Feature 1000 series, then Cajun crossover for the Feature 2000s. With the success of the rockabilly music, Jay Miller phased out Fais Do Do, and upgraded his recording equipment to tape. Feature’s 3000 run opened the floodgates to the blues in 1953.

Miller began dipping his toes into the blues market in 1953 when Clarence Garlow came to him after Macy’s went defunct. The record was a shameless follow-up to Garlow’s huge “Bon Ton Roula” hit, this one called “New Bon Ton Roola”. Garlow brought his own band, with Goldband veteran Bill Parker on drums. Since Garlow had provided the musicians, Jay Miller had not yet needed to conjure blues backing musicians of his own. So, lacking any great interest in the blues, Miller’s first encounter with them was over, and it had been happenstance.

The next year, by all accounts Jay Miller fell for Otis “Lightning Slim” Hicks who had a regional hit with the instant classics “Rock Me Mama” and “Bad Luck” (“If it wasn’t for bad luck, poor Lightning wouldn’t have no luck at all”) on Feature 3006. For a few years, Miller continued to use Feature as a “tester” label for new artists before submitting their cuts to Excello for nationwide distribution. His devoted interest to country music flagged when it lost its major market share with the rock ‘n’ roll takeover of 1955, and Feature closed.

Miller’s leasing partnership with Excello began in 1955, so his house

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separate genres. Happy Fats’ band the Rayne-Bo Ramblers (named for his hometown of Rayne, Louisiana) had already been recording for a decade when he approached Miller.
labels saw little activity compared to Goldband. They were generally short-lived: Zynn was the frontrunner, and the only label whose name ever hung on a sign out front. It had Clifton Chenier and other ensemble blues. Rocko was for rock as Miller defined it in the sixties, but he also used it as a blues tester label. He changed the name to Rocket briefly, then back to Rocko. Action opened in 1961 for a handful of Katie Webster singles. “Baby Baby” backed with ”I Want You To Love Me” are cult favorites featuring Ashton Savoy, later released reprinted as the only release from the Kry label. Rebel was a white supremacist imprint that released anti-Civil Rights, anti-integration records, kept behind the register out of the view of customers. Jay Miller swore African Americans constituted a bulk of his sales, finding the records “hilarious”.

In the late sixties, Miller’s studio had a makeover including the acquisition of a name, Master-Trak studio, under the umbrella of Master-Trak Enterprises, which was now helmed by his son Mark Miller. The elder Miller’s attention turned to other ventures, including a brief time in state politics, and his son Mark Miller operated the Modern Music store, studio, and more labels.124 Among the first was Blues Unlimited, opened about 1970 to honor the eponymous magazine which had brought so much attention to SWLA music. His label was never affiliated with the magazine or any of its contributors. The Blues Unlimited label spanned 1970 to 1988 and was used for mostly swamp pop. By 1972 the Cajun revival was in full swing, so Mark Miller opened up Cajun labels again, including Kajun, Cajun Classics, Cajun Jamboree, Bayou Classics, and French “HITS”.

124 Komara 693.
One of the younger Miller’s initiatives included organizing a catalog under MTE, which published LPs and CDs from Miller’s many labels, with matching reference numbers to the old releases. MTE includes listings from the Blues Unlimited, Cajun Classics, Kajun, MTW, Par-T, Savior, Showtime, and Zynn labels. Other labels operated by Miller over the years are Spot, Ringo, Cry, Tribute, and Chamo.

**Untethered Session Musicians in Lake Charles and Crowley**

Much of Jay Miller’s success has been attributed to his ability to keep an excellent stable of session musicians on hand. This sort of misplaced credit is part of a mythic configuration of Jay Miller as created by the *LJMS* series that I discuss in Chapter 4. The studio band was un-credited on releases, so it was the work of compilers such as Mike Leadbitter, John Broven, Bruce Bastin, and Ray Topping, who first reviewed the tape boxes with Miller and fleshed out personnel lists during their fieldwork trips of the 1960s. John Broven has rightly pointed out that Mike Leadbitter invented blues discography—and it began in Eddie Shuler’s tower!. These discographical projects of the late-sixties and early-seventies revealed the enormity of output by contemporary unknowns like Katie Webster, Lionel Prevost, Lazy Lester, Lonesome Sundown, Clarence Garlow, Charles Sheffield, Bobby McBride, Al Foreman, Al Smith, Tal Miller, and many more. In the decades and cult followings that followed, the UK Ace label, in particular the diligence of Ian Saddler, have corrected and furthered due attention to these musicians, raising artists like Katie Webster and Lionel Prevost to giant status. Katie Webster believed she had played on some 750 singles with Miller before she
was 18, with Lazy Lester and Lionel Prevost appearing on many, if not most, of those recordings too.\textsuperscript{125}

**Katie Webster (1939-1999)**

![Figure 21](image)

*Figure 21. L-R, Hot Rod Reynaud, Trent "Dad", Pennie, Katie Webster, & Ashton Savoy. c. 1958, Goldband Records. Courtesy of the Johnnie Allan Collection at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette Center for Louisiana Studies.*

*Barrelhouse piano and voice.*

The trajectory of Katie Webster’s career outlines a familiar path of hope, near-hits, and failed promises that many swamp blues players experienced. She had an enormity of talent, perhaps more than any other single musician in the swamp blues reserves, and yet despite a prolific recording career and multiple live performance tours (even with Otis Redding) and residencies, Katie Webster somehow slipped through the cracks. A child prodigy on the piano, Webster was already on her fourth band

and had nearly a decade of professional experience under her belt when she first recorded at Goldband in 1957—at eighteen years old.

Born Kathryn Thorne in Houston, Webster learned the piano in a devout Pentecostal household where she played “Sanctified piano” for her mother, and with safety guaranteed by the quarter-a-day lookout on the corner, watching for Webster’s mother to turn down the street after work, she played prodigious Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard rock ‘n’ roll furtively for herself. By the time she met Jay Miller (after Eddie Shuler had passed on her for solo work), she had already developed a signature hybrid boogie style. It paired what music reviewers in time called her “funky left hand” and “rolling right,” she recalled, and it is that heavy, bedrock bass and rolling ching-ching treble that identifies so many of Miller’s recordings. Indeed, Katie Webster’s piano is almost as imperative to the swamp blues sound as the acoustics of Miller’s studio. No wonder, then, that the same year Webster quit sitting in for Jay Miller’s sessions—1966—his blues-hits factory closed, marking the beginning of the end for the swamp blues.

Webster’s barreling singing voice, like her gospel-rooted piano, also bore testimony to a childhood buried in gospel music, or as she recalled to John Broven with snarl, “where it was church in the morning, church in the evening, and church at suppertime.” Her depiction of taking to the piano is part habitual adoption, and part inherited talent: “the way I learned, well, my daddy told me when he was a young boy, he used to go play at these clubs, what they would call honky-tonks then. And he say, he said he’d play in these smoke-filled rooms all night long, just a piano playing boogie woogie and
blues, Fats Waller type stuff. And my daddy still play a mean piano…”

Meanwhile, her mother wanted her to play classical piano and sold Avon cosmetics on the side of her missionary work to pay for lessons so Katie could do so. In contrast to the menial labor that ingrained much of Webster’s piano, the way she describes singing is notably experiential. “When I’m singing, you know, and I’m souling, and I close my eyes and I just drift off, you know, then I can feel the electricity from my body flowing in somebody’s else body, and I feel theirs flowing into mine and I get these chills and things and then I start doing funny things with my voice, you know.”

**Absent Royalties and the Romanticization of Lost Opportunity**

Counter to Eddie Shuler, Jay Miller had no interest in promotion. He also was uninterested in his blues artists as people and spoke of them (save a soft spot for Lightning Slim) with held contempt, inaccurately accusing many of alcoholism or non-existent malfeasance. As early as 1968 Mike Leadbetter recognized that Miller’s failure to provide promotional materials created a vacuum for “speculation and romance” that researchers would later revel in. Many liner notes and blues journals with various degrees of retrospect have grieved over the solo careers session musicians could have had under a variety of imaginable, but still imaginary, circumstances. For some, the problem at Goldband in particular was poor production choices, especially the 1970s overdubbing of unnecessary guitar lines, heavy horn, and replacement vocals over 1960s originals. Katie Webster’s 1982-3 Goldband recordings, which she had hoped would be her comeback, suffered from poor mixing. Her best shot

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at crossover stardom had come in 1959 when she made a cover of Phil Phillips’ double-platinum ballad “Sea of Love” in Crowley. This song’s provenance is a curious and unusual combination of several prominent South Louisiana record men, making it an illustrative perfect storm of the re-cyclical nature of songs, and the disposability of musical authorship in this part of the country.

The teenage, black Creole bellhop Phil Baptiste, who until now had sung in a gospel quartet with his brothers, wrote “Sea of Love” for his girlfriend on her Lake Charles front porch. Over the next year he shopped around a demo tape made at KPLC and quickly recognized music executives were taking notice. At one point, he even went to a hotel in Fresno, CA to meet Sam Cooke, who wanted to record it, but Baptiste decided if he intended to achieve singing stardom himself, that song was the ticket. He turned Cooke down and returned to Lake Charles, by which point local record-man George Khoury had heard of this song and approached him to record. Khoury had labels but no studio; Khoury brought the tape and Baptiste to Eddie Shuler in February of 1959 in a pseudo-audition, where ultimately it was recorded in the Goldband Studios for the Khoury label, with Baptiste and Khoury credited for the songwriting and Eddie Shuler for the arranging and publishing. The song was a local top-seller, got leased to Mercury to become an R&B #1 hit, and finally a Pop Singles #2 hit. Katie had incorporated “Sea of Love” into

\[127\] As the story goes, Eddie Shuler said he recognized it was a hit right away, and the two Lake Charles record-men took their time to curate the perfect backdrop for Baptiste’s vocal delivery. They swapped musicians in and out, and Shuler alleged he arranged and re-arranged the Baptiste-penned, Khoury-amended song. Baptiste has always claimed the song was recorded exactly as it came from his mouth on Verdie Mae’s front porch, untouched by
her nightclub act to rave reviews, so J.D. Miller proposed a “female” cover to share some of the surprise limelight while the original was still charting. She did, and Miller leased it to Decca, certain a big payday was coming. Decca did a poor overdubbing of extra percussion on the single, and it sat dead in the water. This stagnant, 7” vinyl melee of efforts had a bevy of names attached to it: Khoury, Phillips, Shuler, Miller, and Webster. Of the approximately thirteen pairs of black hands that wrote, planned, and played on the original and Webster’s cover, legally and historically, the “Sea of Love” put out on Decca is credited to two African-American musicians and three white handlers. That was July 1959.128

Excello had always been enthusiastic about Miller’s downhome blues sides—his blues-man sides—from the beginning of their relationship. That laser focus might help to explain why the few Katie Webster cuts Jay Miller

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128 J. Philip “Phil Phillips” Baptiste and Katie Webster are the only two African-American musicians whose names have been credited in the two Mercury and Decca singles. Uncredited by name on Phillips’ original single were the three male vocalists who sang behind Phillips (he named them The Twilights for the single), Cupcakes pianist Ernest Jacobs, and probably Cupcakes bassist Joe “Blue” Landry and drummer Ivory Jackson. On Webster’s cover, she was backed by (white) drummer Warren Storm, probably Sherman Webster on bass, a baritone vocalist and three-part female vocal group from the local high school (billed as The Songettes on the record).
did send to Excello were rejected. As a result, Webster’s solo sessions for Miller, which were straightforward blues cut between 1958 and 1966, ended up on his other labels, none of which really suited her. In an unfocused, trial-and-error method that lasted most of the sixties, Miller experimented with putting Webster sides out on almost all of his subsidiaries, like Kry: “Baby, Baby” Kry-100-A with Ashton Savoy (billed as “Conroy”) in 1958; Rocko: “On The Sunny Side of Love” Rocko 45-503-B, a cover of Mr. Calhoun’s January 1959 hit, in March 1959; Zynn: “Hoo Wee Sweet Daddy” Zynn 505-A in 1960; Action: an alternate take of the earlier Rocko “Sunny Side of Love”, released as Action 1000-B in 1961; and Spot: “Glory of Love” and “The Katie Lee”, Spot 1000 in 1961; that were intended for genres other than the blues. This inconsistency did nothing to build a recorded nest egg for Webster.

For others, the problem was an absence of attention and support: Goldband failed to issue follow-ups to Hop Wilson’s 1957, Al Smith’s 1959, and Juke Boy Bonner’s 1960 locally popular sides. In Crowley perhaps because of the sheer magnitude of musicians in rotation, there was an absence in the development of solo cuts for musicians like Jimmy Dotson, the drummer for Silas Hogan’s band who led some great sessions in 1962 that produced “I Need Your Love”, for instance. Jimmy Anderson, Boogie Jake, and Moses Whispering Smith at Crowley are others whose solo recording oeuvre seems strikingly incomplete. Last, in later decades complaints from swamp blues musicians and their families surfaced claiming Miller and Shuler

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129 Excello did put out a Katie Webster single on their A-bet subsidiary in 1967: “Never Let Me Go”/“My Dearest Darling” A-Bet 9420. She had decided to leave Miller however, and excepting one time she sat-in with Count Rockin’ Sidney late the next year, the 1966 “Never Let Me Go” session was the last she ever recorded in Crowley.
failed to properly remunerate most of the blues-playing African Americans who had dealings with them. This betrayal and its attendant bankruptcy were perhaps the most obvious cause for the flight of blues talent from SWLA. Guitar Junior’s 1959 move to Chicago, Clarence Garlow’s turn to radio and other businesses, Katie Webster defecting to the West Coast in the mid-sixties, Lazy Lester and Lightning Slim’s departure from Crowley for Detroit a few years later—have all been attributed to growing distaste for the business, rooted in absent royalties. Those romantic what-ifs, while attractive, both dehumanized and mythologized the skill, or genius, or other star qualities encapsulated within some practitioners of the swamp blues. With the exception of Katie Webster and Lionel Prevost, none of the Crowley stablemates were exceptional instrumentalists.

**Red Herring “Studio Band”**

It is beyond the scope of this project to give due attention to all of the studio players who cut records in Lake Charles and Crowley. Those session bands were motley, numbering 158 artists across the LJMS alone, 75 of whom recorded swamp blues tracks. Eddie Shuler’s known backing artists number in the dozens. Identical bands rarely played across sessions. The earliest archive work performed in these storage rooms, in 1967, 1968, 1969, and 1970, however, unintentionally and indirectly exaggerated the contributions of a handful of stable-mates.³³⁰ For blues and swamp pop sessions, Guitar Gable’s

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³³⁰ In 1994 Baton Rouge blues promoter and researcher Steve Coleridge said that while Crowley sessioneers are responsible for many of the swamp blues “classic sides”, some of the early British discographers romanticized and overstated their presence. Coleridge may have misplaced the blame: one of those early British discographers was writing about romances
band, Silas Hogan’s band after 1962, and the under radar Moore Brothers
band frequently stood in, almost always with additions or subtractions. Katie
Webster, Lionel Prevost, and Lazy Lester most commonly played with them.
The canon is generally credited to the mystical excellence of a studio band
that was not so much a band as it was a roster of phone numbers.

During those field visits of the late sixties, British and European
researchers spent sweaty, summer hours in Jay Miller’s store attic and
Shuler’s back rooms. In attempts to reverse entropy, they gathered personnel
information, sorted it, and connected it. Stacks of sorted tape-boxes began to
predetermine the unsorted and unlabeled ones. Recurrent musician names
led to assumptions of continuity, corralling discrete studio bands and tidying
chronology. Compilers published their pending research in *Blues Unlimited*
and on the early *LJMS* album sleeves. Those first peeks at the swamp blues
scene became Urtexts for further researchers that continue to be repeated
even though later albums corrected the misinformation.

**Lionel “Torrence” Prevost (1935-2002)**

*Tenor and baritone saxophone.*

After Katie Webster, Lionel Prevost is probably the most prolific and
underrated of Miller’s session players. Born Lionel Terrance Prevost near
Franklin, LA on the Oxford sugarcane plantation, Prevost was one of twenty-
three children born to his parents Clarence and Aura Prevost. He has said his
playing was styled after saxophonists he listened to on record as a child: Louis
Jordan, whose growling alto sax attracted Prevost to the instrument, and

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being spun around J.D. Miller and the musicians working for him as early as 1968. Coleridge
Illinois Jacquet, whose ubiquitous squeal influenced Prevost’s style. Both these techniques can be heard in Prevost’s most popular side, “Rooty Tooty”, a proto-funk boogie in the party song vein on Zynn 45-1023-B, released in 1962. The opening line and hook features an innocuous growl, and the sax solo is filled with high-register howls. Prevost’s playing has the flight of a bebop player with pinch-hitter versatility, fluent in any genre, and as remembered by fellow sax sessioneer Harry Simoneaux, he was “fantastic in any key!” despite the rubber-bands holding his saxophone keys together.\footnote{Broven (1983) 136, 146.}

Like many African-American families in Southern Louisiana did in wartime, Prevost’s parents had left the rural southeast of the state for work in the industrial boom going on at the Texas-Louisiana state line in 1941, where father Clarence Prevost had a job at the Texaco Oil Refinery. Six years later the twelve-year-old Lionel Prevost was old enough to join his parents in the town of Port Arthur, which was in process of becoming a rhythm & blues hub for several related, but separate cultural byways of the next twenty years. These were: the Honky-Tonk Corridor (Brasseaux 2009), The Strip, the Zydeco Corridor (Wood and Fraher 2006), Cajun Lapland (Broven 1983, Ancelet 1989 and 1991, Brasseaux 2009) and the Crawfish Circuit (colloquial, Sandmel and Olivier (1999)).\footnote{A full archaeology of the term “Crawfish Circuit” is performed in my Third Chapter; in summary the term began appearing in print in trade publications in the 1980s. Some attribute Marcia Ball with coining the phrase at that time to describe the province of her influence. Meanwhile, cookbooks, SWLA slang dictionaries, and other vernacular print publications referred to it as early as 1986. The term began appearing in scholarly works in the 1990s, such as a \textit{Living Blues} article on zydeco prince Boozoo Chavis (1991), followed by at least one dissertation (1997), then encyclopedias in the early 2000s, such as Bogdanov et al’s \textit{All Music Guide to the Blues} series (2003), Komara (2004, 2006), and Ford (2008).}
Back in Louisiana, he recalled, one of Prevost’s formative musical experiences had been passing, and spending time with, an accordion-playing neighbor on his front porch. The teenager was named Clifton Chenier, and he would invite the child up onto the porch to play along with him on washboard. Then, the same year Prevost moved to Port Arthur, the newlywed Clifton moved to Lake Charles, and then on to employment driving trucks at the same Texaco refinery as Clarence Prevost, in Port Arthur.133 Some twelve years after rubbing board with him on the front porch, Prevost would have his professional debut in 1955 when the would-be Zydeco king Chenier needed a sax player, and invited Prevost to join them on a touring and recording trip to the West Coast. Chenier put the recent high-school graduate in charge, arranging the sets and leading The Playboys band in rehearsals.

Prevost had spent another portion of that interim half-decade in Louisiana playing not with the typical imaginary stick-horse of childhood, but instead with an imaginary sax-towel. Not long after his move to Port Arthur his father replaced the dishrag with a pawnshop sax, and Prevost’s self-proclaimed “obsession” was consummated. His education continued. In addition to books of scales, finger-pad maintenance, reed bending, and tonguing exercises assigned to him by teachers to refine technique, Prevost curated an ear-training curriculum of his own. His mother ran a nightclub in Port Arthur where Prevost struck a deal with the juke-box servicer to pass along the records as they rotated out. The aspiring teenage sax-man took

133 Broven 110.
them home and practiced mimicking the records by ear until it only took two
or three passes at hearing a song before he could replicate the sax solo exactly.

After he had outgrown saxophone lessons and graduated from the high
school band, Prevost learned more or less by apprenticeship with local sax
players. One was Shelby Lackey, of “Bon Ton Roula” fame, whose speedy
staccato tonguing became a part of Prevost’s gathering bouquet of virtuosic
skills.

The broad exposure Prevost had to different heuristic methods as well
as to different musical genres is relevant to a discussion of Prevost’s role
within the swamp blues. He partook in three, maybe four, different
communities of musical activity before he set foot in the Crowley studio:
proto-Zydeco on an actual rural plantation, tight jump blues from Jordan and
Jacquet, the formal training he received that gave him his first experiences in
ensemble playing, and the grownup Zydeco he played with Chenier’s band on
the West Coast. Heuristic methods varied too: he learned by book methods,
lead sheets, and by rote. Appropriately, his ear-training began with the “King
of the Jukebox” Louis Jordan and continued by conquering his own jukebox
repertoire.

Each of those styles and methods would benefit him later in the swamp
blues studio: he backed rockabilly, Cajuns, swamp poppers like Guitar Gable
and Sonny Martin, and bluesmen like Clarence Garlow, Slim Harpo, and Katie
Webster. His experience in musical organization and teaching for Chenier
would help him and Webster introduce new music to the studio bands, just as
his experience playing in big and small combos would aid him in following
frontmen with notoriously unpredictable habits, like Lightning Slim’s totally unpatterned harmonic rhythm and Lonesome Sundown’s irreverence to meter.

I do not mean to suggest his path to the swamp blues studio was teleological or even linear; rather, I mean to point out that given his ubiquity on swamp blues recordings, it is no leap of faith to see how important a role he played in how the arrangements came together, however understated his presence or unrecognized his extra-saxual contributions may seem to have been. In Lake Charles and Crowley both, the roster of other session players reaches into the dozens, so the assimilation of Prevost’s supporting sax, for instance, was a linchpin by virtue of his leadership, musicianship, and experience that more than likely surpassed the others in range if not in performance hours. His “supporting” sax, then, did more for the integrity of the ensemble than, say, Webster’s piano or Warren Storm’s drum had to—because they had relative autonomy as anchors of the rhythm section. His sax had a higher profile than Al Foreman’s rhythm guitar or Sylvester Buckley’s harmonica, both of whom Miller explicitly instructed not to be flashy, but to fill empty space; higher too than Bobby McBride or Rufus Thibodeaux’s bass, a monophonic line almost always doubled by bass drum and Webster’s piano. And if supporting sax carried a surprising burden of cohesion, then his solo performance had the power to make the session transcendent.

In 1958 Prevost was back in SWLA with three years of professional playing under his belt. When he was not gigging or recording with Chenier’s band, Prevost began sitting in on other sessions at Crowley for J.D. Miller. It
was Miller’s habit to drop musicians’ names he believed sounded too French; so on records where Prevost is credited as a sideman, it is under a misspelling of the middle name he was given after his grandfather. Henceforth, to musicians, promoters, and historians Lionel Terrance Prevost became “Lionel Torrence”. John Broven recounted from an interview that Prevost had not been on board with the name switch to begin with, much less the bastardized spelling of his middle name Terrance. Nevertheless, he became one of the most consistently used musicians of all of Miller’s stable, second perhaps only to Katie Webster—who credited Prevost with having played just as many studio hours and cuts as she did. In fact, in interviews about her own career throughout the years, Katie Webster routinely brought up Prevost’s talent, summarizing once that “He was only the best saxophone player in the world.” Virtuosic and richly voiced, his prowess on the saxophone began to gain accolades outside the industry thanks to the British discographical projects of the 1980s. During their archival trips in 1967, 1968, and 1969, the British researchers Mike Leadbitter, Neil Slaven, and Bruce Bastin were repeatedly told by J.D. Miller that Prevost was the best sax player in the business.

Other Important Session Players
Because of the sheer magnitude of output from J.D. Miller and Eddie Shuler’s studios, the list of session “regulars” numbers into the dozens for both recording houses. Each of these musicians created and contributed plenty that merits its own discussion, it is beyond the scope of this project to

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135 These were not the earliest blues pilgrimmages to Lake Charles and Crowley; Chris Strachwitz visited in June 1962.
treat each subject. In the interest of space, then, I name only the most prolific among them. After Lionel Torrence was doubly talented Harry Simoneaux, who played both tenor and baritone sax, sometimes wearing both strung around his neck and switching between them on sessions. White saxophonist Boo Boo Guidry stood in when Simoneaux was absent. Harpist Sylvester Buckley came from Silas Hogan’s band, and wound up on sessions for half a decade. He recorded in his own right in 1962, producing the unreleased “Mumblin’ Blues” in which he forgets the words and actually mumbles, and “She Treats Me Mean and Evil”, with an infectious rolling opening line that demonstrates both rolling dune-Western influences and the melodic contours tightly associated with Cajun-Creole ballads. Jimmy Anderson was another harpist who alternated for Buckley, sat in sessions, and recorded on his own in 1962-1964.

Drummer Warren Storm was a legend in his own time, playing on possibly every swamp pop record that came out of Crowley. Jimmy Dotson began drumming in Silas Hogan’s Rhythm Ramblers band with Sylvester Buckley, Isaiah Chattman on bass or second guitar, and session regulars Katie Webster, Lazy Lester, and Jimmy Anderson. When it was time for Hogan’s band to record, Hogan had Jimmy Dotson step in to sing for him, and the resulting 1960 B-side “I Need Your Love” is a Lazy-Lester-bongo and Katie-Webster-rolling-piano driven, head-bopping yet laid back number that does not wear the ear even after a handful of consecutive plays. Dotson played as a

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136 *BRSD* 204.
137 *BRSD* 38-39.
sideman for some years, but as Miller observed later, a musician can only earn so much without fronting his own band, so Dotson eventually fronted as well.¹³⁸

Tal Miller was the session pianist before Katie Webster took residency, playing in a style similar to hers but less obtrusive—Webster’s piano took over sessions with its flash and bombast, but always in a good way. Tal Miller had been in Guitar Gable’s band who J.D. Miller frequently used as a session band in the late fifties.¹³⁹ The pianist Miller was from Opelousas, Louisiana, like Ashton Savoy, Big Chenier, and Lonesome Sundown, and it was by his acquaintance that Lazy Lester was brought to Goldband, where Tal Miller also cut many sides.

Silas Hogan and Lazy Lester were the Crowley pinch hitters, sitting in for instruments missing players and stools missing occupants to round out the Crowley sound in many sessions. Silas Hogan formed the Rhythm Ramblers in 1956, began recording with Jay Miller in 1960, but did not sing on his own records until 1961, and left Miller for good in 1965. Lazy Lester recorded with Jay Miller for nine years, and is likely the most prolific of the un-credited swamp blues players.

**Lazy Lester (1933–)**

*harmonica, voice, guitar, percussion*

In the swamp blues golden years, Leslie Johnson was a primo harmonicist who, like Katie Webster, has a distinguishable presence on records. He had some shining moments fronting the session band, and was an

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¹³⁸ *BRSD* 360.
¹³⁹ See footnote 11 above.
infamous omnipresence at Miller’s studio for decades, even long after he had left the music business of SWLA due to tensions over non-payment. But in its heyday, he was the on-call renaissance man, playing drums, washboard, and—gifted at inventing innovative percussion sounds—was used as a mostly uncredited percussionist behind not just Lightnin’ Slim and Slim Harpo, but also Katie Webster, Lonesome Sundown, swamp poppers Pete Marlo, Nathan Abshire, and Johnny Jano, and zydeco man Clifton Chenier. The photograph below was taken during a 1958 recording session for swamp popper Pete Marlo and his Rhythm Kings band, behind which Lazy Lester was playing supplemental percussion. Lester is seen holding his pile of temple blocks, which commonly are spread out and racked, behind the four white musicians. Lester’s blocks are audible in the refrains of Pete Marlo’s “Rock and Roll Beat”. Pictured left to right are, L.J. Doucet, Earl McFarland, Lazy Lester, Nelson Bergeron, and Pete Marlo.

Figure 22. Lazy Lester holding his temple blocks in a pile in a recording session for Pete Marlo’s white swamp pop band. Jay Miller’s studio, Crowley, 1958. Courtesy Johnnie Allan Collection, University of Louisiana at Lafayette Center for Louisiana Studies Archive of Cajun and Creole Folklore.
Johnson bought a harmonica and a Little Walter record at the grocery store where he worked as a woodcutter as a child. Little Walter and Jimmy Reed influenced his playing, in tandem with his “original love” for country music (as part of an interview about his blues-playing career, Lester once told Nick Spitzer of his love for country, “I think I like it better, ha!”)\textsuperscript{140} from Jimmy Rogers, Buck Owens, and Hank Williams. He first recorded at Miller’s studio in November of 1956, by virtue of what has become one of the most retold introductions of all the swamp blues anecdotes.

The genesis tale of how Lester became affiliated with Jay Miller has become a metaphor for the casual, downhome, and romantically happenstance ways swamp blues musicians were alleged to have gotten into recording generally. The reality is South Louisiana had a thriving, if uncentralized, blues scene, with many working musicians actively pursuing business connections and opportunities. Researchers, especially in the early sixties “discovery” period liked to depict flukes and unplanned unions. This tale is popular perhaps because of its luck, slow spontaneity, and the decade-long union that followed.

Like Lonesome Sundown, Slim Harpo, and Moses “Whispering” Smith, Lester also came to Miller’s swamp blues hub through the region’s most successful blues player, Lightnin’ Slim. Leslie Johnson and Otis Hicks were on the same bus traveling west from Baton Rouge, Slim on his way to a session in Crowley, and Johnson to the town of Rayne, one stop prior. Johnson had been

playing around Baton Rouge for half a decade and recognized Slim, but
Johnson had never recorded, and did not tell Slim he was a musician. He
tagged along to the recording studio, then J.D. Miller left to find the
harmonica player. After he spent the good part of a day trying to track him
down, driving the hundred miles to Beaumont and back, the stranger Leslie
Johnson finally volunteered to sit in for him. Lester recalled the incident to
Nick Spitzer:

“I was on a bus, and I saw this guy sittin’ back there, I said “Oh I know this
ole dude,” you know. And it was Lightning Slim. I didn’t mention that I
worked, played any kind of music. He said, “well I’m going over to Crowley
to do some recording, Cut a record.” I told him—bus driver—I said “here’s a
quarter more” I say, “I’m going over here to Crowley, see what this
recording is all about.”

Got there. Got off the bus in Crowley, went ’round to the studio, and uh,
met Jay Miller. He said “Well, we got to go get the harmonica player.”
Jumped in that big red Cadillac, took off. Went over to Port Arthur, look for
Wild Bill. Nobody seen him. Went to Beaumont looking for him, never
found him. He said, “Well Lightnin’, I don’t know what we gonna do.”

I said, “What’s so special about this harmonica player?” He said, “well, it’s
the guy we always use, so.” and I say “hell I can play better than that!”
[chuckles] He say, “what!” I said, “I can play better than that.” I say, “Go get
me a G and a A. I had Lightning on the guitar.

--said "Let me hear what you got." And Lightnin hit "Sugar Plum". 141

Johnson enjoyed playing with the band, and Miller was pleased with
what he heard. In short succession had his own recording session booked and
his first record came out on Excello in 1957: “I’m Gonna Leave You Baby"
backed with “Lester’s Stomp.” Miller conferred the name Lazy Lester on him
after his slow manner and speech, and thus began a nine-year recording
relationship.

Jay Miller’s version of the story is less haphazard. He recalled,

141 Spitzer (2001), n.p.
"One day Lightnin’ Slim walked into my studio to cut a record session, accompanied by a tall, slender young stranger, introduced to me as Leslie Johnson ... I learned that Lightnin’ had met Leslie on a bus to Crowley, but had not heard him sing or play. Having a few minutes before the session, I put Leslie in the studio and the rest of us went into the control room to listen. When I turned on the equipment and signaled him to begin, I was surprised by what I heard. It was so much more than what I expected. I was immediately convinced that this was an artist of great potential."\textsuperscript{142}

Jay Miller’s recollections tended to be rosier than the artist’s recollection, Lester became Lightning Slim’s standard harmonica player at Saturday Night Dance halls, college parties around Baton Rouge, and on the juke joint “Crawfish Circuit”. Meanwhile Miller had hired him to play harp, but Lester came to be handy as an innovative percussionist: in “I Hear You Knockin’” he slapped a rolled up newspaper on his leg on the second and fourth downbeat, but he had squeezed into Miller’s wooden “echo box”, so the newspaper echoes in staccato triplets at each downbeat.\textsuperscript{143} Jay Miller and others called this his “slap-back” echo effect.\textsuperscript{144} An unissued take of this song features a much more country-inflected guitar and harmonica, and the high treble effect made by the newspaper is reminiscent both of the sound and the physicality of playing spoons on one’s lap—a vernacular percussion common in South Louisiana households.

On “Late Late In the Evening” he brushed paintbrushes across a cardboard 45 rpm records box. On Guitar Gable’s “Goodbye Baby” he played water-filled coke bottles, and on several songs he played temple blocks to connote the country, affecting horse clops in partnership with a slow shuffling drum and swinging baritone lines in the electric guitar. In fact, productions

\textsuperscript{142} Bastin (1976), n.p.
\textsuperscript{143} Bastin (1978a), n.p.
\textsuperscript{144} Bastin (1977), n.p.
from Miller—who was always on board for a novel sound—came to be known for their unique and noteworthy percussion. Once referred to as the “Excello sound”, and now as the “swamp blues” sound, Lazy Lester was most often responsible for the invention and execution of the percussive novelty. It is worth noting that the early-to-mid-fifties recordings from Crowley that were made before Lester’s November 1966 arrival also had noteworthy percussive effects including woodblocks and washboards additional to the standard drum kit. Before Lester, the house multi-percussionist had been Monroe Vincent, an impressive singer who recorded for Miller in his own right as “Vince Monro”, “Vince Monroe”, and “Mr. Calhoun” in 1956 and 1959, and who later moved to New Orleans where he recorded for Instant and performed as “Polka Dot Slim” until his death in 1981.145

Lester’s recorded oeuvre never led him to great fame or success, but it did find a famous audience: The Kinks covered his “I’m a Lover Not a Fighter” Excello 2143-A (April 1958) on their debut album in 1964. That same album included Slim Harpo’s “Got Love If You Want It” with songwriting credits to one “Harper”. But, Lester’s song was not included on the US version of the Kink’s album—and therefore Lester’s music and name remained unheard by US audiences while having a presence in the UK. The Fabulous Thunderbirds covered “Sugar Coated Love” (Excello 2143-B (Apr 1958) and “I Hear You Knockin’” (Excello 2155-A (May 1959)) in the 1980s. Lester’s songs were recycled among local acts frequently: Barbara Lynn (1971), Johnny Winter (2004), and The Crawdaddys (1979) to name a few. Beyond these covers,

Lester’s best-known cuts are “They Call Me Lazy” (written for him by J.D. Miller), “Tell Me Pretty Baby”, “I Hear You Knockin’,”, and “Sugar-Coated Love”.

In 1966 Lester ceased recording for Miller and left the music world professionally, working in road construction, trucking, and lumberjacking around Baton Rouge. In the meantime, Lightning Slim had moved to Pontiac, MI, and still performing a few years later, agreed to participate in a reunion concert at the Chicago Folk Festival organized by blues promoter Fred Reif, who then declared Lightning and Lester “rediscovered”. Reif recalled, “In December of 1970 I was promoting blues and had just rediscovered Lightnin’ Slim living in Pontiac. I sent a bus ticket to Lester to come up North to do a reunion concert with Lightnin’ at the 1971 Chicago Folk Festival, being held at the end of January...a few weeks later, Lester was back in Baton Rouge.”

In 1975 Lester did move to Detroit after his friends and former bandmates; Reif would become his manager and booking agent after convincing him to take back up his harp. Lester has since taken “swamp” as his catchword, although the music he labeled with it was in a style considerably evolved beyond the swamp blues he had recorded with Miller two decades prior. His late 1980s and 1990s work evinces both the amplified,

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146 Saginaw, MI-native Fred Reif was an active member of the Detroit blues community interested in tracking down blues artists—Lightning Slim one of them—in the Detroit area at the height of the “rediscovery” era around 1970. His contact with these musicians and resultant interviews eventually made their ways into *Blues Unlimited*, *Living Blues*, and *Juke Blues*. He became Lazy Lester’s manager and toured with his band for some time playing washboard.

rougher influence of Chicago blues and the country lilting music that had been attractive to him in his youth.

Lonnie Brooks, the musician formerly known as Guitar Jr, and Leslie “Lazy Lester” Johnson are the sole living original-generation swamp bluesmen today. Brooks is a fixture of the Chicago blues scene where he and his two sons continue to perform.148 Lester lives and performs in Northern California, but returns to Louisiana with surprising frequency, according to J.D. Miller’s son Mark Miller. The younger Miller runs the Modern Music store and Master-Trak recording studio still on North Parkerson, and said the 83-year-old Lester returns for performances about once a year, and telephones with some regularity, despite having left Miller professionally in 1966. Since 2001 the Ponderosa Stomp Foundation festival has been staged in New Orleans, both named for Lester’s eponymous song. The festival celebrates “the unsung heroes of American music”, and both of the living swamp bluesmen, as well as other octogenarian Crowley players, have performed there. In Spring 2016, Lazy Lester appeared at a special four-night event at the famous Antone’s Nightclub in Austin, Texas.149

Conclusion

Of the some 1,200 recordings that constitute the swamp blues, there are some shared stylistic traits. Those musical attributes, however, are not what constitute the swamp blues as a genre. The swamp blues are connected

148 In May 2013 the Chicago House of Blues hosted an “80th birthday bash” in honor of Brooks hosted by Dan Aykroyd. No performance dates have been announced on any of Loonie Brooks’ social media since then.
149 At the 2010 festival, Lester was still the pinch hitter, filling in for any act missing blues harmonica throughout the weekend. Lester last appeared at the Ponderosa Stomp in 2011. “Four Big Nights With Lazy Lester!” Antone’s Nightclub. Web. Accessed 8 September 2016.
instead by a shared space-based aesthetic, rooted in Louisiana but untethered to the Franco-based music traditions that have been falsely superimposed on the state’s arenas of cultural production.

The sprawl of stylistic traits across the swamp blues is anachronistic and contradictory. Early ensemble swamp blues from the fifties have highly physical rhythm sections influenced by Western hillbilly swing bands and jump blues bands, paired with syncopated and complex drum patterns from South Louisiana’s parade tradition and New Orleans musicians of the late forties who brought that outdoor aesthetic inside to a five-piece combo. The downhome branch of the swamp blues family commonly shares melodic contours of Afro-Creole and Cajun music, but lacks the pivotal French instruments: everything is electrified and amplified, the polyphonic French accordion gives way to the stride-descended, keyboard-consuming boogie piano, and the fiddle disappears in favor of harmonica and sax. The first electric guitar in the Louisiana swamp blues is the same as the California surf guitar, the second guitar plays with gravelly, indelicate homophony out of the last of the acoustic Texas blues men and the concurrent electrified Chicago blues. Later swamp blues recordings shift into a proto-soul and proto-funk with slapping bass and Hammond B-3 organ. Coconuts and bongos accompany the country-styled cowboy blues songs and novelty theme-dances alike. The piano’s role, essentially defined by Katie Webster’s roll, plays with the force of an orchestra. And while the piano anchors the percussion section of almost every swamp blues song, barely a handful of songs feature the piano front and center, and even fewer are piano and voice alone.
To attempt to define the swamp blues by generic characteristics would be unnecessarily schismatic, as the songwriters, fronting musicians, backing bands, engineers, and wholesale buyers generally had different target audiences in mind. Meanwhile, audiences were ethnically and racially varied, socioeconomically stratified, and zealous, if small. For Goldband and Jay Miller’s house labels like Feature and Zynn, the audience was limited to the gulf coast. Excello releases scattered the South. Furthermore, note that most of the musical traits in all iterations of the swamp blues, whether swamp-poppy, hillbilly, jump blues, electric Jimmy Reed-styled, proto-funk boogie, or a ragbag of fantastic scraps from all of the above, are defined in comparison to other regional styles. The swamp blues do not exist incongruously with other Southern regional blues: they exist amidst them, between them, apart, but piecemealed from them.

Thadious Davis has discussed the notion of a black space-based aesthetic that can cohere diverse, elastic, or unmappable communities of South Louisiana. In absence of definable community boundaries to corral Crowley and Lake Charles blues musicians into a social network, or of a single framework of stylistic traits to define the swamp blues, the connective tissue is shared aesthetic practices relative to locality, place, and issues of space, which I believe is exactly what binds the practitioners of the swamp blues.
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CHAPTER THREE
THE CRAWFISH CIRCUIT, 1958-1968

You oughta come along with me to the land of green
Just take Route 90 down to New Orleans
Right out of California through New Mexico
We'll have a cup of coffee in El Paso

Roll on through Comstock to San Antone
Gonna call my baby on the telephone
We'll head through Katy and Houston too
Stop in Beaumont, TX for some barbecue

Hot links and hog ribs and file gumbo
at the Bon Ton drive-in, that's the place to go
Well Jennings, Crowley, Lake Charles and Rayne
When you pass Lafayette, boy, you see 'em cutting' cane.

There's Morgan City where the shrimp boats land
Put a nickel in the jukebox, hear a Cajun band
Ain't you glad you came along boy, to the land of green
On old Route 90 on to New Orleans

Clarence Garlow, “Route 90” (1954)

In 1957, the coastal prairielands of Southeast Texas and Southwestern Louisiana were a hotbed of musical activity. Dozens of records and new labels appeared weekly; juke boxes and radio stations overflowed with material, and innovative musical cross-pollination kept the surprises coming. This beehive of activity is not what frames the birth of Zydeco or swamp-pop, rather it is the wellspring of the swamp blues. Previously circumscribed to the Baton Rouge area, in this dissertation I have argued that the swamp blues proceeded chiefly from two independent studios in SWLA, influenced by New Orleans to the east but even more so by the urban blues sounds from Houston to the west—and thrived through radio, package tours, and club gigs within the Crawfish Circuit.150

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150 Traveling from west to east on the Gulf Coast, the Cajun Lap-land portion of Southeast Texas spans the hundred miles between Houston and the Louisiana border. The southern part of Louisiana can be divided into three roughly equal portions: Southwest Louisiana, Acadiana, and Southeast Louisiana. Southwest Louisiana comprises the 60 miles of prairieland east of the Texas/Louisiana border, with Lake Charles as its seat. The south-
Just as the limelight for down-home blues records began dimming stateside near the end of the sixties, in the U.K. a thoroughly versed contingent of British enthusiasts was a boon to the preservation of this specific era of musical life in south Louisiana. British journals, record distribution and reissue deals, and revival tours single-handedly prolonged the lifespan and secured a legacy for the swamp blues.

Figure 23. This map outlines the “Acadiana triangle” in red. The North Louisiana cultural region is above and greater New Orleans is to the right. The darkest red indicates greatest concentrations of Cajun culture. Southwest Louisiana is the rectangular southwestern-most area.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the distinctive musical forms and styles comprised in the swamp blues are directly relative to the cultural and economic conditions—which are singular to other parts of the state—that occurred in Southwest Louisiana during the first half of the twentieth century. Musicians frequently crossed the southern part of the state as warranted by their day jobs, but the most heavily engraved paths lay in SWLA, where biweekly migrations stopping anywhere between Houston and Lake Charles were not infrequent. Thus, casual interaction among musicians sometimes purposefully, sometimes haphazardly, led to nightclub collaborations, introductions to record men, sitting in on sessions, and other impressions left on the musical landscape. In this chapter, I will explore how migration flows along the Gulf Coast met with this transatlantic conduit of record circuitry to central area known as Acadiana runs the next 60 miles, and is culturally centered on the city of Lafayette. Following the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to its mouth in New Orleans is Southeast Louisiana, also referred to as Greater New Orleans.
launch a second life for this music, and instigate a second round of attendant people flows as well. Amid all these moving parts, an amoeboid arena for interaction and exchange took shape, where notions about “the” swamp blues became signifying fodder for discrete constructions of an authentic blues past, a romanticized earthy present, and other marketable prospects for static American blackness latent in the swamp blues.

“If you want to go further than Houston you can go to New Orleans, and Baton Rouge, and some of the Crawfish Circuit out there...”

The center of this conversation is the so-called Crawfish Circuit, which has been an in-group referent for decades but is mostly absent in print. The Circuit comprises the string of clubs lining Highway 90 between Houston and New Orleans, mostly referring to the small clubs east of Houston in the cities of Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange, TX, and in Southwest Louisiana: in urban Lake Charles, and small towns for about 60 miles westward to Lafayette, then trickling south deeper into agriculture and port towns to the gulf coast. It is the two record studios in the middle of this circuit that I feature here. One is run by record man Eddie Shuler, and the other by J.D. Miller (Figure 4). I have already discussed the differences between business

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151 I propose the Crawfish Circuit not as a rival or replacement for the Chitlin’ Circuit, but as a smaller-scale, B-list touring byway in comparison to Robley’s larger-scale, planned “racket” with Evelyn Johnson (Lauterbach 98). Where the Chitlin’ Circuit covered a defined area between East Texas and “most of Louisiana” for act promotion, record sales, and career creation—all with a business plan in mind—the Crawfish Circuit constituted a defined area where musicians and small-town recordmen booked their own acts within a half-day’s travel of home. The Chitlin’ Circuit as a food metaphor originated in Southern cooking; the Crawfish Circuit, from wherever the name was derived, clearly referenced Cajun and Creole seafood and tomato-based foodways as in opposition to conventional barnyard-and-butter Southern dishes and crops. Preston Lauterbach, author of Chitlin’ Circuit, quoted from a 1950 edition of the Houston Informer to define the Chitlin’ Circuit trek: “Robley’s chitlin’ circuit territory, zigzagging through Texas’ black nightclubs, and border-hopping to Louisiana rarely with a day off” is further distinguished by audience: where the chitlin’ circuit served black nightclubs and a black clientele, the Crawfish Circuit overwhelmingly serviced white audiences at white nightclubs. As I have argued in previous chapter and in this chapter, the swamp blues were a product of the Crawfish Circuit, itself a product of white audience demand and leisure. See Lauterbach 98-99, 104, 107, 178, and 237; for the food origination of the chitlin’ circuit, see Lauterbach 305.

152 This quote is taken from Alan Craig Turley’s dissertation on sociological and ecological forces that affected the development of rock music in Austin. In an interview with a senior editor familiar with the blues arena around Austin, the editor gave this quote. Turley 249. For more on the blues-based musical impressions the Golden Triangle left on local musicians, see Govenar ([1988] 1995), 141-143.
practices, managerial methods, and production styles between these two studios in Chapter 2. The present discussion focuses on the daily, weekly, professional rhythms of movement surrounding these studios, belonging to dozens of South Louisiana and Southeast Texas blues musicians. Day jobs at oil derricks and plants drew musicians to SETX and Lake Charles, where they frequently stayed and shared musical practices before returning to families for weekends, holidays, or labor seasons following. In the interims, musicians either returned home or sought new work in locations upwards of one hundred miles from home—and the music each time departed, arrived, mated, and evolved with performance.

Figure 24. The Crawfish Circuit: Southeast Texas’ Cajun Lap-land and Southwest Louisiana.

Figure 25. Recording operations.
Interstial Populations of the Golden Triangle

After the wars, transplanted Creoles rushed to industrial centers in southeastern Texas port cities along the Gulf Coast, establishing “Cajun Lapland” and prompting the birth of Zydeco. The population who stayed in Louisiana, in contrast, adopted a new nationally-styled blues music whose regional success helped in the postwar recontextualization of sentiments about American music-making writ large among Louisianian populations. People-flows between these two populations—musicians making French-derived music in Texas, and Southwest Louisianians playing urban-inflected swamp blues—glided this cultural currency back and forth between locales, continually lubricating and tendering the emergence of a new era in the Gulf South. A second trajectory moved music across the Atlantic: British researchers resuscitated careers and conduits of musical circulation to attract more nuanced understandings of the important contributions made by nearly-forgotten artists, and to reinstate some of the complexity and variety of the musics of south Louisiana.

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153 The styles of music popular in South Louisiana and Eastern Texas at this time include this regional iteration of the blues as well as other popular music genres including Cajun, Zydeco—an electrified interpretation of Franco-rooted music that variously added the amplified instruments, thematic subjects, ornamentation, formal, and harmonic structures of rock ‘n’ roll—, New Orleans rhythm and blues, Houston and Chicago urban blues, rockabilly, doowop, gospel, early soul, Broadway tunes, and more.
Once arrived in urban areas like Lake Charles and Houston, musicians began altering the profiles of their music ensembles. On both sides of the Sabine River—the dividing line between Texas and Louisiana—, the folksier diatonic accordion gave way to the all-purpose piano accordion, and the triangle or fiddle was increasingly exchanged in favor of electrified guitar and bass. In this early shift, which occurred between 1940 and 1950, the historically racially integrated musical life of Southwest Louisiana and Southeastern Texas begins to fork into two race-based camps under the simultaneous influence of the two-caste racial system of the metropolis, and the codifying assignations of race in the American music industry.

In her dissertation on race and migration in Jim Crow Houston, Tyina Steptoe specifies that Houston’s color lines underwent drastic changes in the first quarter of the twentieth century. On paper, Houston’s legal history tells a story of black-white conflict, with seceding neighborhoods (1915) and organized responses to racial violence (1917) characterizing a search for black
autonomy in the city.\textsuperscript{154} White supremacist responses shored up the appearance of racial dichotomy. But despite those outward appearances that the “Bayou City” seemed to abide more or less by the same black-white racial binary as the rest of the country, three large migrating populations, of Mexican, Tejano, and black Creole origin, blurred the Jim Crow two-caste racial system for city dwellers. Of the populations who repaired to Houston, Mexican immigrants were the first to come en grosse at the outbreak of The Mexican Revolution in 1910. Tejanos followed, who, like many Louisianian plantation workers, left agricultural work in favor of the boom in industrial labor jobs in Houston.

Elsewhere in Texas, such as along the southern border and in its central counties stretching out from Dallas and San Antonio, politicians had created laws that denominated “Mexican” as a third racial category. In Houston however, no such legal division ever occurred, with Mexican Americans legally considered white, and black Creoles (including those who had identified as “mulatto” in Louisiana censuses) became “negro”. Therefore, while on paper Houston operated along a single, and defined color line, at the level of daily life was a set of inconstant color lines, Steptoe says. As the century progressed into the Civil Rights era, several factors affected these color lines including the heavy in-migration from SWLA and other largely rural areas. The presence, new adjacency, and commingling of populations of

\textsuperscript{154} As early as 1908, black families were moving to an area in north Houston coming to be known as “Independence Heights,” where black contractors were building homes for black families. In 1915 the neighborhood officially seceded from the city. In the summer of 1917, the installment of an all-black military regiment ignited racial tension in Houston; one private’s response to an act of racial violence by a white police officer against an African-American woman climaxed in what came to be known as the Houston riot of 1917. Steptoe 8-12.
different ethnic backgrounds sparked conflict with racist white factions, and activist minority movements grew in face of growing awareness of the national political terrain.

The most influential population change that helped blur Houston’s black color line, however, were the waves of black Creole migration that began with the 1922 establishment of the “Frenchtown” neighborhood. A second wave followed shortly, after the 1927 Great Mississippi Flood destroyed plantation crops and swallowed small towns in the lower River Parishes of southeastern and south-central Louisiana, displacing black Creole families to the nearest dry land with room for residential construction and with jobs waiting: Houston. South Louisianian black Creoles influenced black Houston culture, for instance in food, in music, in language, and in religion with an influx of Catholicism and Catholic traditions. By living in close proximity and intermarrying with non-Creole African Americans, the new migrants became more like Houstonians too, losing Creole ethos in those same cultural arenas.

As the oil industry continued pulling laborers from across Louisiana until the decline of the industry in the early 1980s, black Creoles reseeded towns from Lake Charles to Houston with Creole institutions, but with time, even that French influx increasingly resembled Anglo-African-American culture. One reason Creole heritage “diluted” despite incoming waves of Louisiana migrants was that the majority of initial migrants were male oil industry workers who often moved alone. Furthermore, many laborers agreed to contract work that had inherent expiration dates. That impression of

155 Steptoe 250.
temporariness may have contributed to the decision not to displace their families from points east in Louisiana. The resulting social structure in the booming industry towns of Lake Charles, Orange, Port Arthur, Beaumont, and Houston was a predominantly male population living outside the context of home and family.

**Absence of Real Women and Home-place in the Golden Triangle**

It has been established by feminist social geographers like bell hooks and Doreen Massey that particularly in patriarchal, heavily gendered social arenas structured by industry, such as the oil field and its related industrial sites (not to mention within the blues itself), women carry and produce culture. In *Space, Place, and Gender*, Massey explores the social structures that are defined by local industry, and the ways that spatial and sexual divisions of labor affect the constitutions of place, identity, and the local. She problematizes the flattened notion of the “homeplace” as a nostalgic home-base, the fons et origo that shapes selfhood, and an imagined, lost site of authenticity. She argues that such a reading of home is inextricably bound to a particular, essentialized cultural notion of Woman that has nothing to do with real women. My discussion here does not intend to deny Massey’s critique. Instead, I am suggesting that in the Golden Triangle, “homeplace” was a flattened symbol of Louisianian past, and women existed, for a large part, only in that imaginary landscape. Therefore, I do not challenge the essentialized consideration of women and womanly roles because that gendered framework was the most common to blues musicians in the Golden Triangle and the record men to whom they eventually brought their music. Most important, in
the music women are, mostly, static, text-based figures. The lyrical text operates within a framework whereby women are, at best, archetypes, and at worst, single-trait stock characters.

If real women’s perspectives are absent in this problematic, imaginary, ideological creation of homeplace, it is attributable to the real absence of real women in the daily rhythms of these migrant workers’ lives. So, in songs like “I Got it Made (When I Marry Shirley Mae)” (Goldband 1957), “I Need Your Love” (Rocko 1960), “Shoo Shoo Chicken (this Rooster Don’t Need No Hen)” (Rocko 1961), and “Naggin’” (Excello 1963), whose subjects include typical blues tropes that figure women as romantic subjects, muses, and antagonists respectively, the ways in which the songwriters reflect upon women parallel the ways in which the lost maternal lands of *Louisiana* figure in the new Zydeco style. Creole traditions and institutions are similarly mythologized in poles. Louisiana is either romanticized (Clifton Chenier’s 1954 “Country Bred” and “Louisiana Stomp”) or villainized, and references in the songs to Creole community or traditions similarly take place in the imaginary. In the narratives of swamp blues songs written by musicians who lived and worked in phases of migranthood, women tend to be fixed in singular roles, as stable and stabilizing forces. Massey links this impulse to fix women in space (domestic, private) and place (home, hearth) with the familiar masculine impulse to fix space and place.

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156 “Louisiana” does not appear as a central theme in swamp blues songs—written by musicians moved to SETX or otherwise—because, as a rule, the swamp blues are geared toward an American share of the market; folk and folk-derived genres like Cajun and Zydeco may revere or idolize Louisiana as home-place, but in general, the swamp blues will not.

157 Massey 11, 238. Citing C. Owens 75.
Therefore, within the conscripted dynamics of temporary migrant labor communities along the gulf coast, the production of culture and the ministry of heritage often depended upon an absent feminine curation of (even the imaginary) “homeplace.” In the daily lives of many black laborers in the petrochemical industries, that domestic incubator from which culture, in-placedness, and heritage emanate existed only in imagination. It makes sense, then, that despite the aggregation of black Creole persons in the SWLA and SETX towns of the Golden Triangle, in absence of the womanly and the familial to sustain culture and cultural identity, Creole social institutions, including music, began to flag. In music, the dilution of Creole blackness to the growing hegemony of “American” (Houston) blackness manifested in black Creole bands increasingly adopting rhythm and blues styling, themes, form, and instrumentation, while all-white Cajun groups incorporated country and western and would soon be dubbed Rockabilly. The influence of the aggressively designatory record and radio industries of the 1940s and 1950s cannot be underestimated in these two contested shifts.

**Woman in the (Swamp Blues) Imaginary and Katie Webster**

It is worth noting that as imaginary as women are within many swamp blues songs, they are fixed in an equally imaginary position in the popular memory of the swamp blues music industry: Miller and Shuler both speak of

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158 Davis 353. See Massey, 118-124, 171-172, 180-184, and 266-269.
159 See, for example, the stylistic development of African-American musicians such as Clarence Garlow and Clifton Chenier, and of white musicians like Janis Joplin and Jonny Winter. In conventional narratives, the “evolution” of genre appellations for white Cajun groups is generally as follows: the white Cajun bands of the 1930s played “French” music. In the 1940s the same bands were said to play rockabilly, then rock’n’roll, and under the influence of the 1970s Cajun revival, these defunct white bands and their descendents were placed retrospectively under the “Zydeco” umbrella. The racial division between Cajun and Zydeco music is not as concrete in Louisiana’s popular memory as written histories suggest.
woman musicians cursorily, with brevity and in a distant manner. Other independent record company oral histories are similar. Furthermore, blues magazines rarely featured women among their coverage of South Louisiana music, and first-person interviews with women are virtually absent before the mid-1980s.

Katie Webster is the only female musician either producer speaks of with detail or nuance. Indeed, of 476 minutes of taped archival interviews with Shuler and Miller, Katie Webster is the only woman whose discussion touches on personality traits. Webster is the only woman of Shuler’s fifty-nine year history with Goldband and Miller’s fifty years with whom the producers seemed to have an interpersonal relationship resembling the relationships between the producers and their most frequently recorded men.\textsuperscript{160} From contemporary accounts of woman musicians and retrospective accounts, Eddie Shuler speaks of women in the record business, broadly, as immature, helpless, whiny, “all the time they bitchin’ about something.” Black women were a particularly a touchy endeavor he said would endanger him with the locally active KKK. Around 1960 Shuler passed two of his most frequent studio backup vocalists, Barbara Lynn (of “You’ll Lose a Good Thing” (1962) fame) and Katie Webster, onto other nearby record producers to record solo cuts. Barbara Lynn thus recorded for Huey Meaux’s small Eric label in

\textsuperscript{160} For retrospective interviews, see Shuler 1990, 1991, and 1993; for Jay Miller, see Miller 1991; for John Broven, see Broven 1992. For contemporary accounts of Eddie Shuler’s business relationships with women see the Eddie Shuler and Mike Leadbitter correspondence 1963-73 from the Goldband Collection at UNC’s Southern Folklife Collection. See also Shuler 1984, and Webster 1979.
Houston, and Katie Webster with J.D. Miller. As Shuler recalls almost verbatim, in separate interviews two years apart,

“and they [Webster and Lynn] was all beatin’ me over the head wantin’ to record, well I didn’t wanna record ‘em ‘cause that was in the segregation days and I couldn’t see me out there on the road with a black chick in my car, ha! And the whatchacallit, the people with the hoods you know, ... they would come and do me in, said I don’t wanna fool with those people because they’ll tear me up, you know.” “I said, man I can’t make no headway with no black female, the Ku Klux Klan would burn down my building!”

With respect to her treatment as an African-American woman in the two studios, in an interview with John Broven in 1979 Webster spoke with uncharacteristic limited detail, and buffered herself with performative third-person narration.

“That’s when [1958] Ashton Savoy brought me into Eddie Shuler to record but Eddie Shuler didn’t wanna have anything to do with Katie Webster during those days!—only as a piano player with all the material that came out of his studio. He didn’t want have anything to do with Katie Webster at all other than that! So he sent me [1959] to J.D. Miller in Crowley and I did some work for J.D. Miller in Crowley for some years, and I didn’t get anything moving, uh, didn’t get you know,—“

Broven interrupted to clarify a few details of chronology during which time Webster’s voice raised with audible pique:

“These songs, I never got a chance to know what they really did, you know, because like I said you know I never received any royalties off of these records so I never knew if they sold big or if they didn’t. You know, because I never got anything for them. You know. But I knew that they were pretty good records, [that] I had gotten good cuts on them and everything. Because J.D. Miller is a perfectionist—you go in his studio you have to cut perfect records, you know. Folks used to tell him perfect records don’t sell, you hafta have a flaw in them somewhere, but in J.D. Miller’s studio you do not cut a flaw. A record has to be perfect, you can not make not one mistake, ‘cause he has microphones in his ears! And if you make one lil’ mistake and he hears it, you gotta do it over again because he hears—he hears the least little mistake! I give him that. He hears the least mistake. You cannot get away with nothin’ in that studio. When it comes to recording. He’ll back it up, and play it, and show you exactly where, you know, where you fouled up at.

JB: So he was a good producer, then you say
KW: yes he was a good producer, as far as records were concerned, he always would get a good sound.
JB: mm
KW: he’d get a good sound.¹⁶¹

Systemic racism caused many musicians to abandon the industry and find employment elsewhere. Most worked in petrochemical or other industrial labor jobs nearby, where they still had plenty playing opportunities after-hours. Webster was among those who opted to leave SLWA in order to stay in music full-time. In 1964, after a famous night where Otis Redding invited her to join him on tour from the stage of the Bamboo Club in Lake Charles, she spent three years opening for and playing with Redding and band. Despite her constant presence, including on the famous live Whisky A Go Go albums, Webster has never been listed among the Redding personnel. His plane crash was the final push she needed to leave the music business. She retired in 1968 first to raise her children, then in 1974 moved to California to care for her parents. In the late seventies she recorded comeback albums for Goldband.

In the pages that follow I consider the case of another Texas-born musician, Juke Boy Bonner, in whose career Southwest Louisiana figured prominently. Like Webster, he was a Southeast Texan living, working, and moving among Creole populations from Louisiana to California, but whose music attests to an individual swamp blues aesthetic outside the French tradition. Katie Webster and Juke Boy Bonner’s location in the overlapping margins of guitar-led Texas country, piano-based boogie, small-ensemble and multi-percussionist New Orleans rock’n’roll, and South Louisianian French

crooning tradition are exemplified in the following description of the standard Crawfish Circuit audience, which I quote at length for the complexity and precision of his characterization. In a 1979 interview with John Broven, the New Orleans guitarist and composer Earl King described an awareness that he and other New Orleans musicians had of the specific SWLA audience of the fifties, and their stylistic leanings. The audience enthusiasm for local artists that King saw in SWLA echoes the fanfare surrounding local celebrities Lightning Slim and Slim Harpo in Baton Rouge, which Jimmy Dotson described in the previous chapter. King said,

“"Those Lonely, Lonely Nights" for Ace was a change of structure for me. When I wrote the song in 1955 it was geared towards those people in that [SWLA] area out there. It was a country/rhythm and blues-type song. We’ve got a piano part in there where Huey Smith is playing a solo and it was predominantly a guitar/mandolin type solo to get that country flavor, so he gave that type of tone to it. The record broke first in South Louisiana...There’s so many clubs down there and we used to play maybe twenty dates a month, and every night we’d play a different club in a different little town. And sometimes two clubs in the same night. And some of the standard ones, like in Lafayette they had Landry’s Palladium, which was one of the big spots to play in, Ball’s Auditorium in Lake Charles, and a bunch of other places in Lake Charles. It’s just so fast down there, it’s unreal to even think that you got so many places all along the community out there. You had places like Robinson’s Recreation, which had a lot of entertainers went down there in Abbeville. One of the big places where all the big acts from all over the country came down in Opelousas was the White Eagle, Bradford’s White Eagle. All the big names came there, T-Bone Walker, Ray Charles.... People would drive twenty, thirty, forty, fifty miles in buses to go hear a particular group, it was common for them to do that. They did it frequently, every week. It could be any day...I’m talking about the area from Opelousas into bits of Texas, then back into Louisiana. Even Orange, Texas, that bites on the borderline, you’re dealing with the same

162 Earl King is a veteran of the New Orleans rhythm & blues world, and the composer of several New Orleans r&b standards. His highest-achieving two songs were “I Hear You Knocking” (Smiley Lewis 1955 – #2 on Billboard R&B Singles; Gale Storm’s white-washed 1956 cover reached #2 Billboard pop singles, and Fats Domino 1961 version has probably become the best-known), and “These Lonely, Lonely Nights” (Earl King 1955 – #7 on Billboard R&B Singles). He also wrote or co-wrote “One Night” (Smiley Lewis 1956, reaching #11 Billboard R&B Singles; Elvis Presley 1958 #4 Billboard Pop Singles; and Fats Domino 1961); “Do-Re-Mi” (Lee Dorsey 1961); “Big Chief” (Professor Longhair 1964); “Come on (Let the Good Times Roll) Pt. 1” and “Come On Pt. 2” (Earl King 1960, made famous by the Jimi Hendrix Experience 1968); and “Trick Bag” (Earl King 1960, the Meters 1976).
people. Most of the people down there are French, and that’s an interesting concept. Earl King, Dave Bartholomew, Fats Domino, Allen Toussaint, Guitar Slim, and the rest of that first-generation New Orleans rock’n’roll cohort recognized that in the western corner of their home state, something very musically distinct was going on. A vibrant scene of musical tastes and activity demanded an admixture totally different from the standard New Orleans audience. Big acts like T-Bone Walker and Ray Charles visited Southwest Louisiana, where there seemed to be just as many music venues as there were people; the audience had specific tastes and acted on them, traveling up to an hour’s distance to hear a local favorite musician, even on weeknights. It was a place where musicians had recurring work. From Southeast Texas, along Highway 90 directly across Southwest Louisiana until the Highway 90 split at Lafayette, and up to Opelousas and down to Morgan City, an African-American—not Afro-Creole—music tradition was firmly established, and rooted in Southern Louisiana. These are the same musical and demographic elements I have discussed in the first part of this chapter.

Musicians in Motion
The swamp blues sound that came from Jay Miller and Eddie Shuler’s studios was borne of similar processes as the roughly contemporaneous California and West Coast blues sound of the 1950s and 1960s. The Texas-California migration of the 1930s-50s brought Texas-based regional styles and white producers in California together; with black musicians like the Crowley and Goldband bluesmen Clarence Garlow, Lafayette Thomas, Boogie Jake,

\[163\text{ Broven 152-3.}\]
Vince Monro, Jimmy Wilson, and Juke Boy Bonner, came the heavy Texan
guitar and rock’n’roll backbeat. The rhythm and blues sound today associated
with what were the biggest indies, Specialty, Aladdin, Modern/RPM, and
Imperial, plus a slew of other Los Angeles and San Francisco-based
independents, has its roots in Texan blues tradition, not unlike the swamp
blues.¹⁶⁴

As I discussed in my previous chapter, to be clear, I want to avoid
conceptualizing the swamp blues as recorded aural snapshots of community
music-making. The musicians who I profile throughout this dissertation in
many instances made these records on the go—while moving into Southeast
Texas or passing back through SWLA for jobs in lumber, shipbuilding yards,
rice farms, shrimp fishing fleets, on the Texas-and-New Orleans, Kansas City
Southern, or Southern Pacific Railroads, or in the burgeoning petrochemical
industry.¹⁶⁵ Many recorded in towns that were not their homes, nor where
they resided, nor their destination. While it is easy to think of the music as
having been based—in the sense of being rooted—in Jay Miller’s main street
store in Crowley and Eddie Shuler’s little white wooden ziggurat in Lake
Charles, the swamp blues did not stem from those places. Instead, those two
recording studios, while pivotal to the creation of the swamp blues and
without whom the swamp blues arguably would not exist, were pit-stops for
many swamp blues musicians en route for stays elsewhere.

¹⁶⁴ Other Bay-area independents include Fantasy, Swing Time, Bay Tone, Down Beat, Globe,
Bob Geddins’ Irma, Cavatone, Big Town, and Veltone subsidiaries, and several more.

Texas-born, Weldon Bonner spent most of his career touring around the Crawfish Circuit alone as a self-styled “one man trio” with Houston as his home base. Like many other gulf coast bluesmen in the fifties, he moved to California in 1954, then back to Houston in 1959, when he took up his travelling routine again. During one of those touring stints, on his way back from New Orleans January 6, 1960, he stopped in Lake Charles for one day looking to record at Goldband. He had come to Eddie Shuler because of a Goldband record he once heard and liked on a jukebox back in California. By Eddie Shuler’s account, Juke Boy precipitated the trip directly to Goldband. Shuler is loose with the chronology and other facts, framing Bonner’s story as evidential support for the import and excellence of Goldband Records in the history of recording:

“Juke Boy Bonner was in Oakland, California when he heard Goldband records on the jukebox. And he said I’m leaving now to go over there and start recording. Got up and got on the bus and came to Lake Charles and came to the door and said I’m here to record and I said what do you do? And he started singing “Life is a Dirty Deal” so I said you’re in like Flynn. As far as I know he didn’t have a record with anybody else at that time.”

For Bonner, who had joined up with a New Orleans pianist for the return trip to Texas, and recorded those first sessions with him, how or why he came to Goldband was not of as much consequence as being recorded by an operation that would keep histrionics to a minimum, and let him keep artistic control of his own music.\(^{166}\)

Bonner’s first number was the absorbingly trudging “Life Is a Dirty Deal,” ahead of whose first take Shuler mistakenly called out in his diphthonged country drawl “Li-ife is a cheater!—Dirty Deal, I mean, take number one.” If he sounds optimistic, it is because he already had an idea of what was to come, as his slip-up in naming the take indicates he had already heard at least the song’s punch line of “I feel like life is a cheater, and it gave me a dirty deal”. This first take was likely Bonner’s first run-through after Shuler paired him with Guitar Joe on backing guitar. Bonner starts in on harmonica and guitar together on a D7 triad, with harmonica in higher profile, rippling crescendoing swells of minor third descant to the distorted guitar’s descending baritone pickup. The two guitars settle into a bottomed out bass register so raw that they blur; though Guitar Joe is outlining a bass line and Bonner provides the percussive forward motion, Guitar Joe matched Bonner’s timbre well enough that a signature muddiness takes hold making it hard to distinguish the guitar lines from each other. This “wall of sound” would come to characterize much of the swamp blues mostly thanks to J.D. Miller’s engineering, but here Bonner creates the atmospheric sound autonomously. It is worth noting that a certain muddiness inhabits both Bonner’s musical performance and his lyrical framework. His raw guitar and harmonica zealous with harmonic overtones (a common function of racked harmonica) are matched in the gritty settings he commonly describes in text.

I am smiling like I’m happy but you don’t know how I feel
I feel like life is a cheater, and it gave me a dirty deal
I’m gonna tell everybody, please understand
My baby don’t want me no more, she got another man
And I’m smiling like I’m happy, but you don’t know how I feel
I feel like life is a cheater, and it gave me a dirty deal

I’m gonna tell everybody just like it is
I drink to keep from worrying, smile to hold back my tears
And I’m smiling like I’m happy, you don’t know how I feel
I feel like life is a cheater, and it gave me a dirty deal

Juke Boy Bonner, “Life is a Dirty Deal”

Bonner played three more numbers that day, only the last of which Shuler would elect to release, “Can’t Hardly Keep From Crying”, as the B-side on Bonner’s debut Goldband 1102. The other two were “My Time To Go” and “I’m Not Jiving”, both surprisingly upbeat considering Shuler’s next request. After Bonner finished playing, Shuler asked for something “commercial” to balance out the repertoire Shuler felt was monotonously heavy, morbid, and depressing. At the follow-up session two months later Bonner improvised the upbeat boogie number “Call Me Juke Boy,” marked by Bonner’s signature propulsive guitar and an ostinato bass, made prominent in post-production.167

Prompted to improvise, Bonner riffed on the mundane. For musicians in daily professional migration along the Crawfish Circuit, each new town probably resembled the one that came before. Bonner reflects that experience in the sellable flip titled “Call Me Juke Boy”. This song answers Shuler’s request with an upbeat starting riff in Bonner’s percussive, chugging, hollow guitar style. The one-man trio, who plays the guitar constantly, alternates his

167 To demonstrate the full, but piecemeal publication of Bonner’s Goldband recordings, the first-time releases of each were as follows: Goldband Gb-1102 (1960) A-side “Call Me Juke Boy” was recorded 15 March 1960 in Lake Charles; its B-side “Can’t Hardly Keep From Crying” had been recorded at Bonner’s first session on January 6. The personnel for both were: Juke Boy Bonner, voc, g, hca; Guitar Joe, g; Little Brother Griffin, d, snare drum taps, plus an unknown bassist in March. 8 of 15 cuts made across the Jan, March, and December 1960 Goldband sessions were issued on Storyville (DK) SLP 177 in 1965. A ninth came on Jan & Dil (GB-Eng) EP 451 in 1966, a tenth on Gb LP 7774 (US 1976); later, the ninth and an eleventh on Flyright FLY CD 38 (UK 1991), and last, Ace CDCHD 821 (UK 2001) included 11 of the 15, only one of which had not been released prior.
harmonica and sung passages throughout the song. Two measures after he takes off on guitar, he brings in the harmonica intro.

![Image of Juke Boy](image)

Recorded 15 Mar 1960  
Goldband Studios, Lake Charles, La.

**personnel:**  
Weldon Juke Boy Bonner, voice, harmonica, guitar  
Guitar Joe, electric guitar  
Little Brother Griffin, drums  
unknown string bass

0:00 *chugging, but hollow guitar with harmonica intro*  
0:14 *a confused electric guitar enters, garbled and overlapping with bass*  
0:21 They call me Juke Boy and I just got in your town  
Oh, they call me Juke Boy and I just got in your town  
Got a brand new style, you’re gonna like what I’m putting down

**Figure 28. Juke Boy ca. 1960 and lyrics to “Call Me Juke Boy”.**

Juke Boy’s recording career was intermittent. He recorded in short spurts over his career: Oakland once in 1957, after which he worked for a time at the Del Monte canning factory and did not perform at all. He recorded in Lake Charles three times in 1960 between stints spent elsewhere on the Crawfish and Chitlin’ Circuits. Then came a spate of eleven recording “sessions” in Houston between 1967 and 1969, a tour in Europe in 1969, and a session for Liberty/CBS in London while he was there. The momentum Bonner’s performing and recording history gained in the late sixties was due to the efforts of overseas blues researchers and fans—including a fundraiser organized by Mike Leadbitter for *Blues Unlimited* subscribers to finance a session in Houston—to help make Bonner, his music, and eventually his

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poetry, better known. (“I think he was primarily a poet” as Chris Strachwitz later put it.) The Goldband sessions mothered a total thirteen songs plus two alternate takes, only three of which Goldband ever issued in Bonner’s lifetime. The songs would go on to have a life of their own elsewhere, however, before long.

After Shuler sent the very first Juke Boy Bonner tape, the unissued “My Time to Go”, to the British blues pioneer in September of 1963, Leadbitter was enthralled. For his part, Shuler was amazed at British interest in the rhythm & blues that he swore “you can’t give the stuff away” in the U.S. Juke Boy Bonner became the darling of *Blues Unlimited*, to the extent that the magazine mounted a campaign to finance a recording session for him in Houston. The Arhoolie recordings followed. Where he was hailed in Britain for being the “last of the downhome bluesmen”, in the U.S. market he was a vestige of music past.¹⁶⁸

**Miller and Shuler Studios as Pivot Points of the Crawfish Circuit**

New and original music that was geared toward radio dissemination and record distribution proliferated from Miller and Shuler’s studios. The recording sites of Lake Charles and Crowley lay conveniently between New Orleans and Houston, with a distance buffer that granted stylistic leeway—neither the New Orleans parade line tradition nor the Houston guitar tradition hung heavily. Lake Charles and Crowley were furthermore fated to attract the musical activities they did because of their residency on Highway

90, the main stretch of the touring byway. The Crawfish Circuit loop followed a highway that today has been supplanted by Interstate-10, which cuts straight through Southern Louisiana to Baton Rouge. Before 1968, though, connector bridges and thoroughfares did not connect SWLA and Baton Rouge directly. The eastward portion linking Lafayette to Baton Rouge, and on to New Orleans, was not completed until 1974. Greyhound buses and caravans of musicians following Highway 90 therefore had to choose among North, Northwestern, South, and Southeastern-bound smaller two-lane highways that splintered at Lafayette.

![Map indicating routes for Highway 90, which curves south from Lafayette to New Orleans, bypassing Baton Rouge, and its future linear East-West replacement Interstate 10. Reproduced from *South to Louisiana* by John Broven (1983).](image)

The following Figure 30 maps popular clubs on the usual circuit. Some of them are the River Club in Mermentau, swamp bluesman Elton Anderson’s own Rickey Club in Duson—where Lightning Slim and Lazy Lester often
appeared together, the Silver Slipper in Arnaudville (between Lake Charles and Sulphur), the Club Forest, the Four Leaf Clover in Church Point, the Hide-A-Way Lounge in Rayne, and in Lake Charles, played The Bamboo Club, The Turf, the Village Lounge, and the Polynesian. Lightning Slim and Lazy Lester were even booked to play church events as far afield as Opelousas to the north of Hwy 90 and New Iberia to the south, a span of seventy miles.¹⁶⁹

Figure 30. Map indicating sample Crawfish Circuit nightclubs

Note that the circuit is corralled into the SWLA region by geography: the Mississippi floodplains, including the Atchafalaya Basin, carve off southeastern Baton Rouge and New Orleans from the Cajun prairielands that hold these clubs in the southwest. Mostly undeveloped forest, freckled with rural towns, creates the northern barrier. The roughly rectangular patch of land that remains may be considered the swamp blues territory. Three historical factors reinforce my outlining of this area. First, almost all of the swamp blues musicians were born or raised within this area west of Baton

¹⁶⁹ Webster (1979), n.p., Bastin (1988), n.p.; Jay Miller booked Lightning Slim and Lazy Lester to appear at the Immaculate Conception Church in Lebeau, LA, which is twenty miles northeast of Opelousas, and the Our Lady of Victor Church in Loreauville, LA, which is five miles from New Iberia as the crow flies, or about a ten mile drive along a large loop of Bayou Teche.
Rouge, as indicated by Figure 31. Second, most of the musicians received musical training and cut their teeth within this rectangle. Big Chenier learned fiddle in Opelousas and guitar in Lake Charles; Lionel Prevost learned to play the sax in Port Arthur, Guitar Junior also got into music after moving to Port Arthur, Juke Boy Bonner learned from his uncle in Port Arthur. Leroy Washington, Tal Miller, and Guitar Gable were raised on music in Opelousas, Charles Sheffield and Sticks Herman in Lake Charles, Katie Webster in Houston and Beaumont from records and radio, Lazy Lester learned the harmonica on the bus between his job in Baton Rouge and his home across town in Scotlandville, and so on.¹⁷⁰

Third, the majority of live performance jobs outside of nightclubs also lay within this demarcated zone. Individually booked gigs began as birthday parties, weddings, and church suppers, and grew into events like high school dances, (white) fraternity parties, and club dates. Manager-agents Miller and

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¹⁷⁰ Broven 118-159.
Shuler arranged some of these bookings, while some bands, such as Silas Hogan’s The Rhythm Ramblers, had been seeking and attracting such jobs without producers’ hands involved.

Before I draw conclusions based on analyses of these coded-white performance venues, I should pause to comment on the absence of private black music-making in this discussion. While in-home music-making is an important facet of any study of African-American musical life, my focus here is on how swamp blues musicians positioned themselves in professional arenas outside their home communities. In contrast to domestic music-making, in these public, white spaces—Eddie Shuler said the swamp blues were never devised for a black audience, but for white record buyers—, musicians typically appeared in fixed ensembles, performed rehearsed arrangements with predetermined ornamentation, which they played in prearranged sets. The argument can be made, then, that if the swamp blues are not a codifiable genre it is partly because of the ways in which they are an imaginary, performative genre. Not vaudevillian or minstrel, but nevertheless packaged in a way that contorts conventional tropes of authenticity in the blues. Specifically in records from Miller’s studio, post-production often sheered tracks with an ever-present fourth wall. From Miller, the fourth wall can be felt in the hyper-treatment of the master tapes—the deep reverb, the echo, the alternating overdubbing of bass, or guitar, or percussion to emphasize or create atmosphere. Other elements contributing to this performativity is Miller’s use of musical gimmickry and onomatopoeic elements like guitar chicken scratches or rooster calls (Charles Sheffield’s
“Shoo Shoo Chicken”, Lightning Slim’s “Rooster Blues”), deep reverb to accompany lyrics referring to “low”, “down”, and feeling “blue,” (Lightning Slim’s “Poor Lightnin’ Blues”) and a variety of bee-related sounds in Slim Harpo songs “I’m a King Bee”, “Buzz Me Babe”, the instrumental “Buzzin’”, and “Little Queen Bee”.¹⁷¹

Returning to my discussion of the SWLA musical environment in which the swamp blues were created, it is important to note that the local accessibility of Miller and Shuler’s studios was itself an important economic recourse for working musicians in the area. Theirs were not always the closest, but they were the most technologically outfitted (at least in the fifties and early sixties, they were; Miller updated his equipment over the years while Shuler never changed from his 1953 floor-model Ampex), and highest achieving studios between Houston and New Orleans. Their proximity made a recording session within reach after a full day’s labor in Baton Rouge, or Port Arthur, or Lake Charles. With these resources close at hand, African-American oil industry day-laborers could make records with less professional sacrifice, since local access meant fewer lost work hours, and less travel time likewise mandated fewer, if any, nights away from home. The physical location of Miller and Shuler’s studios, then, suggested a direct route to professional music-making. Record sales and bookings through these houses would help make that profession tenable.

As such, these studios acted as a gravitational force within the Crawfish Circuit area for musicians, even if history would never see any of those

musicians made rich, and even if as many reported, they never received any remuneration from Miller or Shuler. The active reagent here was the appearance of solid business foundations—the perceived promise of being able to make a full living through the business channels that Miller and Shuler represented—and that prospect kept swamp blues music-making circulating in, and returning to, SWLA. Therefore it is important to understand that Jay Miller and Eddie Shuler’s studios’ physical situation at the middle of this circuit influenced the circuit’s sprawl and its ability to self-sustain. To further reinforce that centrality, sketching out a radius of about fifty miles (half of a day’s travel, including the return) from the studios creates a nearly identical map as in Figure 30 above; in fact, the few portions within the radius that do not feature circuit stops are mostly undeveloped, dense woods. Additional to geography, then, the record-men can be understood to sit at the middle of this swamp blues terrain in my configuration of the Crawfish Circuit as a phenomenon whose existence is contingent upon the existence of these studios in SWLA.

**Baton Rouge Not Key to Swamp Blues**

These elements combined—the domain of the Crawfish Circuit nightclubs, the birthplaces and hometowns of swamp blues musicians, and sites of rehearsed music-making—outline a specific region of swamp blues activity. This region and these circuit stops flow east-west, with a noteworthy eastern limit that excises the cities of Baton Rouge and New Orleans. I have already mentioned in previous chapters that the state of Louisiana is home to three conventionally accepted cultural divisions (Chapter 1), and specifically,
that SWLA stands apart from the Northern Louisiana and Greater New Orleans cultural zones. Nevertheless, the swamp blues have been in many histories conscripted to a Baton Rouge phenomenon, or at least a phenomenon somehow related to Baton Rouge. This assumption has been based on the order of discovery in the *Legendary Jay Miller Sessions* that I discussed at length in Chapter 2. Put briefly, Jay Miller’s “big 4” artists Lightning Slim, Slim Harpo, Lazy Lester, and Lonesome Sundown each grew up in the outskirts of Baton Rouge, and in the minds of researchers who dug out their records from Jay Miller’s attic, this on-paper provenance seeded the notion that Baton Rouge lay at the middle of the swamp blues they eventually created. In reality, only Slim Harpo spent his adult life in Baton Rouge; Lightning Slim left for Detroit in 1966, and Lonesome Sundown retired to the church. As Bruce Bastin conducted his fact-finding mission across the Southern U.S., Jay Miller’s archives offered plenty. Not long after, John Broven’s written correspondence worked its way through the Miller archives as he sent records, here and there, overseas.

First came Stateside’s *Excello: The Real R&B* and *Excello: Authentic R&B* in 1963 and 1964, the former featuring Slim Harpo and Silas Hogan at top billing, and Lightnin’ Slim, Whispering Smith, Lonesome Sundown, Jimmy Anderson, Roscoe Shelton, and Tennessee musicians Earl Gaines and Sweet Clifford below. The latter is made exclusively of J.D. Miller recordings.\(^{172}\) The *LJMS* series and Goldband-related anthologies like

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\(^{172}\) Ace Records reissued both these Stateside LPs under their original album titles, with additional alternate takes, as ACE CDCHD 492 and ACE CDCHD 562, in 1994. For more on
*Jambalaya On The Bayou* (FLY LP 3503, UK 1969) and *Those Old Happy Days: 1960s Blues From the Gulf* was co-produced by Mike Leadbitter and Eddie Shuler in Shuler’s Goldband studios, (FLY LP 513, UK 1974), were the exhausting, and yet still not comprehensive, results of several decades of unpacked research performed by these half-dozen British researchers. These series and anthologies eked out albums generally as the material got sorted. Meanwhile, further “fact-finding” trips to Louisiana produced live albums over a brief few days’ stints, like when Mike Vernon, the owner of the Blue Horizon record label and editor of *R&B Monthly* went to Baton Rouge in August 1970. He recorded Silas Hogan, Whispering Smith, Arthur “Guitar” Kelley, Clarence Edwards, and Henry Gray over the course of four days, split into solo and group sessions, and released them on one of the first publications to claim the “swamp blues” label: Blue Horizon’s double-LP *Swamp Blues* (S 7-66263, UK 1970), simultaneously released in the U.S. by Excello (EXC LP 8015/8016, US 1970), and soon thereafter by Vogue in Germany 1971 (LDVS 17258, DE 1971). Ace (UK) reissued this double-LP in 1997 (Ace CDCHD 661, UK 1997 and Excello CDCHD 661, US 1997.).

From Flyright, the first three *LJMS* albums were compilations released in 1976 and featured none of Miller’s “big four”. The heavyweights came next, individualized: in order, Slim Harpo, Lightning Slim, Lazy Lester, Lonesome Sundown, and Katie Webster constituted Volumes 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 respectively. Researchers compiled and released their discoveries from Jay

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Miller and Eddie Shuler’s archives serially. In many instances the series were pressing one volume as dust was just then being blown off the masters for the next. In other words, the swamp blues music that got top billing in canonical and canonizing pressings later—like the Louisiana Swamp Blues (FLY CD 9, UK 1989), More Louisiana Swamp Blues (FLY CD 24, UK 1990), and Lightnin’ Slim: King of the Swamp Blues 1954–1961 (FLY CD 47, 1992) from Flyright—was hierarchized by the sequence of discovery of the earliest LJMS pressings. Goldband’s own “Collectors Item” Series logo graced the front of LPs released on and off from 1968 until at least 1982 (GB 7740 through at least GB 7781) and other albums with appendages like “The Goldband Years” either helped to consolidate the canon, or revealed a desire among the two swamp blues record men and their British counterparts to do so.174


Flyright LJMS, the Stateside Excello anthologies, and so on, became album headliners two decades later; musicians and songs whose organization across the LJMS was less assuming, in turn, became the flotsam and jetsam of the swamp blues canon as it was established—in effect, curated—in the 1980s and 1990s. Those tracks that had “slipped through the cracks” today are the fodder of popular cult blogs like The Home of the Groove, Uncle Gil’s Rockin’ Archive, The B-Side, Funky16Corners, The Cosimo Code, and more, which are primary disseminators for twenty-first century fans.\(^{175}\)

To summarize the above, Baton Rouge got fixed at the middle of the swamp blues by early researchers, who came across specific old records that were stacked in the right place at the right time. Almost all written material on the swamp blues that has followed the work of this first generation of researchers—Mike Leadbitter, John Broven, Neil Slaven, Bruce Bastin, Larry Benicewicz, Chris Strachwitz—built upon their work, so the centrality of Baton Rouge remained, unquestioned. But, as I will argue below, I believe not only did the cultural place of Baton Rouge not play an active role in the creation and development of the swamp blues, but I believe the city could not have played an active role because of a century-long cultural separation that had been separating it from SWLA since the Civil War.

Allow me to walk backwards through the chronology of why and how the Crawfish Circuit geography came to be what it was. At the height of the golden era of the swamp blues (1955-1962) musicians moved and performed

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\(^{175}\) Many of these blogs are distinctly New Orleans-centered: “Based on the premise that the true Home of the Groove, at least on the North American landmass, is the irreplaceable musical and cultural nexus, New Orleans, Louisiana, and environs...”, “
within a distinct territory, mostly between Houston and Lafayette, which I refer to as the Crawfish Circuit. That territory was determined by the contour of U.S. Hwy 90, as it was the most frequently and easily traveled auto route between terminuses and as it held musically attractive towns in between. Highway 90, in turn, was built along the flat, dry, sturdy land cleared and shored up for laying railroad just before the turn-of-the-century. Because of Louisiana’s booming lumber industry and the construction of the U.S. Corps of Engineers’ river dredging to create canals (Port Arthur Canal completed 1899) and the massive Intracoastal Waterway (Sabine Neches Intracoastal Waterway completed 1908), several different railroad companies had built linear cross-sections through the state before the turn of the century that were increasingly junctured with ports.\textsuperscript{176} The Texas & New Orleans Railroad was the largest, and by 1860 it already had run track from Houston, straight through the future “Cajun Lapland”, straight through SWLA, then traced a deep southward loop to New Orleans through towns with offshore Petrochemical access, such as Morgan City. See Figure 32. The Southern Pacific rail also bypassed Baton Rouge, as evidenced in the 1884 map below. See Figure 33.\textsuperscript{177}


\textsuperscript{177} The first railroad to go through Baton Rouge was the Texas and Pacific, whose 1903 track crosses northwest Louisiana to New Orleans, passing through Shreveport, Opelousas, and Baton Rouge. It does not overlap the Crawfish Circuit. See Map 3. This and other rail tracks crossing Baton Rouge also detoured the Atchafalaya basin, to the north. Gentry et al., 1860.; Southern Pacific Company, 1884; Texas and Pacific Railway, 1903.
Figure 32. 1860 map of Texas & New Orleans Railroad connections that outline the Crawfish Circuit and bypass Baton Rouge.

Figure 33. 1884 map of Southern Pacific Railroad connections that outline the Crawfish Circuit and bypass Baton Rouge.
So, by the time of twentieth-century discussions of highway systems, tracts already existed that connected Houston, Beaumont, Port Arthur, Orange, Sulphur, Lake Charles, Crowley, and Lafayette—but they veered south away from Baton Rouge for two reasons: first, the Atchafalaya Basin between Lafayette and Baton Rouge was impassable. Second, going south accessed more rice and port towns like Jeanerette, New Iberia and Morgan
City. In the 1920s an auto-route dubbed the Old Spanish Trail gradually became highway, first called Louisiana State Route 2; with the 1955 Louisiana Highway renumbering, it became Highway 90. In the meantime a federal “Interregional Highway System” plan had been underway. From the earliest interstate map proposals of 1939, Baton Rouge was excluded. It was not until the 1955 revisions of the interstate maps that proposals would directly connect SWLA to Baton Rouge by interstate. However, as of 1963, that direct connection was still not yet complete.

Figure 36. Crawfish Circuit nightclubs and highways.

Further cause for the Crawfish Circuit’s southwesternly limits is the low incentive to go to New Orleans in this era for small music gigs. To be sure, the great music city had plenty work to offer blues musicians, but its plenty was unnecessary to musicians hailing from SETX and SWLA. The small towns

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178 The Old Spanish Trail once spanned the U.S. from San Diego, CA to St. Augustine, FL, built through sites of shared Spanish heritage marked by forts, missions, or colonies. Not to be confused with the 19th-century cattle trade route (Santa Fe to Los Angeles) of the same name, the auto trail’s center and headquarters were in San Antonio, however construction of the auto trail began in Mobile, AL in 1915. In 1927, the Old Spanish Trail became U.S. Highway 90 from central Texas to Florida. For more on current and old alignments between the Old Spanish Trail and Highways 90 and 80 in brief, see www.americanroads.us. For a detailed historical account of the development of a nationally connected system of roadways, see Weingroff, Richard F. A Vast System of Interconnected Highways: Before the Interstates. Federal Highway Administration, 2014. Retrieved from www.fhwa.dot.gov/highwayhistory/vast.pdf.

of Opelousas, Ville Platte, and Eunice offered plenty performance opportunities themselves anyway. New Orleans and Baton Rouge might as well have been an additional hundred miles away, as to get there almost guaranteed an additional five hours of travel. A closer map view that includes parish divisions (Figure 16) reveals that main stops along the circuit are the parish seats of Beaumont, Lake Charles, and Lafayette, reinforcing these cities’ centrality to the surrounding areas. See Figure 37 below.

Thus by the time that any band made the return loop to Texas, it is almost certain that they would have heard Jay Miller and Eddie Shuler product on jukeboxes, in conversation breaks during session breaks, or from nightclub owners, many of whom themselves were musicians and some of whom had recorded with Goldband and with Jay Miller furthermore. Crowley and Lake Charles were therefore inevitable stops on the way back to Houston. So while reliable performance sites eastward petered out at Lafayette, and the option to choose venues south or north opened up at the highway split, Lake Charles and Crowley were non-negotiable.
Records in Motion: British Blues Movement

A second trajectory shortly moved music across the Atlantic: British researchers resuscitated careers and conduits of musical circulation, which allured new fans by virtue of novelty, and spurred nuanced, deeper appreciation by virtue of the fervent writing of blues societies and journals. Clubs such as seminal writer Mike Leadbitter’s Blues Appreciation Society, Chris Trimming’s London Blues Society, and the later meta-club the National Blues Federation (NBF) sprang up at record pace with aims to recall the important contributions made by forgotten artists, and later, to ‘uncover’ little known blues musicians (see Figures 11 and 12). Many of the appreciation societies founded their own blues journals that became the first outlet for first-person accounts of musicians’ lives, including Juke Boy Bonner. Formed in earnest with more than a hint of social activism, many enthusiasts sought to avoid the cheapening perils of overly determining performance criteria and tour packaging. The founding committee of the NBF, for instance, stated an important goal of theirs was “to fight the danger of excessive commercialisation of the blues scene. We all remember the trad[itional jazz] boom and what happened to the music, and there are already signs of something similar taking place in the blues business.” Their efforts reinstated some of the complexity and variety of the musics of south Louisiana on a worldwide platform, much owing to informant characters like Eddie Shuler and Jay Miller, whose activity bridged the fluid cultural space of

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180 For a fuller discussion of the record industry in Louisiana, the role of radio, the national circuitry and hierarchical network of independent labels and national imprints like Imperial, Modern/RPM, Specialty, and Aladdin, and the commercialization of the blues boom in the U.K., see Chapter 2 in this work.

southeast Texas-Southwest Louisiana to its next life in England. Through Eddie Shuler (and later, less directly, also Jay Miller) British enthusiasts were able to siphon this musical repertoire from its alleged failures in the U.S., and the legacy of the swamp blues consistently funneled through them for the extent of the British Blues boom.

Further, the rise of the “international festival circuit” which granted African-American blues performers a “new and vital forum” for preserving and advancing their music helped maintain the currents that mobilized the swamp blues. Alan Govenar even declared, “The audience abroad has saved blues from extinction.”

The insistence among white recordmen and collectors to locate the swamp blues in the past did not handicap the swamp blues musicians. Rather, like many blues artists, as they continued to play in SETX and SWLA, they played to the crowd’s requests, whatever the musical style, whomever the music’s originator. Similarly, they played to British audiences whose knowledge of the repertoire, and expectations, were usually out of date.

Taking from Karl Hagstrom Miller’s work on Southern popular music and the shaping of historical memory, I argue that many of these musicians reappropriated the folkloric paradigm—which locates black authenticity in the down-home (nontechnical) past, fosters imagined cultures of isolation, and anticipates black American backwardness that precludes access to social amenities such as recording technology, formal industry circuits, and commercial autonomy—to eclipse restrictions on the ways of music-making.

182 Govenar 24.
The technology one employs can help define community boundaries and consolidate group memberships. Absenting access to other professional media and working primarily with white Recordmen, these African-American musicians’ full awareness of commercialization in the blues situated them to capitalize on their mixed musical heritages. Here, at the cusp of the Civil Rights movement, African-American identity, French heritage, and musical identity are able to overlap without incompatibility, but rather, indeed, inseparability. Thinking of race as technology thus frames the construct as a potential instrument for conscious self-mediation, and actualization.
Mike Leadbitter, 39a, Sackville Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, Sussex, England, to Eddie Shuler, Lake Charles, La., 26 October 1962.

Dear Mr. Shuler,

I am writing this letter to inform you that the new society has been formed, during the last three months. We are also running an eight-page blues column in the "Jazz Statistics" magazine, under my editorship. One of the first things I'd like to do is to bring attention to Goldband, through this column, as a thanks for the information and records you have sent me.

Chris Strachwitz, of Arhoolie Records, wrote to me and said that he'd talked with you about Goldband. Chris is sending information concerning your cajun releases, so this side is covered.

If possible, I'd like to start off by featuring Big Walter, Hop Wilson, Guitar Joe, and Red Hookin' Bob. Any information on their recordings, personnel, dates, etc. would be appreciated, so you use a regular studio band for your R&B recordings? Can you possibly let me have the band personnel, if so?

I should also be interested in any publicity sheets, photographs or biographical details.

Would any of your artists be interested in becoming honorary members of our society? If you would accept, I should also like to add your name as an honorary member.

Whether you can, or cannot send my requests, I shall send a copy of the issue featuring Goldband.

Once again thanks for all your help so far.

Sincerely,

Eddie Schuler,
Lake Charles, La.

[Signature]

Figure 38. Mike Leadbitter's first letter to Eddie Shuler, concerning the newly formed Blues Appreciation Society. 26 October 1962. Courtesy of the Goldband Recording Corporation Collection at the SFC UNC-Chapel Hill.\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{183} Leadbitter, Mike, Sussex, England, to Eddie Shuler, Lake Charles, La., 26 October 1962. Autograph letter signed, original in the possession of the Goldband Recording Corporation Collection #20245, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
November 7, 1962

Mike Leadbetter
2121212121212121212
38a, Sackville Road
Sussex, England

Dear Mike:

Happy to know that you have now formed a society of the
Jazz Statistics Magazine. I am quite sure that it will
be a success. Any help we can give you, we will be happy
to do so.

We have one artist by the name of Bill Parker, who lives in
Oklahoma City, Okla., and I am sure that he would be glad to
become an honorary member of your society. You may add my
name as an honorary member, and I feel highly honored. We
do not have any photographs of Bill Parker but will be happy to
send them for you, and send some time later. Bill Parker has a real
good record going at this time called "Sweet Potato Mash." I
am forwarding you a few copies. He has a real band, he tours
country backing up on tour such artists as Sam Cooke, Jackie
Wilson, Little Willie John, Bobby Blue Bland, and Ivory Joe Husk
plus many others. He is in reality an institution rather than a
band leader. He has one of the best shows for night club
performances that I have ever seen. As the cats would say,
"Man this thing really moves."

I am sending you a picture of Guitar Jr. Here is some informa-
on Guitar Jr. He lives in Chicago, Illinois, and is booked the
Universal Attractions. Some of the personnel we used on his
records are staff bands in various parts of the country. Here
are a few names that I remember real well. Clarence Garlow,
player, Ice Water (a great artist), bass, Little Brother Griff
Drums, Danny George, Saxophone, Leroy James, Saxophone, Boogi
Joe Joseph, Piano. Guitar Jr. was born on a tenant farm in
small town of Jemermere, La., and has been playing music since
he was six years old.

These are about the only things I could offer at this time.

Sincerely,

Mike Leadbetter

e/o The Blues Appreciation Society
38a, Sackville Road
Sussex, England

Figure 39. Eddie Shuler's response to the above letter. 7 November 1962. Courtesy of the Goldband Recording Corporation Collection at the SFC UNC-Chapel Hill.\(^{184}\)

\(^{184}\) Shuler, Eddie, Lake Charles, La., to Leadbetter, Mike, Sussex, England, 7 November 1962. Typed letter unsigned, original in the possession of the Goldband Recording Corporation Collection #20245, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
The blues importers

Figure 40. *Melody Maker* article describing a successful blues package tour recently put on by the National Blues Federation of London, in which Juke Boy traveled and performed as part of the “longest and most intensive tour any American artist has made...”. Public Domain.

Reverse Body Flows

Not too long after the emergence of Zydeco in Texas, the economic draws that had brought Creoles to the area, like the urban-industrial jobs in oil, had sprung up back in Louisiana, too. Continued growth in Houston’s population contributed to the lost appeal of city-dwelling among Louisiana expats who had never truly severed their cultural and familial ties to Louisiana anyway. So, by the late 1960s return-migration to Louisiana not only brought Creoles back home, but it also brought an important souvenir of Houston: Zydeco music. Living actors had brought with them old soundscapes into Texas, carrying their past into the (former) present to live alongside it.

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Musicians returning to SWLA at this time were re-presenting the same soundscape in new (urban blues) ways, just as their Creole Texan cousins are re-visiting the old soundscape, in new instrumentation.

In so doing, Louisiana-Texan Creoles brought their experiences of past and present full-circle; twenty years ago, they had brought elements of a nostalgic Louisiana past to Texas’s new, urban environment in the 1950s. Now, near 1970, Zydeco music housed representations of a past which Louisiana Creoles brought to bear on their experiences of a well-travelled, encapsulated Louisiana culture.¹⁸⁶ New-Louisiana that developed in the industrializing port cities contradicted the encapsulated-past Louisiana, however, since the economic and cultural landscapes had vastly changed between 1950 and 1970. The re-transplanting Louisiana-Texas-Creoles were confronted with a different presentation of their sylvan homeland than what they thought they’d kept abreast of through their music all along.

Indeed, what had been rural Louisiana resembled what urban Texas used to look like, both in topography and some aspects of cultural orientation. The physical landscape of Louisiana now bore oilrigs, petrochemical plants, port traffic, and the attendant industrial-style office buildings, new roads, and the developing highway system. The southwestern portion of the state’s cultural infrastructure had shed many of its ‘small-town’ traits, favoring national American trends over isolated ethnic tradition; urban progress and

¹⁸⁶ Find a more sophisticated means of thinking about: If not for the incredible three-fold rise of modern industry in and around Lake Charles, and perhaps most obviously, the willingness/progressive/desire of post-war Cajun, Creole, and non-French Louisiana musicians to explore alternatives to traditional music, such horizons would not have appeared... Give more agency to musicians beyond ‘will to explore’... Bernard (1996) 76-7. “modern petro age” = Tisserand and Spindletop..
development rather than conserving communities of sharecroppers.

Last, the music itself these return-transplants carried had evolved, even while saluting French history. Thanks to the proliferation of Zydeco-style music on the radio and regional record sales, live ‘package’ tours around the gulf coast had brought new iterations of this Creole blues music, fresh from Texas, into southwestern Louisiana and points beyond. By the 1970s and into the 1980s, the defining sound of ‘Zydeco’ music was more akin to urban blues, rock, and soul than the old French La La style it had resembled during its formative years in Houston.¹

The Myth of Cajun Homogeneity, 1964-1996

From the oldest academic studies of Cajun music through the turn of the 21st century, Cajun music has been consistently defined according to its textual characteristics. Around 2000 and following, a new generation of Cajun scholars (Bernard 1996, Brasseaux 2004, 2009) began considering Cajun music in the context of music history, outside the umbrella of folklore or social histories. Late-19th and early-20th-century folklore studies had set the tone for an anthropological treatment of Cajun music that through the heritage advocacy of the Cajun renaissance influenced ideas about cultural identity across Southern Louisiana. Eventually, by the 1990s, the term “Cajun music” was used interchangeably with “Louisiana music”. And the history of the swamp blues was effectively erased.¹

¹ Language-biased Cajun Renaissance scholars in the last quarter of the twentieth century continued the work of Cajun music fieldwork pioneers Irène Whitfield (Holmes), Harry Oster, and John and Alan Lomax. However, these researchers were by and large trained folklorists; their research relied on disembodied texts and failed to question the underlying assumptions of crafting a field of “Cajun Folklore”. Both Lomaxes, Lauren C. Post, Sarah Gertude Knott,
In July of 1968 the state legislature created CODOFIL, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana.\textsuperscript{188} Within a few short years, the University of Southwestern Louisiana established a Center for Louisiana Studies (CSLS) in 1973 to encourage scholarly research on the state.\textsuperscript{189} To date, the largest collection within the CLS archive is the Archives of Cajun and Creole Folklore (ACCF), for whom a full Center for Acadian & Creole Folklore was created in 1974.

A festival counterpart to CODOFIL began in 1977 under the aegis of Festivals Acadiens. In 1984 the Cajun French Music Association chartered and founded eleven local chapters, most of whom generally host a Cajun music festival, too.\textsuperscript{190} A wave of late-twentieth century festivals made tourism an even more major industry, and brought cultural and heritage products to market for tourists. Eventually Louisiana’s popular music products ran

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\textsuperscript{188} CODOFIL’s purpose was “to do any and all things necessary to accomplish the development, utilization and preservation of the French language as found in the state of Louisiana for the cultural, economic and tourist benefit of the state.” Perhaps the best-known accomplishment of CODOFIL was the establishment of the French immersion program in public schools.

\textsuperscript{189} USL has since changed its name to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

overwhelmingly French because of the widespread endorsement of Cajun culture by the intellectual elite. It was attractive nostalgia, and the readymade heritage marketing granted Cajun culture even more symbolic capital. By the 1980s, a homogeneous Cajun identity already trumped other musical output in South Louisiana. Combined with the birth of a field of Cajun scholarship, the swamp blues genre evaporated without much fanfare or notice.

Just as the strength of folklore comes from continual telling, a mythologized Cajun homogeneity in Southwest Louisiana has also been retold, institutionalized by official sanction and reified by informal trends. In policy-making and other executive functions, Cajun-heritage foundations like CODOFIL and the collectivity of other Cajun music associations created momentum for other state-sanctioned institutions and events to follow. Public school “heritage days” institutionalized the celebration of many aspects of Cajun heritage, including its diversity—but just Cajun nevertheless; the state Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism (which housed CODOFIL) produced tourism materials that hopped the Cajun culture bandwagon at full tilt.

At the vernacular level, themed festivals and festival names continued the skyrocketing ubiquity (and currency) of all things Cajun. In addition to a lengthy six-week Mardi Gras season—obviously rooted in Louisiana’s French tradition—the first of these festivals was Contraband Days in Lake Charles, established in 1955 to honor a French pirate.191 In the succeeding years,

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191 Contraband Days is the city’s official celebration of the legend of pirate Jean Lafitte, who was said to have docked at Lake Charles and buried his treasure in the sand somewhere along
especially after the highly favorable reception of three Cajun musicians at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival, festivalization in SWLA maintained that tenor. The early seventies saw the creation of the Tribute to Cajun Music Festival (1974), a joint effort of Acadian scholar Barry Jean Ancelet and iconic Cajun musician Dewey Balfa, and city-centric Cajun Heritage Festivals in small towns across the southern half of the state. Cajun music and food festivals multiplied in the next decades.\footnote{Among the first festivals devoted to Cajun music were the [Original] Southwest Louisiana Zydeco Music Festival in Opelousas (1982),\footnote{A precedent for this kind of connection between naming patterns, symbolic capital, and regional identification has been set in studies of the old versus new American South by political scientists Cooper and Knotts (2010 and 2004), Alderman and Beavers (1999), Reed et al (1990), and Reed (1982, 1976).} followed by the Mamou Cajun Music Festival (1982), the Boggy Bayou Festival (1984) in Pine Prairie, the gargantuan Festival International de Louisiane (1986) in Lafayette, and the profuse family of Cajun music festivals spawned by CFMA chapters (1984+), including the Cajun Food & Music Festival (1987) in Lake Charles. All these festivals celebrate the region’s French heritage. For more on the political achievements of Cajun music festivals in SWLA, see Guenin-Lelle, Dianne and Alison Harris. “The Role of Music Festivals in the Cultural Renaissance of Southwest Louisiana in the Late 20th Century” Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association 50.4 (Fall 2009): 466-7.} Predictably, the deeper French names appear primarily in Acadiana (“the Cajun heartland”), while the area within Imperial Calcasieu (a primarily Anglo area to the west of the Cajun heartland) opt for smaller gestures that imply Louisianian identity without excluding its considerable non-French-heritage population.\footnote{A precedent for this kind of connection between naming patterns, symbolic capital, and regional identification has been set in studies of the old versus new American South by political scientists Cooper and Knotts (2010 and 2004), Alderman and Beavers (1999), Reed et al (1990), and Reed (1982, 1976).}
The Early Dissolution of SWLA’s Hit-Making R&B Machine

The oil industry suffered a heavy blow in the 1970s, so workers who previously had reliable work in the refineries and plants, and whose reliable work afforded leisure time in which to pursue music—whether for profit or pastime—lost their job security and hobbies along with it. This economic shift pinpoints an important moment in the history of Louisiana roots music, one that, in retrospect, signified the death of rhythm & blues for many SETX and SWLA musicians. Since Jay Miller and Eddie Shuler’s own livelihoods depended in part on the musicians’ wherewithal to pursue music recording as a side career, now that the bread and butter of swamp blues musicians’ incomes had been put in question, a large portion of Miller and Shuler’s prospects vanished overnight. The independent record industry was already in its denouement thanks to corporatization and the growing reach of the “Big 6” record companies. The majors undertook aggressive campaigns to get shares of the black consumer market, recently graduated from a niche demographic to a large and valuable one.¹⁹⁴ So, Miller and Shuler looked elsewhere on the horizon for business opportunities. Their efforts moved to warehouse and commercial property leasing, politics for Miller, and back-catalogue Cajun reissues and television sales and servicing for Shuler.

The rhythm & blues music that had found an outlet in these two South Louisiana record men so successfully in the late 1950s and first half of the

¹⁹⁴ I am referencing the now-infamous 1971 “Harvard Report” commissioned by CBS to make determinations on the soul music market including whether it existed, how to define it, reach it, and attract it—i.e., ideally to corner the market. Some of the major recommendations were followed by CBS, some blatantly ignored, which suggested that CBS executives failed to read the full report. For a fuller discussion of the details of this report and its implications in the popular music business, see Nelson George’s The Death of Rhythm & Blues: 135-138.
1960s faded quietly as the decade saw the U.S. entrance to the Vietnam War and the onset of the Nixon years. Regional music scenes gave way to national swells of Motown; the Payola system linking independent producer/agents with radio disc jockeys crumbled. Not only did local blues acts cease appearing on the airwaves, but they ceased to exist as well. The session greats like Katie Webster, Lionel Prevost, Ashton Savoy, Warren Storm, Fats Perrodin, Jockey Etienne, Al Foreman, Bobby McBride, and Jimmy Dotson joined other acts. Others like Guitar Junior, Lightning Slim, Juke Boy Bonner, Jimmy Wilson, Boogie Jake, and Lazy Lester “disappeared” into the urban centers of Chicago, Detroit, or Houston.

With the dissolution of the old guard “last of the downhome blues men,” moth holes grew in Miller and Shuler’s foolproof formulae for hit rhythm & blues record-making. By the end of the long sixties, about 1974, newcomers African-American blues musicians and bands no longer appeared at Eddie’s TV Repair nor Modern Music looking to record. As Shuler and Miller’s focuses turned to other business ventures, they drifted away from the recording scene and their equipment gathered the cobwebs of outdated technology. Indeed, lacking musicians staid or new, lacking engineers, lacking scouts, and lacking audience demand for the blues on record, the formerly self-running record machine of SWLA lost its capacity to churn altogether.

What then, became of the once-vibrant regional popular music scene in Louisiana? This is the question *Billboard Magazine*’s Kip Kirby explored in 1981. In an article that juxtaposes the buoyancy and wealth of living musics native to the state with the absence of Louisiana music in the mainstream,
Kirby outlines a musical history of commercially successful high-points that averages one peak per decade. From the earliest days of recorded music were Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, and King Oliver. The field recordings of the 1930s brought Leadbelly to the national fore, and in the forties, Professor Longhair, Roy Brown, and Dave Bartholomew shaped the sounds of popular music across the nation. In the rock’n’roll vein, he sources that 1950s “explosion” to New Orleans’ Fats Domino, Clarence Henry, Little Richard, Jessie Hill and Ernie K-Doe, and carrying the genre into the sixties were Irma Thomas, Dale and Grace, Robert Parker, and Aaron Neville hits. Outside of rock’n’roll, Louisiana’s musical geyser continued with big-band (Pete Fountain, Al Hirt), country (Kitty Wells, Webb Pierce, Elvis Presley), and traditional roots music (Clifton Chenier, the Balfa Brothers), to round out the activity of the long Sixties. In all, he surmised the place was a commercial gold mine: “If you’re looking for major label-quality potential recording acts, they’re here. If you’re looking for ethnic music, it’s here, too. In fact, there’s little in the way of music that you can’t find in this carnival state...”

While Kirby recognized that music-making had not slowed in Louisiana—big acts like the Meters, the Neville Brothers, Irma Thomas, and LeRoux were out of New Orleans, and across the Southern swathe of the state was a resurgence of interest in traditional Cajun music and its descendents—, its biggest contemporary hit-makers had defected to New York, San Francisco, and Chicago. “So, with this treasurelode of natural talent,” he asks, “why hasn’t Louisiana made more of a mark within the commercial mainstream?

Why have its periods of fame been sporadic and more recently, slow? It’s apparent that there is a market for the state’s music; [...] Why have so many musicians left the state to strike commercial gold?"  He found his answer in a recently drawn proposal to the Louisiana Department of Commerce, which, approved, created the Louisiana Music Commission. The fifteen-member Commission had one purpose: to promote the development of the music industry in Louisiana. This pursuit made it the first of its kind in both Louisiana and the US.  

Kirby quotes from the proposal at length, some of which I will reproduce here, as its summation of the state of the industry—and the chronic illnesses plaguing it—is so astute that one wonders how this analysis went unanswered as long as it did. Its litany of problems, when reversed, reads like a prescriptive handbook for rebuilding Louisiana’s dulling regional music scene. Instead, the history of the commission it created, which I explore next, wades through three decades of unproductive quagmire.

‘Big record companies will go anywhere for a hit. So if a recording company can come into an area and pick up a hit, it will come back...But gone is the day of hit records being made in someone’s garage. Today’s space-age technology has moved into the recording studio, and the public demands the highest level of recording perfection.

This means if one wants to attract record companies to an area, one must have two things: (1) commercial musicians writing hit songs; and (2) facilities outstandingly different from other recording centers.

The songs are no problem, but the facilities are, and this is why our songwriters and musicians are constantly leaving the state.’

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196 Kirby, L15.
197 Lornell 263.; Kirby, L15.; Picou, (n.p.)
Kirby goes on to pinpoint three key problems: an absence of available up-to-date recording studios throughout the state; once local acts get contracts with major record labels, Kirby says, local radio dropped them. His final observation concerns the musical variety that the state prides itself on: that variety naturally settles into “factionalization and regionalization”. In other words, he echoes familiar sentiments about living roots musics: minority cultures survive, in part, thanks to isolation. That isolation, by definition, severs certain ties to nearby and adjacent communities. Repairing those severed lines of communication, from “Lake Charles to Lafayette, Crowley to Alexandria, Baton Rouge to Bourbon Street,” Kirby concludes, is imperative to the economic viability of Louisiana-based music industry.\footnote{Kirby, L15.}

**The Death of the Independent Record**

As early as 1971, the some of the blues’ greatest champions were co-authoring articles about the death of the rhythm & blues industry in the U.S., including an obituary for the Excello label as a whole penned by Mike Leadbitter and John Broven for the November 1971 issue of *Jazz & Blues*. The “Big Four” recording conglomerates consumed, absorbed, or otherwise trudged upon the indie labels across the U.S. in the 1970s. In SWLA the effects were felt in the next decade: a 1984 *Billboard* story asked about the decline of the music business in Louisiana, “Why have so many musicians left the state to stroke commercial gold?”\footnote{Ibid., L1, L8, L15.}

There are no salient reasons why the independent record failed in SWLA. More correctly, the swamp blues had existed in a prosperous bubble
for the record industry that burst in the last quarter of the century. The bubble opened with a domestic technologically-supported boom in industry sales, increasing 261% from 1955 to 1959. Of the million-seller records in that period, a full seventy percent came from independent studios. After a market slug from 1959 to 1963 (perception of rock ‘n’ roll’s ephemerality mixed with old-guard, conservative music executives who failed to develop big acts), the indies were recharged by Beatlemania in 1964, and the psychedelic influence of Californian music in 1967. In 1970-1973 the industry saw a “reconcentration” around the Big Four (in 1973, Columbia, Warner Brother, Capitol, and Motown) that squeezed out the mom and pop labels who could not compete in scale, speed, efficiency, and price.\textsuperscript{200} The conversion to digital CDs in the latter eighties made Shuler’s 1953 floor model Ampex 350 a dinosaur; with the addition of twenty-four track recorders at Master-Trak, a disinterested Jay Miller phased himself out of recording in his own studios.

Many of the original swamp bluesmen had become so disillusioned by misdeeds and betrayals that they had quit either the area or the industry by the time interest in r&b faded in SWLA. By 1975, Slim Harpo, Lightning Slim, and Sonny Martin had died. Katie Webster said the studio golden days ended as musicians all started to drift in separate ways, moving to a different coast or leaving recording altogether.

Eddie Shuler and Jay Miller were both approaching what should have been retirement. They began to reflect professionally on their careers in

retrospectives and memoires; Jay Miller had acquired “The Record Man of
The South” as a nickname as early as a 1962. The Louisiana Blues Hall of
Fame grants an annual J.D. Miller Award named in honor of his
contributions. His legacy as an important channel for Southern blues was set
well before the close of the century.201 Jay Miller died in 1996 after heart
surgery.

Shuler meanwhile had gotten little industry recognition so he began to
seek it himself. He submitted manuscripts for an anecdotal advice book How
to Become a Successful Independent Record Producer in 1972. He applied
twice to be included in Who’s Who in Leading American Executives and
petitioned the Louisiana Hall of Fame to induct him from 1985 to 1992. He
wrote the applications in the third person, signing them as “chair” of the
Goldband “business committee”. Eddie Shuler spent the last decade of the
twentieth century trying to canonize himself as a Cajun and rockabilly
pioneer, and when prompted, said he had lost interest in the blues. In 1995
swamp pop scholar Shane Bernard brokered an introduction between Eddie
Shuler and the University of North Carolina’s Southern Folklife Center to
discuss the “donation” of his papers. Shuler felt SWLA lacked local interest
and investment in the local recording industry as a heritage history, so it
comforted him to pass the 6,000 sound recordings and thirty-five linear feet
of paper records on to their Collection.202 Eddie Shuler died in 2005.

201 Strachwitz, Chris. “Keys to the Highway: Goin’ To Louisiana. Part Three.” Jazz Report 2.10
(June 1962): 11-12.
202 Goldband Collection Subseries 1.1 Eddie Shuler personal materials (40 items). University
of North Carolina Southern Folklife Collection.; Green, Steve. "Swampland Jewels-
A Case Study in Music Industry Support: The Louisiana Music Commission, 1981-2010

Allow me to take a detour to discuss the Louisiana Music Commission (LMC), as its haphazard management and ultimate failure is indicative of the low-ranking consideration of the regional music industry-as-such within the state government. As I discussed in my previous chapter, around this time, in 1981, the “heritage movement” had taken Louisiana by storm. Both in the popular imagination and in the state’s legislation, the idea of local music was integral to the state’s three-pronged identity (history-foodways-music), while in practice, local music was indeed prized, but as a commodity and souvenir—

Figure 41. Eddie Shuler with his 1953 floor model Ampex 350, in April 1973. Courtesy of the Southern Folklife Center at UNC-Chapel Hill.

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not as a living economy. In other words, rich musical variety was a keystone of the state identity, but that richness and that music were conceptualized as organic, ignoring the real need to support such an industry. The idea of local music, then, in theory and practice, prioritized the Folk while ignoring the work. Put the other way around, to acknowledge a music industry, shored up by legislation and infrastructure such as higher education in Music Business, would be to break down the façade of the Folk. Breaking that façade undermines the image and allure put forth by the tourism and other culture-reliant industries; and to legislate for music-as-work belies music as an ineffable essence. What this means, then, is that in the state of Louisiana around 1980, to successfully build up the infrastructure of a music industry through government subsidy such as the LMC would be to dismantle the state’s identity. The State had an economic need to conceive of local, or regional, music as a folk cultural product that trumped the reality of supporting music as a trade. The LMC’s failure, therefore, was foretold by the state’s actual championing of music.

The LMC’s failure was not a short one, not in the sense that it appeared to be doomed from the start. Over its thirty-year history (1981-2010), every few years came reinjections of energy or effort either from new administrations or due to milestones in Louisiana’s music history; momentum never seemed to stick, however. First, one year after Kirby’s poor diagnosis of the state of the music industry, the 1982 oil crash hit and what little momentum had been conjured in the industry ground to a halt. Secondly, there seemed to be a disconnect between those administering the
powers and finances and those making music. Even with musicians on the LMC board, most of them were prominent musical figures *emeritus*, that is to say, no longer with fingers on the pulse of the contemporary music industry’s needs. Much the same could be said for the dissolution of Jay Miller and Eddie Shuler’s small imperia: their staid efforts meant increasingly less as industry needs advanced to require more and newer technology, more innovative output, and to resonate with a larger audience. There were no outside models after whom Miller and Shuler could fashion their business strategies or musical approaches. Similarly, an undirected, governor-appointed cabinet with no real stake in developing the contemporary music world ran the LMC. Just as for Miller and Shuler, as they turned their focuses elsewhere, so too did their stakes in making successful blues records hold less importance.

As I mentioned above, at its inception, the LMC was the only state agency to devote itself solely to the support of local music-making and music commerce. No such government body existed in any other state, either; that burden of trailblazing could be said to have troubled the project from infancy. The commission was designed to support all musics coming from Louisiana, and musicians of many stripes constituted the majority of its board. In reality, the commission ended up serving mostly New Orleans-based interests, ignoring points north (the former seat of *Louisiana Hayride*) or west (the Acadian seat of traditional Cajun and contemporary Zydeco activity, and farther west, the focus of this dissertation, the blues greenhouses in Crowley and to a lesser extent, Lake Charles). Interestingly, and in contradiction to the
jazz-heritage-oriented activities of the commission, all the records relating to
the project are housed today in the Louisiana Folklife Program Project files.204
This speaks to the commission’s ambiguous legacy. Nevertheless, as of 1981,
the LMC’s broad mission was to garner support for a fledgling music industry.

Four years after Kirby’s article and the founding of the Louisiana Music
Commission, the music industry in Louisiana was deeper in its slump. Outcry
from a New Orleans newspaper had caused the local chamber of commerce to
call a joint meeting with the LMC to brainstorm ways to organize, and
revitalize, the industry and to restore New Orleans’ seat as a (national,
international) cultural capital for music. At this impromptu summit, some of
the major industry problems cited were organizational: a local lack of
direction and leadership; a lack of communication between music
communities across the city’s landscape. Another notable absence had to do
with infrastructure: no formalized music business education existed in the
city’s universities; outside financial support was needed to create such
community programs. The founder and director of the LMC, Lynn Ourso,
concluded the meeting with a familiar call: “It’s time to breathe some new life
into this industry.” It is worth noting that this campaign was centered entirely
on the viability of New Orleans as a seat for the music industry, without
mention of musical life, past or present, elsewhere in the state.205

Program Project Files 1973-2000, Mss. 4730, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley
Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. LSU Libraries Special Collections.
205 Hannusch, Jeff. “New Orleans Meet Tackles Industry Ills: Crescent City Seeking Return to
Ten years later, in 1995, a nearly identical news item appeared. This time, entrepreneur music distributor Harris Rea claimed to be making inroads. He gave a 1987 date as having been a turning point for New Orleans’ struggling music industry. That year, he explained, Wynton Marsalis had closed out at the Grammys, igniting a veritable jazz movement, and that, in conjunction with the international attraction that the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival had become, opened what Rea said was the century’s third “window of opportunity” for New Orleans music. He considered the Jazz Age (until Louis Armstrong left for Chicago) and the golden era of ‘50s New Orleans R&B (until the British Invasion) to have been the first two windows, after whose closings New Orleans had had no great musical exports. That was to say, until Rea’s 20,000-square-foot facility emerged to distribute—literally export—CDs of Louisiana music. Again, the state of the music industry in Louisiana beyond greater New Orleans failed to garner press. In April 1997, the core mission of the LMC as promoting music industry quietly gave way to the interest of music as attraction when a bill in the Louisiana House of Representatives transferred the LMC from the Department of Economic Development to the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism.206 The

206 Louisiana. Legislature. An act to amend and reenact R.S. 25... (April 8, 1997); ibid. (March 31 1997), ibid. (April 7, 1997).; While transferring from an economic department to the CRT, the bill did provide for “the creation of the office of music development and to provide for its functions and duties”. The responsibilities of the LMC relative to that office were unquestionably economic, true to its original purpose: “to advise...on all matters relative to...popular commercial music and its related industry in Louisiana...and...the promotion of the musical heritage of Louisiana.” The roles of that office specified that “development of the commercial music industry” meant, in part, to prevent local musical acts and other professionals from leaving the state to pursue commercial success—a direct answer to the dilemma as stated by Kip Kirby in the Billboard article twelve years prior. So, despite the departmental move, the LMC seemingly still served the same purpose as stated in its 1981 proposal.
following year, a line was added specifying the LMC’s objective was “to
maximize the economic impact of Louisiana music”, citing performance
indicators of job creation and an impressive ten-to-one ratio of commission
budget to economic impact. The detailing of the functions, capacities,
budgets, and prerogatives of the newly approved office of music development,
and of the LMC in its new advisory role to that office, all pointed to an
optimistic future for the music industry.207

By March 2001, a House bill called for a complete overhaul of the ailing
LMC, reducing its budget, reorganizing its leadership and reporting structure,
and officially moved it to New Orleans. The final bill also specified that the
governor would appoint each member of the LMC.208 In October of that year,
the Executive Director of the LMC was Bernie Cyrus, a musician and longtime
fixture of the jazz community in New Orleans. Mr. Cyrus was also Secretary of
the upcoming Jazz Centennial Celebration at which New Orleans’ Jazz Walk
of Fame would be inaugurated. These New-Orleans- and Jazz-history-
oriented activities seemed to be the major projects of the LMC at that time.
The next year, the House again called for reorganization of the LMC.209

By June 2005, the LMC had been removed from its seat as the tenth
agency in the Department of Economic Development—the fourth department
in the executive branch, after the three primary offices of Office of the

208 Louisiana Legislature. An act to amend and reenact...to repeal provisions relative to the
[LMC] and to provide for its re-creation, composition, and duties;... (March 27, 2001).; ibid.,
(April 26, 2001).
209 Joint Finance & Planning, Engineering and Construction Committee. Committee meeting.
Governor, the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism—to the 97th of 134 miscellaneous agencies collectively listed as the twenty-third and final department of the State. For comparison, the only other musical agency of the state presided over a museum devoted to former governor Jimmie Davis that fell fifteenth (of nineteen) within the sixteenth (of twenty-three) executive departments. Observers and former leaders of the LMC agree it most successfully aggregated and funneled “unprecedented” support to Louisiana musicians between 1992 and 2006. From 2006 (the year following the tragedies of the failed levees of Katrina), the LMC, long suffering from poor direction, confirmed its closure in fall 2009. In May 2010, the LMC was officially dissolved.\textsuperscript{210} The singular, and isolated existence of this body, the chronology of its fledgling institutional support, and its rather quiet dissolution are telling of the lack of value attributed to, and understanding of, the role of Southwest Louisiana regional music beyond the Cajun hegemony.

**Music as Labor**

Much as the LMC straddled many musical styles in design, so too did Shuler and Miller endeavor to record virtually any regional music whose musicians came by. But, as radio stations and record charts became increasingly compartmentalized over the long ‘60s, so too did audience and industry expectations home in on discrete differences between musical styles—differences that hadn’t existed prior to 1960. As Miller and Shuler continued to record the same blues music from 1951 through 1967 without

\textsuperscript{210} Louisiana. Legislature. (May 6, 2010).
much change to their studios, to their business models, or to their engineering approach (that is not to say they did not upgrade their technology or modernize in other ways), the industry out-paced their work. And, just as the LMC inevitably honed down its focus on the most promising market, in this case the music of greater New Orleans, Shuler and Miller eventually felt the direction of the winds blowing away from the blues, and toward Cajun records, overseas distribution of reissues, and most influentially, out of record-making as their primary occupations. A running theme in the musical life of this latter part of the twentieth century is a general failure to connect music-making and its management; to consider each half vital to the survival of the other. Two musical worlds seemed to exist, as diagnosed by a pair of Baton Rouge music professionals in Kirby’s article. The music-as-essence, artistic workforce existed in plenty, they believed, but the music-as-work, technological component was lacking.

“[T]he problem [is] one of naivete [sic] rather than any lack of songwriting or musical genius. The Louisiana music community has been slow to recognize the need for technological advancement. The development of local producers, engineers, publishing companies and facilities has been startlingly slow. Since much of Louisiana’s early rock’n’roll successes came with mono, two-track and three-track hits..., there wasn’t the urgent push to expand and upgrade.” 211

This greater contextualization of state support for the music industry of Louisiana after the golden era of independent record labels, and the fundamental disconnect that plagued it, helps to explain what caused Miller and Shuler’s business models (as regards the blues) to shift so forcefully to an overseas market as the 1960s waned. That overseas market, and the vast

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211 Kirby, L15.
impact it had on the lives of swamp blues players and the legacy of the swamp blues, is the subject of my next chapter.

**Conclusion**

Like all parts of history, the story of the swamp blues has been different in the past and present than it will be in the future. At various junctures in history the inconstancy of black livelihood, creativity, and autonomy has been drawn into the bogs of heritage, folklife, and Cajun-Louisiana metonymizing tropes to reframe the swamp blues in the historical narrative. In each iteration of the swamp blues—its development in Southwest Louisiana contemporaneous to Zydeco, its reshaping under the heyday of the Crawfish Circuit, and its second and continued life (and secondary reshaping) in the hands of historians abroad, this swamp blues music, like all others, was always and already an alloy of old meets new. This exploration of midcentury industrial expansion in Southwest Louisiana helps to recall the anachronisms involved in musical genre creation and recreation, and helps to develop a new, deservedly nuanced and complex understanding of the contributions of these so-called nonprofessional swamp blues actors.

Previously ascribed to the Baton Rouge area, I argue that the swamp blues proceed from Southwest Louisiana, equally and yet minimally influenced by New Orleans to the east and the big-city blues from the west—absorbed through radio, record circulation, and celebrity tours on the chitlin’ circuit. Mainly two populations—musicians making French-derived music in Texas, and the urban blues coming out of Southwest Louisiana—introduce two deployments of the musical past. Whereas the Zydeco of southeast Texas
is the progeny of nostalgic preservation (Miller 2010), the development of the swamp blues in Louisiana occurred in recording studios, and was based on outside influences that indicate a willingness to meld with modern trends and, I argue, to participate in a broader African-American community through the circulation of music.
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CHAPTER FOUR:
THE SWAMP BLUES IN BRITAIN

Within the framework of the long sixties, the life cycle of the blues in Britain could be ordered into three dovetailing phases that pillar this chapter. First, its roots were in the jazz reviverist movement that flourished from the early 1930s to the 1950s, which the blues broke out of around 1950 to establish a separate field of interest by about 1958. The second influential wave of energy came in the heyday of British writing on the blues, when American blues performers came to perform live in Britain and spawned British imitations from that 1958 date until 1964, when the “British blues” overtook the American blues in popularity. The third, closing phase began upon the runaway success of those British “blues” bands, whose popularity had seized the U.S. in the British Invasion. With little interim in between, this swept American blues music out of the commercial mainstream and American blues musicians off British stages. In this chapter I liken these three phases to a print British Blues Revival, a politically-minded, but ultimately consumer-driven, British Blues Movement, and the extinguishing British Blues Boom.

At the close of this chapter I discuss the British blues in postmortem, a final period of transformation that came thanks to reissue labels that began cropping up as the live-era swamp blues was taking its last breath. These campaigns were little-veiled attempts at a canonization of the swamp blues, and in particular what I have referred to as the “Jay Miller mythology”, which I discuss in the fourth and final part of this chapter. In this grieving period of
the swamp blues, labels like Flyright, Blue Horizon, Ace, and even Excello and Goldband began issuing “Best of” and “Complete recordings”-style retrospectives that froze the swamp blues in time. These anthologizing projects permanently framed the swamp blues as an object of white veneration while severing the music of dynamism or context as an African-American cultural expression. Instead, the swamp blues became the same tired symbolic encapsulations of authenticity, lost purity, and vestige that the blues magazines had ostensibly, originally, set out to resist.

In this chapter what I am addressing is not the “crossover” over of the swamp blues to white audiences in Britain, in as much as “crossover” references the transition of an audience base from black to white, or American to English. While the swamp blues did sustain that demographic change in listenership between the first half of the 1950s and the second half of the 1960s, the focus of this chapter is to observe that the swamp blues underwent what might be considered a reincarnation, dying in the U.S. and arising to new life in the U.K. under the careful guard of white collector-fans. Where the swamp blues of the U.S. were standard-fare regional-variant rhythm & blues, purchased by the same middle-class people who made the music, in the U.K., the swamp blues bore mystique. It was a music half-living and half-ghost; half-real and half-vapor. That ghostly vapor would become institutionalized starting in 1976, in the form of systematic reissue campaigns that would codify and congeal a long process of “museumification” of the swamp blues. In yet another instance of white gatekeeping, collectors made it their project to
administer and inflect categories upon the unknown swamp blues; to classify, define, and tame this otherwise feral subset of black-made music.\(^{212}\)

**Methodology and the Preeminence of Great Britain**

Although many European countries had a part in the 1960s blues revival, including England, the Netherlands, Sweden, Scandinavia, Belgium, France, and Poland, the greatest concentration of blues revival interest and activity was in England. While there is furthermore a long history of interest in African-American musical forms in the Netherlands, especially, my interest and discussion in this chapter is on the role played by the community(ies) of blues researchers in southern England who visited Southwest Louisiana in the 1960s and following, and the events that transpired in blues music from that area as a result of their work.\(^{213}\) Yet more narrowly, my focus is on the activities that affected blues musicians who recorded with Eddie Shuler and

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\(^{212}\) White ownership of popular black expressive forms in the name of respect and appreciation has a long history stretching back at least as far as American emancipation. In her 1997 field-defining *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*, Regina Bendix wrote that in the postbellum U.S., “American Romantic racialists moved from professing an affinity to black music expression to attempts at capturing this music in Western notation and thus making it a commodity for white consumption.” One easily sees the analogies between the disciplining of black music into notation and the disciplining of the postwar blues into discographies, encyclopedias, and the like. Importantly to Bendix, appropriation began through collection. Bendix 91-3.

\(^{213}\) A 1998 *Billboard* article avowed the relative ferocity of the British blues craze with respect to fervor elsewhere in Europe: “Brit Blues: U.K. Fans Have Been Among The Genre’s Most Loyal Ever Since Its ’50s Heyday.” In the article, the author continues “Specialist labels all report ...British blues fans are among the most loyal and committed anywhere in the world...” Williamson, Nigel. “Brit Blues: U.K. Fans Have Been Among The Genre’s Most Loyal Ever Since Its ’50s Heyday.” *Billboard* (2 May 1998): 44.. While the Netherlands are probably the second most blues-crazed nation, the Dutch *Blues-Link* magazine states that in the era I am discussing here, in which most activity occurred prior to the British Invasion, the blues had not fully arrived in the Netherlands. One retrospective assessment from 1973 reads “Prior to 1965 there was very little to read about the blues in Dutch. There was Paul Breman’s book “The Blues” in 1962...”. In written form, there was Jazz Wereld, and next *Kink* (1966) and *Hit Week* (1966) that had R&B columns but they lasted less than a year. Even after the huge success of the AFBF 1973, Frank Sidebottom recognized that “radio and television in Holland have largely ignored the blues. “The Dutch Blues Scene.” *Blues-Link* (Aug 1973): 20-24.; Sidebottom, Frank. “American Blues Legends ’73.” Reviews. *Blues-Link*. (Aug 1973).
J.D. Miller in Southwest Louisiana. Led mostly by the field efforts of Brits Mike Leadbitter and John Broven from 1962 to 1974, the seeking out, interviewing, record re-releasing, and tour-arranging efforts they made held a profound effect on blues musicians’ lives and livelihoods. Later work from the 1990s filled in many gaps in the documented personal histories of the musicians and their contemporary live music scene, however, this work did little to affect the “world” of blues music, outside of the written publications that dispensed the histories.

I. The British Blues Revival: Record Collecting & Blues Writing in Britain

“...the objects that occupy our daily lives are in fact the objects of a passion...this everyday passion often outstrips all the others, and sometimes reigns supreme in the absence of any rival. ...the objects in our lives...represent something much more, something profoundly related to subjectivity...a thing whose meaning is governed by myself alone.”214

Jean Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting”

In this first section I am establishing that interest in the blues was endorsed and legitimized in Britain first through highbrow jazz writers who set the precedent to conceive of black music as static, objectified cultural relics for scrutiny and study. Baudrillard’s comment above on the fetish objects of our everyday lives exemplifies the extraction of dynamism and humanity that occurred in this transferral of the blues to the written word, first, by reducing blues music to a follow-up collector craze among prewar Dixieland fans, and second, among those who took the mantle of returning context and empathy in blues appreciation. In the obsessive restoration of details of personnel and

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other technicalities by those in the *Blues Unlimited* camp and following, instead of uplifting the music and musicians, further constricted the music to the page in the form of discographical listings, charts, inventories—and the statistical groupies who followed. Consequently I am commenting on the institutionalization of the blues in Britain as being the written manifestation of the collectorly impulse, entering the British sonicsphere always and already objectified, and dehumanized.

High status has long been attributed to jazz record collectors and discographers in Britain. Stretching back to the 1930s, curators of jazz records were granted “laudatory” status among serious critics and younger fans alike, as the de facto experts and Croesian lords of all the country’s jazz holdings. Thus a generation of jazz fans in Britain, firstly having access to jazz music only through Paramount, Okeh, and Victor records, and secondly having little supply of record imports, grew to uphold collectors as the intercessory linchpins in the consumption and heralded “understanding” of jazz music. This established a trickle-down economy of record collecting, wherein collector cachet encouraged the development of pre-arranged, quasi-formal, group listening events that would come to be called “record recitals”. That these recitals were scheduled events pointed to their special nature; infrequent opportunities to hear the music compelled stoic listening at these events, and this careful attention to the record led to delicate handling of records and record libraries, resulting finally in the fetishization of the collector object: the record. In the extreme, this collector’s impulse eventually evoked an atmosphere of quantitative science more than art, far removed
from the experience or practice of leisure. The early paucity of jazz records in Britain, in other words, begat a British tradition of worshipful collection, of materialized musical goods, that had been disembodied from their African-American authors. This pattern, of accruing un-blackened black cultural objects, expressions, and experiences, was now a thoroughly British pastime. This seed would grow into the next, boomer generation’s adoption and appropriation of the blues.

The reconfiguration of the swamp blues from an ageing Southern folk music into rarefied American Folk product, relied, in part, on the disembodiment of the music in its reception in the U.K. This British presentation of rhythm & blues existed outside what Nelson George’s *The Death of Rhythm & Blues* termed the “r&b world”, and its consumption, absorption, and duplication in the U.K. often occurred without an awareness of the “r&b world” that these blues records reflected.215

**Jazz Records in Britain, 1935-1950**

For British collectors, critics, and discographers—often one and the same—of the 1930s and 1940s, the jazz records they fetishized were independent cultural objects, extracted, it is important to note, from their crucial historical positions rooted in African-American culture. From these collectors’ viewpoint, by jazz’s tenth birthday the biotic relationship between the genre and African-American culture, music, and musicians had vanished in favor of a narrative crediting white authors with the development of jazz music in Britain. Because of this disembodiment of jazz music from its

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215 George xii-xiii.
makers, many important British critics including Edgar Jackson, Brian Rust, and Ralph Venables developed and staunchly insisted upon a “white origin” theory of jazz.

The existence of jazz fandom depended upon both an availability of phonograph records and their survival in good condition. This social organization around capital caused what critic Ernest Borneman called a “peculiar shift of values” in European jazz fans and audiences, whereby the stature of music was surpassed by the importance of the record. Thus the relative importance of musicians and collector-discographers were reversed, and as far as British audiences were concerned, the collector outshone the music and musician in fame and fandom. The result was hysteria over the golden cow, where the record became a fetish object to consumers and the music as a subject of fondness or appreciation faded into the background of the hooplah. In the prewar industry of jazz reception, therefore, over the course of the 15 years leading up to the war, a generation of British and European fans detached the music from its makers and the context of its creation. As I explore in the next part of this chapter, this pattern repeats itself amidst blues reception a generation later.

Around 1945 a new trend developed among young, British jazz fans, in which they began to form their own jazz bands modeled on the African-American originators of jazz, as opposed to imitating the Glenn Miller-styled “sweet swing” that had dominated British dance floors and music halls in the previous decade. The new strain of jazz appreciation, coined “traditionalists”, began with George Webb’s group the Dixielanders. The group was
immediately heralded for their purist ideals and politicized as anticapitalist, blue collar, principled, folk art revivalists. The Dixielanders incited a new wave of interest—audiences widened beyond the jazz literati this time but no less serious—that led to many reissues of original New Orleans jazz records.\(^{216}\) By the 1950s, the “traditional jazz” that had become so popular among lower middle class British youth in the last decade was now the preferred music of now grown-up, middle class left-wing intellectuals. For the jazz fans of the 1930s, to be a fan of jazz had been tantamount to being a student of jazz. For fans of the following decade, jazz was a hobby in pursuit of fun.

Exposure to original 78 rpm recordings of black jazz and musicians ushered in a wave of interest in any African-American roots music, including the blues. Whereas blues records had been carried overseas to Britain as far back as the 1930s, little critical attention was given them until after the war.

Postwar advocates of the blues included the critics Albert McCarthy, Ernest Borneman, and Paul Oliver, whose record recitals and lecture tours in 1947...

\(^{216}\) In the U.S., this jazz record craze was called “hot collecting” and its beginning has been pinpointed to Yale University in the early 1930s. It took off on the East Coast for different reasons than in Britain, both in line with college student mentality: first, it was a relatively cheap hobby, and second, as an investment in the future day when jazz fell from the zeitgeist. See Schwartz 15.; Borneman (1947), 145-6.; For more on the identity-defining role of the “fetish object” in subcultures, see Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge, 1979.; For more on the institution of jazz record collecting and British incognizance of the genre’s African American history, see Roberta Schwartz. *How Britain Got the Blues*. Ashgate (2007): 15-16; Jed Rasula, “The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History,” in Krin Gabbard (ed.), *Jazz Among the Discourses* (Durham, 1995): 135; and Eric Ballard’s contemporary opine “Editorial.” *Hot News and Rhythm Review* 1.6 (September 1935): 20.; An example of Dixielander’s left wing fans was the Young Communist League (as the ‘Challenge Jazz Club’). One of the most salient extramusical characterizations of the Dixielanders was as “the clear shining light of purity and conviction...Quixotes from Subtopia tilting their lances against the evils of commercialism.” (from Godbolt, *Jazz in Britain*, 202-3.). However, other scholars have argued the political element in revivalist jazz of 1940s Britain has been overstated. See Schwartz (2007).; For more on the 1940s proletarian-minded reemergence of New Orleans Dixieland jazz, see Albert McCarthy’s essay “The Re-Emergence of Traditional Jazz” in *Jazz: New Perspectives on the History of Jazz by Twelve of the World’s Foremost Jazz Critics and Scholars*. Ed. Nat Hentoff and Albert J. McCarthy. NY: Grove, 1961: 305-324.
and 1948 gave the music legs in the wider public. Small pamphlets on jazz-related subjects published during the war had helped to keep discussion of the blues alive amid the lean paper rationing years. The first such autonomous publication on the blues was printed on behalf of the Jazz Appreciation Society, Iain Lang’s *The Background of the Blues* (ca. 1942). A small, semi-encyclopedic booklet, it discussed lyrical themes and regional diction, and gave a sketch of general musical elements characteristic to the blues style. Max Jones and Albert McCarthy’s journal *Jazz Music* (1942) put out two similar booklets, *Piano Jazz* and *A Tribute to Huddie Ledbetter*, and *Jazz Tempo*’s editor John Rowe started up *Record Information*.

After wartime restrictions on paper continued to lift, serious criticism turned its attention to the blues around the pivot-point date of 1950. A monthly blues column titled “Preachin’ the Blues” appeared in the *Jazz Journal* and for years was the only locus for such discussion. As of 1949 its author Derrick Stewart-Baxter still marveled that collector interest in the blues was not higher. *Melody Maker* hosted “Collector’s Corner”, a column that promoted a notion of the blues as the essence and foundation of jazz, and further, not a crude form at all, but “the most difficult branch of jazz”. Between 1946 and 1951 this column had grown from occupying four inches to eight (in 1949), and finally almost a full page of the weekly publication. The first publication that declared the blues a sovereign music genre, related to but separate from jazz, was Rex Harris’s 1952 revivalist manifesto *Jazz*. In 1955 McCarthy founded *Jazz Monthly*, in which blues content featured regularly.
While I have provided a skimming of the events that pose British reception of jazz as a prototype to blues reception, several works exist that fully delve into the subject. Komara’s *Encyclopedia of the Blues* (2006) gives a rounded and concise account of the rise of print interest in the blues, including the birth order of first, blues columns inside of jazz magazines, and later, blues magazines standing on their own. He supports the idea that 1950 marked a turning point for blues criticism, gathering support from the proliferation of blues items in music trade papers, jazz magazines, newspapers, and importantly, discographies and bibliographies, that picked up after the war. At the end of this history, he provides a listing of blues periodicals—divided into four categories by intensity of influence and order of subscribers, into blues periodicals, newsletters and fanzines, and “additional” serial publications—that includes dates and locations of founding. This list numbers over 330 titles.

To conclude, by this 1950 date, a tradition of decidedly non-musical jazz fandom has been established in Britain. Interest in jazz music began in the early 1930s as a novelty interest with whiffs of armchair anthropology; attention shifted to the jazz record, which gave steady rise to a black market with product affordable only to the wealthy or seriously devoted.  

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217 In 1934, Spike Hughes, writing under the pseudonym “Mike”, reviewed a Bessie Smith recording for *Melody Maker*: “known to a few of us in this country from expeditions we sometimes make to [Levy’s, a major record importer, in] Whitechapel to buy Okeh race records...the Queen of the Blues if ever there was one.”; Both Lang’s *The Background of the Blues* and Jones and McCarthy’s *Tribute to Huddie Ledbetter* were published for the Jazz Appreciation Society.; To counter arguments claiming the blues to be primitive and redundant, Stewart-Baxter argued that “blues shouting goes straight to the basic root of jazz”, and prescribed a curriculum of Bessie Smith, Leroy Carr, Tommy McClennon, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Big Bill Broonzy, Leadbelly, and Josh White in order to convert naysayers. See Derrick Stewart-Baxter. “Talkin’ from the Heart.” *Jazz Journal* 2.1 (January 1949): 3.; Max
of the cultural entity of jazz culminated in the preponderance of the written word on jazz, as evidenced by the plentitude of magazines, journals, pamphlets, club newsletters, and monographs in circulation on the subject. The form of jazz that entered the British pop culture mainstream in the early 1950s, therefore, was always already contained by a logocentric culture, deeply text-biased, in opposition to the sonic and political forms of appreciation that would attract blues devotees in the decade that followed.

**Blues Records in Britain, 1950-1964**

Paul Oliver says American blues music already carried ethnic, historical, and authentic connotations in Britain before the turn of 1950, despite having received minimal attention from the average jazz fan before 1947. This contextualized understanding of the blues stood in opposition to the meritocratic value system in the jazz world, where value judgments were based on aspects of musicianship like technique and composerly innovation. Blues columns soon became reliable weekly fare in jazz journals, and the communal knowledge of the blues fan-base grew, but recordings still had very limited availability. Though fans knew facts, figures, “important” artists, and bios, they effectively didn’t hear the music until blues records became commercially available in Britain. So, specialist dealers of the early 1950s

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Jones, “I am not a Roberts fan.” *Melody Maker*. 16 July 1949: 5; “Collectors’ Corner,” *Melody Maker*. 13 January 1951: 7; Harris’s declaration demarcated that blues singers “were influenced by jazz, but they did not influence the course of jazz. Blues singing ran (and runs) a parallel course.” Harris, *Jazz* (1952) introduction: 42.; For this brief history of the blues in print, and listing of blues periodical titles, see Komara’s section on “Periodicals”, 752-761.; Ronald Radano said the self-appointed preservation mission of collectors allowed white conservators to treasure hunt without kneeling in the dirty: “whites could extract these anonymous sounds of human transcendence from their real-life circumstances, thereby erasing blackness in the name of preservation.” (Radano 1996: 518-30.) Roberta Schwartz recounts the history of import tariffs after the war that caused American record collecting to be cost-prohibitive in *How Britain Got the Blues* (2007), 27-29.
made major label and independent labels available to (super-) fans and collectors within reach of flagship shops, first in London with Dobell’s, a London institution, and later in the farther provinces of Liverpool with Hessey’s, Manchester with the Messrs. Hime & Addison dealership and Collet’s. In Leicester was Moore & Stanworth’s and several sprang up in Birmingham; Bristol opened the soon-to-be legendary Stan’s Record Store, and finally the invite-only Corvinus Records was also in Bristol, where discussing and listening to records were available as activities but their purchase was not.

Before 1950, high-minded writing on the blues tended to be teleological by way of British jazz writing, diverse, and at times contradictory. Jazz-turned-blues writers ultimately linked its origin, existence, or fate to an already established version of jazz historicity. But as the decade advanced, nuanced subdivisions entered the vocabularies of British devotees. It is worth noting, again, that these rubrics stemmed from Brits rather than U.S. writers. Since British fans had limited access to live blues performances, they culled a collective pool of knowledge almost exclusively from recorded sound. Thus among British blues fans we see a shift within the discographical impulse from a focus on the material of organization (the collecting legacy of prewar jazz aficionados) to a sonic organization of the blues repertoire. Descriptors like “country” and “folk,” “city” and “urban,” “Southern” and “early” were descriptive pairs used broadly and interchangeably at first, as the lingua franca slowly evolved.
The tide changed when T-Bone Walker and Muddy Waters came to Britain in 1958. Along with co-performers B. B. King, Ruth Brown, Lowell Fulson, John Lee Hooker, and Wynonie Harris, they were quickly embraced critically for having miraculously retained that “sincerity”, “unspoiled”, “brave”, and “gaily” defiant old style blues. The predominant mode of this critical praise did not address however the artists’ musicality or other individual traits, such as Muddy Waters’ melodic guitar playing and eschewal of playing on the beat, John Lee Hooker’s unrhymed couplets, or the multi-instrumentalism of the booming T-Bone Walker. Furthermore, these artists were among the best-known names in the U.S.; a considerable subset of the blues-listening population were primarily interested in the under-heard and under-promoted blues.

Among the early champions of obscure American rhythm & blues were John Broven and Mike Leadbitter. As early as 1957, along with their grammar schoolmate Simon Napier, they had begun together “uncovering” imported r&b and blues records, using their limited teenage resources to buy about two albums a month, as Broven recalls. Leadbitter began compiling discographies soon after, during a time when even the music papers were refusing to treat rock’n’roll, certain its popularity would pass. In *BU 111*, John Broven recalled of their early days trying to investigate the blues, “The English musical press

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218 Though these were not the first blues musicians to come overseas,—Big Bill Broonzy’s 1951 European tour marked a turning point for guitar blues, for instance, and Leadbelly, pianist Sammy Price, and guitarist Josh Bukka White had recorded in the 1940s and Lonnie Johnson and Alberta Hunter had been over in the 1930s—the 1958 visit of Muddy Waters (“They thought I was Big Bill Broonzy” he later said) was a watershed cultural moment that received national and international attention. In addition to the scandalizing amplified guitar, the scale of the tour paved the way for future mega-blues shows, and a year-round market for American blues musicians in performance.
in those days was turgid backwater of useless information and so Mike found he had to buy American rock ‘n’ roll mags, listen to AFN, and pick up obscure English record releases...” By the end of their teenage years, Leadbitter had dropped from school to devote all his time to rock’n’roll, rhythm & blues, and blues research; Broven went into banking in 1960, where he maintained his fascination with American r&b and his roles at *Blues Unlimited*, and later at *Juke Blues*, as a “hobby” for the next thirty-one years. Both were publishing in music papers by 1962 when they formed the Blues Appreciation Society. In April 1963, their mimeographed newsletter *Blues Unlimited* began appearing in specialist jazz shops. At the time of their organization, Broven and Leadbitter saw blues research as “very widespread and disorganized”, the most crucial research needs being in musicology, historical research, and discography.

It is important to specify that although in this digested history I write that the availability of blues records in Britain increased greatly over the course of the 1950s, by no means was a floodgate opened. Many records were still impossible to come by: postwar r&b records, being the product of a cottage industry instead of pressed by the majors who made most 78s before the war, in that sense are much rarer in fact than their prewar counterparts. A light had been turned on in the world of blues record collecting, such that collectors now had a preview of but a portion of the vast undiscovered blues out there. But most of the musical repertoire was yet to be illuminated; blues collectors were still very much operating in the dark, combing blindly through the sea of American indie labels and scraping together the flotsam and jetsam
that came their way into blues discographies from scratch. After all, even Paul
Oliver has said he had been collecting blues records for ten years before he
ever heard the music of Robert Johnson or Charley Patton. But at the root of
it all is fundamentally the record, and the industry built around them to pass
black blues music through a wealth of white hands.\textsuperscript{219}

\textbf{Figure 42.} The cover pages of \textit{Blues Unlimited}'s first three issues. Number One
opens with a manifesto in miniature from editor Simon Napier that reads "This
is the first of what we hope will be many issues of our magazine....as one seemed
badly needed in this now increasingly popular field. ...We need good feature
articles, discographies, criticisms and reviews. News of what's happening
blueswise your way. Anything topical constructive and interesting. Don't be lazy.
Write it. Let us know what you like, and, more important, what you don't. Your
opinions matter. If you don't write, we don't know. However we do hope you'll
find something of interest here, and will continue to do so." \textit{BU} 1, April 1963.

\textbf{London-American and Stateside pave the way for Indie Blues in GB}

John Broven and Mike Leadbitter were "war babies" benefiting from
the postwar Labour Party’s emphasis on education; they were in the same
class at grammar school from 1953-1960. In 1957, John Broven recalled

\textsuperscript{219} Paul Oliver, \textit{Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues}. London: Cassell, 1960: 11.;
75); “Blues Appreciation Society.” \textit{BU} 3 (July 1963): 3.; Oliver, Paul interview in Cushing:
16.; Oliver (1976) 231; Schwartz 23.; Dobell’s Record Shop was owned by Doug Dobell. In
Bristol, Stan’s was owned by Stan Strickland. Schwartz 32-3.; Oliver (1991) 57.; Pearson,
seeing the American film Don’t Knock the Rock, the 1956 follow-up to Rock Around the Clock, featuring sung acts from Alan Freed, Bill Haley and the Comets, and Little Richard. The thirteen-year old Broven recalled having a Conversion of Saul moment upon seeing Little Richard perform “Long Tall Sally”. “When the movie had ended there literally was about five minutes to go before the local record store closed its doors and I can remember running from one end of town to the other”, he recalled, illustrating the not just the immediacy of Little Richard’s impact but also the intensity of that seed. Without a hint of exaggeration, the soft-spoken Englishman condensed that afternoon’s events with a palpable deliberateness in language: “Little Richard”, he said, “had an effect on me almost of volcanic proportions”.

Big labels developed arms for American blues releases, licensed on a label-by-label basis. Three of the mainstream retail channels for blues records were Decca’s London-American, Pye’s Pye International, and EMI’s Stateside. London-American originally began in 1947 by issuing revolutionary stereophonic classical recordings but soon went indie, focusing on American music. They licensed mostly rhythm & blues from the Imperial, Chess, Dot, Atlantic, Specialty, and Motown labels in addition to others. Broven recounted that it was London-American especially that first introduced the grammar schoolboys Broven, Leadbitter, and Napier to rhythm & blues in the 1950s. Broven situated London-American as a 1950s prototype to the punk revolution, in that obscure, American indie record labels licensed songs on a one-by-one basis to London-American, “just rejected totally by the
establishment.” And then teenagers swooped in to support the pseudo-underground industry by buying from jukebox operators and coffee houses.

Pye International was founded in 1958 to distribute American music from Chess, Checker, King, and others. Its heyday was 1961-1964. Stateside was founded in 1962 by EMI and closed in 1973, also to release licensed American blues music, originating to be competition for Decca’s London-American and Pye’s Pye International audiences. Stateside issued anthologies from the Excello vaults that opened up the audience for the swamp blues, and where the Excello swamp blues would have its largest and most “unpredictable” impact. Important, and now collectors item, albums from this period are the Excello compilations Authentic R&B (Stateside 10068 (UK 1963)) and Real R&B (Stateside 10112 (UK 1964)), comprised of Slim Harpo, Lightnin’ Slim, Silas Hogan, Lazy Lester, Jimmy Anderson, Lonesome Sundown, Whispering Smith, and Leroy Washington material. The latter album also included one track from non-swamp bluesmen Leon Austin and one from Earl Gaines. Both of those LPs were released on CD by Ace (UK) in 1994 and 1995, respectively. Stateside was revived in the 1980s as a reissue arm for American music.

Young jazz-turned-blues fans had pushed blues songs carried by these labels to the top of the charts by 1954, the first being Earl Bostic’s jump blues “Flamingo”. Despite the association of blues music with notions of black authenticity well before 1954, purists did not necessarily meet the appearance of rhythm & blues with wide acclaim. Interestingly, critic Edgar Jackson accused Bostic of singing with “phoney [sic] fervor”, and Albert McCarthy said
rhythm & blues across the board were “the music of gimmick and cheap excitement” aptly suited to the “basic emptiness” of 1950s American pop culture. Other critics lambasted the style on the basis of its “emotional sterility”, “superficial” material, and “synthetic excitement.” These kinds of visceral reactions against the blues were caused in part by the music’s orientation toward popular culture, a terrain jazz sophisticates understood to be perpetually comorbid with inauthenticity. In Great Britain as late as 1955, rhythm & blues music lacked the appealing folk qualities of the early, pure, rural blues. This critical tide would soon change.

It is true that the majority of blues fans were a younger generation’s outgrowth of the jazz fandom that had been increasing in Europe since the New Orleans Dixieland revival of the late 1930s. This justification of blues study through established jazz institutions would persist for some time, including carrying over into blues discography and other publication, which I will discuss in a moment. A full-fledged era of blues fandom wouldn’t come into its own until African-American artists began touring in Europe after 1955. This blues fandom, however, was not just, or necessarily, comprised of younger fans, but also of those of the older generation interested in the misleading if widespread belief that the blues was the wellspring of jazz—until that bubble burst and the blues exploded onto the page between 1952-1956. Interests as obscure as the subject of black music on white radio in Louisiana, for instance, have been an object of note in Britain since at least 1955, as
evidenced in the New Years Eve edition of *Melody Maker* “...Louisiana Radio Stations Beam 9 ½ Hours of Negro Music Every Day.”

**Blues Writing in Britain: Big Names in “Productive Encyclopedism”**

The taxonomic impulse among early collectors and writers, where regional chronologies grouped stylistic affinities, schools of thought, and musical lineages, led to homogenization and the oversimplification of history. However, the accumulation of new interviews, correspondence, and a growing body of fieldwork gradually fleshed out contextualized histories that offered rounded, and deeper understandings of the music and the people who made it. The early fieldtrips were made in 1957 by Belgian Yannick Bruyhoghe to Chicago, resulting in several works on *Big Bill Broonzy*. In 1959 Jacques Demètre and Marcel Chauvard went to New York, Detroit, and Chicago; in 1960 Paul Oliver went to several states; Mike Rowe and Frank Scott to Chicago in 1966. In 1965 Bruce Bastin made the first Gulf Coast-focused trip, visiting Houston. In 1967, Mike Leadbitter went to Texas and Louisiana for three months, producing the misleadingly titled piece “I Know Houston Can’t Be Heaven” when he came back, seeing as the treasure trove of that trip was his booty from Lake Charles. Bruce Bastin and Pete Lowry were also on that trip, which seeded the *LJMS* Flyright series Bastin would start issuing ten years later. Leadbitter returned again in 1969, by which time Goldband was already “on a dusty back street in Lake Charles” and its facilities “small and

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antiquated.” In 1970, Leadbitter, Broven, and Robin Gosden went to New Orleans, traveled west through Cajun country and into SWLA to see J.D. Miller and Eddie Shuler. They stayed with a New Orleans musician who connected them to the greats of New Orleans rhythm & blues, all living in relative obscurity in the same neighborhoods they had for half a century, and this research formed the basis of Broven’s 1974 book Walking to New Orleans. The content from SWLA became South to Louisiana another ten years after that, in 1983. Shortly after Broven’s first book, whose publication he called “a joint venture” with Leadbitter and Slaven was released, Leadbitter died of meningitis. After his death, Broven visited Los Angeles to see Louisiana natives Harold Battiste, Earl Palmer, and Roy Brown, and after 1976 Mike Rowe and Bill Greensmith went to St. Louis. I will discuss Bastin’s later trips to J.D. Miller’s studios later in this chapter.

With these field trips under the collective belt and books from them churning out consistently, Peter Narvaez says modern blues criticism began in earnest in 1959, and lasted until 1970. That the golden era of blues criticism ended in 1970 was confirmed by Simon Napier, who affirmed somewhat cynically in 1971, “live blues, however, and “new” blues sessions...[are in] steady and general decline...a revitalised blues scene is unlikely.” Notably, when Narvaez defines the field of blues studies he, like many others, does so by British scholarship. He cites seminal works from Paul Oliver (Blues Fell This Morning, 1960), Richard Wright (introduction to the above), and the less scholarly, more popular-oriented Americans Samuel Charters (The Country Blues, 1959) and LeRoi Jones (Blues People, 1963), who got a nod for the
political potential his work both represented and opened to a generation.

Charters’ work in particular, which I discuss below, exemplifies the sort of text bias that writers about twenty years younger, such as Leadbitter, Broven et al, thought they would be combating.

Works like Sam Charters’ *Country Blues*, which became a cornerstone of blues research and a method book for would-be field-recorders, impressed the importance of blues research fieldwork as a political and cultural endeavor, but for him that endeavor’s ultimate distillation was textual rather than musical. He collaborated with his wife, a professor of English and American literature, on many fieldwork based projects, and that background may have contributed to Charters’ priority of text in his blues writing. As Charters’ focus expanded from solo, country blues musicians of the old generation like Robert Johnson and Blind Willie Johnson, to contemporary blues styles whose commercialization was pejorative for him, his poetic bend became even more clear: “I really got bored with all those dang guitar solos...what I really wanted to hear great text.”

So for him, writing about the country blues was a political expression for *himself*; he even said that at the root of his motivation to write a book about blues music “was a desire to play a role in public affairs.”[^221] His pursuit in writing *The Country Blues* was to contribute toward political change while

[^221]: Broven, John and Bob Groom. “Blues Unlimited 50th anniversary.” *Blues & Rhythm* 16 (2003): 278.; Komara 440.; Ismail 258.; In this interview with Matthew Ismail, Charters continues describing the extent of his political motivations. He continued, “what I had hoped would be a public role, I hoped with the United Nations—I studied, as I say, three years at the University of International Relations—for me, the writing about black music was my way of fighting racism. That’s why my work is not academic, that is why it is absolutely nothing but popularization...” (Charters quoted in Ismail 186.)
documenting an important part of popular literary history. Having less interest in contemporary black musical life, Charters’ work could afford romantic leeway in his dynamic portrayals of musical actors. This deference of the musical in favor of the philosophical would later inspire the first blues revisionist histories of the early sixties that sought to contextualize blues music as a dynamic genre that could change with current trends in popular music and yet remain a vitally important cultural form.

Years later conceded to having glamorized and romanticized the act of performing fieldwork as a means to invite others to document black musical culture. Soon followed critiques of the tenor of these foundational blues histories and scholarship by Charters, Oliver, and Wright. That revisionist histories were cropping up as soon as the folkloristic texts appeared points to the continually, and quickly evolving nature of the growing field of research. Blues scholarship gained traction in the early sixties. New works problematized false binaries like country/city, and folk/urban; a new wave of writing tried to remove the blues from the past and break the sentimental framing devices that many blues writers leaned on. It was a benchmark in blues research to establish the genre as an art form of profound experience, rooted in African-American folk tradition, but geared toward creative innovation and reflecting the modern African-American experience. Although the silent-generation attempts of Leadbitter et al sought to revivify the ways the blues existed in writing, history, and conversation, as I will explore later,
in many ways they ended up repeated the “lepidoptery” of their jazz-loving forefathers. But more on that later.\(^{222}\)

The young pioneer writers and researchers of the blues revival grew up into regional specializations: John Broven was fully installed as a New Orleanian expert after the publication of his 1974 *Rhythm and Blues in New Orleans*; Bruce Bastin’s fieldtrips to the Gulf Coast yielded Flyright’s *LJMS* series of SWLA music in addition to his better-known work in the Carolinas. Beside and from niche experts like these emerged generalists who published the blues’ first monographs like Sam Charters (1959, 1967, 1975), Paul Oliver (1960, 1967, 1969), and American Pete Welding. Charters, Oliver, and Welding and other emergent experts would be recruited by magazines—these last two by *Blues Unlimited*—and record labels focused on blues product. From 1963 on, Sam Charters oversaw and wrote for the Bluesville and Folklore arms of Prestige Records (US). In 1970 he moved to Sonet (SWE/DK/UK). In the 1960s alone, Paul Oliver wrote for Fontana and Philips in the Netherlands, London, Nixa, and 77 Records in the U.K., and Arhoolie

and Heritage in the U.S., all before 1964, and Storyville (DK), Blues Classics (Arhoolie (US)), and Blue Horizon (UK) after 1964. Welding ran the blues column in the American jazz magazine *Down Beat* through the 1960s. For more on these and other blues labels, and the involvement of research pioneers in them, see this dissertation’s Appendix B, a glossary and selected history of labels involved in the swamp blues, at the end of the dissertation.

Other blues pioneers who wrote across many genres and regions also held court from the *Blues Unlimited* offices: Neil Slaven, Simon Napier, Bill Greensmith, Bez Turner, Cilla Huggins. John Broven said that many of the important blues discographers began writing for *Blues Unlimited* because of the singular platform it provided for the era. This group includes Bruce Bastin, Mike Rowe, John Godrich (Godrich and Dixon, 4th Ed. 1997), Pete Lowry, and Neil Paterson, not to mention Napier (1968), Slaven (1966), and Leadbitter (1968, posth. 1987, with Slaven). The perambulations of the *Blues Unlimited* staff across blues publications has been documented and historicized elsewhere, in Bill Greensmith’s introduction to the recent publication *Blues Unlimited: Essential Interviews from the Original Blues Magazine* (2015), which does a great deal in advancing the due legacy of *BU* in the history of blues fandom.

Eventually came a crop of encyclopedists specializing in the blues, the earliest of whom published these first tomes in the late 1970s, like Jean-Claude Arnaudon (1977), Sheldon Harris (1979), Gerard Herzhaft (1979). Bibliographies of the blues did not take off in earnest until well into the 1970s, as evidenced by the self-awareness of Leibl Rosenberg’s tentatively-titled
“Towards a Blues Bibliography” that appeared in *Blues Unlimited* in May 1973.\(^{223}\) Perhaps the earliest gathering of research works on the blues in one collection was 1928’s *A Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and America*, a 698-page compilation by Monroe Work. While other important or substantial bibliographies included the blues in 1942 (Lomax et al), 1951 (Haywood), 1953 (Library of Congress), c.1953 (George), 1954 (Merriam and Benford), 1955 (Hoffman), and 1959 (Reisner), they were written from the fields of regional American folklore, North American folklore, American folksong, “Negro Folk…and Art Music”, jazz, jazz, and jazz, respectively.

Before I discuss blues bibliography further, this new blues encyclopedism begs comparison to the jazz intelligentsia, and it is key to realize the two collecting systems orbited around fundamentally different objects. Where jazz collectors indeed listened to, enjoyed, and focused on the music they collected, the authors of the jazz records were permanently, symbolically detached from the music. Pre-war records were available in more plenty than post-war records would be, since they had been recorded by the majors and as such, always a part of the easily accessed commercial mainstream. Because there was no shortage of accessibility of the recorded music, there was little market for importing live jazz performed by unknowns.

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retired, forgotten, or perhaps deceased musicians. These jazz records, then, would never be connected to living breathing humans, nor was there any particular need to do so, for two reasons. First, Dixieland ensembles had no lead musician, so there was no single name or face to be the jazz audience’s focus of yearning. Secondly, these recordings were relatively easy to find, and their endorsement by the majors added little cult appeal. Postwar blues records, however, coming mostly from American indies, would have a much more sinuous path to British ears.

The liberal leanings of war babies wanted to connect the music of the record with its disenfranchised original performers, including an interest in bringing blues musicians overseas to perform live. In contrast to jazz fandom, where Dixieland ensembles had no single face to attach symbolically to the music, the blues format favored the solo musician, who then could be venerated by his overseas audience. Second, the relative scarcity of postwar blues records incurred wonder about these musicians. Thus, blues encyclopedism differed from the previous generation’s collection of jazz in that the blues fandom saw themselves as performing a “productive encyclopedism” in contrast to the straight encyclopedism of jazz collectors.

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224 George Melly pointed to this ensemble-individual binary as a distinguishing feature of the a-historic nature of the jazz revival in Britain. Secondly, he pointed to the convenient organization of revivalist jazz into formal categories, like refrains, solos, and bridges, as directly opposing the heterogenic sound ideal of African-American jazz. He specified that “What the revivalists thought of as ‘New Orleans Jazz’ was the music of Armstrong, Morton and Oliver—New Orleans musicians but based on, and recorded in, Chicago during the Prohibition era.... The basic difference between the two sounds is that revivalist jazz includes arranged passages, solos, and considerable emphasis on the individual musician, whereas traditional jazz is all ensemble.” Melly 1965, 160-161.

225 “Productive encyclopedism” is a term introduced in an interview between Donald Brenneis and Steve Feld about the anthropology of sound, including Feld’s thoughts about performing ethnography from tape recordings, as a term intended to corral the importance of matching...
That is to say, appreciation of the blues entailed not just empirical documentation, but they were fundamentally a deep study of power relationships, the importance of paralanguage in blues narration as political statement, declarations of individualism, and other crossroads in Saussurian semiology where linguistic symbolism is paired with social psychology. If folkloric mystery dehumanized swamp blues musicians, then the advanced degree of detail in projects like those coming from Mike Leadbitter’s ilk was an attempt to rehumanize the blues.

Despite the wealth of information and research performed by hobbyist pioneers like these, partly because of the vernacular nature of the subject, and partly because the researchers held other day jobs—John Broven in banking; Mike Leadbitter in editing; Simon Napier in antique dealing— their work was not respected as academic contributions for a long time. While the production of encyclopedias on any subject might indicate a well-established field, and as such it would seem that blues research was a thriving institution by 1970, the growth of blues research as a respected domain of scholarship was surprisingly slow. If an increase of encyclopedic works on the blues indicates a quantity of legitimized content, then bibliographies mark the legitimization of works in quality and form. In the next section I will continue to discuss the development of a field of Blues Bibliography, and how its slow momentum is indicative of an equally reticent academic interest in, and respect, of the swamp blues.

The Slow Autonomy of Blues Bibliography

Perhaps the earliest bibliography on the blues not from the fields of folklore or jazz was the unceremonious, one-page “Alphabetical Label Index to Blues Research #1-8” by Anthony Rotante and Paul Sheatsley, appearing in Blues Research No. 9 in September 1962. The next bibliography devoted solely to the blues came from the French duo of Demêtre and Chauvard in 1963, a one-and-a-half page list of essentials for the personal blues library. Then came four pages in Austrian Jazz Podium in 1964, where the list of German-language blues works was shared with jazz and gospel. In 1965 and 1966 Paul Oliver compiled a page each for Jazz Beat and Jazz Monthly called “Blue Literature” and “Literature on Negro Song.” Blues World indexed their own content in 1967, and the Library of Congress compiled a single list of “…Materials Relating to the Blues.” in 1969, in addition to another quarter-page bibliography involving the blues from 1965. See Table 5 below.

Finally the Library of Congress published a 16-page Bibliography of the Blues by Joe Hickerson in 1971 (emboldened in Table 5 below). The ball was rolling. In 1971, Martin Steenson had self-published an index of the first fifty issues of Blues Unlimited (BU), simultaneous to Mike Leadbitter’s similar-thinking Nothing But the Blues: An Illustrated Documentary, an anthology of BU's first fifty issues expanded with historical context per region, photographs, and updated biographical information on the artists. Both of these works answered the same growing demand for the content of BU back issues and confirmed BU’s status as a serialized reference among serious researchers and dilettantes alike. Leadbitter joined into a partnership that
surprised even himself, with sometime rival Mike Vernon, owner of Blue Horizon, to compile a 2-LP companion album for the 261-page book. He opened the gatefold notes noting BU’s sudden rise from the underground:

“When I heard that early issues of Blues Unlimited were fetching £5 a copy I was quite shattered. I knew the demand was growing, but that was ridiculous!”

The first grouping of bibliographies I have mentioned above, released between the initial 1962 piece from Blues Research and the 1971 Library of Congress (LOC) pamphlet, all numbered fewer than five pages excepting this last from the LOC. Over the course of the next four decades, although the publication of bibliographic volumes on, or including, black music grew in size and frequency, even the most substantial among them treated the blues superficially, especially given the wealth of works available. From this date forward, large works gave space to the blues, but most of them did nothing to move the field of blues bibliography toward autonomy. In this second grouping, then, increasingly larger works are written between 1971-1981 that...

host blues content but do not make significant inroads into the autonomy of the field. Examples of how this second spate of publishing arced is as follows: from 61-page contributions in 1971 (Ferris) and 28 pp in 1975 (Maultsby), to 272 pp in 1975 (Cooper), 338 pp in 1976 (Lipson), up to 1026 pp in 1976 (Smythe). This last, a dedicated reference to all of Black America, marks the largest of the tomes. For the next five years, works of similar size continued to emerge: 525 pp and 556 pp in 1977 (Williams and Brown; Horn), 444 pp in 1978 (Abrahams and Szwed), 302 pp in 1979 (Peavy), and last, an uptick of 239 pp and 368 pp in 1981 (Allen; Hefele). Last, in that same year a 4-volume *Bibliography of Black Music* appeared from Greenwood Press (De Lerma) and a similar 723 pp work from Scarecrow (Skowronski). (See Table 5.) But of all of the above works, issued between 1971 and 1981, none of these collections were any more intently focused on the blues than had been the earliest work from 1928.  

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Table 5. A selected chronological listing of blues bibliographies that shaped the field, with size, and home field of study, listed in order of importance within chronology. Greyed listings are publications whose emphasis on the blues is supplemental to (less than) a main focus on other African-American subjects or musics including jazz or folksong, but whose publication is a noteworthy contribution to Blues Bibliography nonetheless. Blackened listings indicate bibliographic works whose emphasis on the blues is equal to or greater than other African-American subjects or musics including jazz and folksong. Emboldened listings indicate important interventions in establishing Blues Bibliography as an autonomous field. Where applicable, these titles are given in full.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publ. year</th>
<th>Editor/Compiler</th>
<th>Page length</th>
<th>Field or category of studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Rotante and Sheatsley</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Demêtre and Chauvard</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>French language - blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Mecklenburg</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>German-language – jazz, blues, gospel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Anon. (Library of Congress)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Blues – theme - “Rising Sun”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Black music - Song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Anon. (Library of Congress)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Cox</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Black music – male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Anon. (Music Educators Journal)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Black music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Ferris</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Black folklore – Mississippi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Hickerson (LOC)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Blues A Bibliography of the Blues (Library of Congress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Cooper</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>Discography - classical, jazz, &amp; blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Maultsby</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Black music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Evans</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Blues Blues Bibliography (Self-published)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Lipson</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>American folklore – film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Smythe</td>
<td>1026</td>
<td>Black American culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Williams and Brown</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>Religious studies – African, Afro-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Horn</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>American folklore – music</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Herzhaft</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>French-language - blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Abrahams and Szwed</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>Black folklore – Americas and West Indies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Goren and Pearson (LOC)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Black music - Rhythm &amp; Blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Popular music – sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Peavy</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>Black American culture - literature – post-war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Meadows</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Black music – theses and dissertations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>Discography – jazz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Hefele</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>German-language – jazz, rock, pop - 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Skowronski</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>Black music</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Floyd and Reisser</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Black music</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the Library of Congress publication of 1971, the next big step forward (i.e., in both size and the progress it marked in the field) in total dedication to blues bibliography was David Evans’ 11-page *Blues Bibliography* in 1975 (emboldened in Table 5 above). That same year a hefty reference for collectors, dealers, and librarians (Cooper 1975) devoted significant space to the blues, but still no landmark bibliographic work belonged entirely to the blues. Groundbreaking opuses that established the field of black music scholarship came in the 1980s. First was a modest but rich gathering of theses and dissertations on black music culled together by Eddie Meadows in 1980.
volume *Bibliography of Black Music* from Greenwood (1981) was Samuel Floyd, Jr. and Marsha Reisser’s 2 volumes of *Black Music in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography* for Kraus (1983). The final buttress in the construction of the blues as an autonomous field of scholarship was Garland’s *The Blues: A Bibliographical Guide*, a 636-page work from Mary Hart, Brenda Eagles, and Lisa Howorth released in 1989. This work was the first book-length bibliography devoted to the blues (emboldened in Table 5 above).

It appeared 18 years after Leadbitter first recognized the need for, and had begun independently compiling, such a work.228

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What Table 5 depicts above is a consistently growing field of publications that appear, in name, to be building a veritable field. However, one notices that the largest tomes of these, before Hart et al. (1989), are nearly all depicted in grey. Usually the presence of large works such as these would indicate significant contributions to the field of Blues Bibliography, but these are in grey because their devotion of space or content to the field of blues study is not as significant as their dedication to other fields within the work. Especially in the latter-1970s era until 1981, several large works were produced, but they are in grey because none of these, as I said above, represent any more of a remarkable statement about the development of the field than the 1928 Anthology. The greatest contributions to the field in this era, instead, number at 11, 2, 4, 11, and 19 pages. I will mention two things that this pattern reveals before moving on to overview specialists in the swamp blues. First, this pattern only emphasizes the enormity of Hart’s intervention in 1989, while attesting to the fledgling state of the field for over three decades. Second, it emphasizes the foresight of the Blues Unlimited team and other pioneers at the helms of labels or blues magazines of their own, and the lack of support, financial and infrastructural, that they had in performing their research, preserving the music, and publishing the results. Not only were they trailblazers, but they were quixotic eccentrics with unrealistic dreams and unrewarding crusades.

Before and beyond the creation of Blues Unlimited, the swamp blues fraternity was already on the receiving end of attention from collector-fans far afield. Future Blues Unlimited contributors were scattering seeds as early as the 1950s. Anthony Rotante, before he and Paul Sheatsley held fort as Blues Research’s resident discographers from 1959 on, wrote for Discophile, where
he discussed Macy’s rhythm & blues 5000-series as early as 1954, and again in 1959, 1967, and 1969. Macy’s, recall, was the small Houston label that first released Clarence Garlow’s “Bon Ton Roula” (Macy’s 5002) in 1949. At Record Research, Rotante created Jimmy Wilson’s first discography in Jun 1961. At the spin-off Blues Research Rotante and Sheatsley wrote on Excello as early as September 1962, and on Goldband, Folk Star, and Tic Toc in 1964. The Chauvard and Demètre pair wrote “Du Cote de Chez Excello” for French Jazz Hot in 1962, which was translated for Jazz Monthly later that year as “Down Excello Way”, in addition to writing on Excello’s discography for R&B Monthly in April 1965. Chauvard also followed Rotante’s lead by publishing Jimmy Wilson’s second discography, written in collaboration with Mike Leadbitter and Kurt Mohr, in Jazz Statistics October 1963. Leadbitter highlighted Goldband’s resident slide guitarist Hop Wilson’s work first in a Winter 1963 issue of Music Memories and Jazz Report, which Leadbitter followed in a later piece in Blues Unlimited. Meanwhile Broven had kept up his work for Blues Research: in spring of 1963, Broven and Jay Miller together had authored “Further notes on “Excello””, an explanation of where to draw the line between the Nashville label and the SWLA bluesmen who made it famous in England. Lonesome Sundown’s story was told in R&B Monthly in Summer 1964, and Slim Harpo’s in Fall. Other than Broven’s discography of Lightnin’ Slim works from 1962, the earliest print work on the “Rock Me Mama” singer was a brief mention in Sing Out! in 1965.

Mike Vernon wrote on Slim Harpo for Melody Maker at the time of his passing in January of that year, which was later reprinted in note form for a
record from his Blue Horizon label. Terry Pattison wrote on the Louisiana blues for *Blues Unlimited* and notes for an Arhoolie album containing them in 1970; the next year he wrote on Excello and the “Louisiana Country Blues” in New Orleans’ *Vieux Carré Courier* to be reprinted in *Living Blues*. The swamp blues generally and an Excello blues discography were the subject of three 1971 *Soul Bag* articles by Jean Guerry, who also wrote about Lightnin’ Slim, Lonesome Sundown, Lazy Lester, Silas Hogan, Slim Harpo, Jimmy Anderson, Moses “Whispering” Smith, Clarence Edwards, and Arthur “Guitar” Kelley in that same issue. In 1972 Tony Russell, frequent contributor to discographies in the *LJMS* series, wrote on Lightning Slim’s AFBF tour of that year. The British *Hot Buttered Soul* published Leadbitter’s discography of the Zynn, Feature, Rocko/Rocket family of labels in 1973. In 1976 the Australian *Crazy Music* published an interview with Jay Miller. More on Leadbitter, Broven, and swamp blues discography in a moment.

From *BU*’s first issues, it seemed most contributors had something to contribute on the swamp blues. In the magazine’s very first issue of April 1963, Marcel Chauvard, Jacques Demetre, and Mike Leadbitter together put together the “Southern Blues Men” series, the first of whom was J.D. Miller. Leadbitter was at the helm of *Blues Unlimited* and as such, his passions were *Blue Unlimited*’s passions. One of his early series was titled “The Unknowns”, where he profiled then little-known musicians that today reads like a litany of blues greats. No. 3 was Hop Wilson (*BU* 31, Mar 1966), in which Leadbitter published the first Hop Wilson discography. No. 8 was Rocky Fuller, better known as Louisiana Red (*BU* 32, Apr 1966). No. 11 was Baby Boy Warren (*BU* 32, Apr 1966). No. 12 was Papa Lightfoot (*BU* 34, Jul 1966). And No. 15 was Sam Davis (*BU* 36, Sep 1966). Another initiative of his was “The Southern Blues Singers” series of whom No. 5 was Clarence “Bon Ton” Garlow, featured in *BU* 10 (Mar 1964).

In 1965, Neil Paterson wrote on Goldband artist Big Chenier and Jacques Demètre on Jimmy Dotson. Leadbitter added to the growing Excello bibliography in *R&B Monthly* in March 1965, and John Broven and Rick Milne wrote again on Excello blues in May and August 1965. Leadbitter’s first piece directly pointing to Crowley as the source of Excello’s good sound came after his first fieldtrip to Louisiana, in October 1967 followed the next month by an updated “Excello Revisited” article. In 1968 and 1969 the *BU* press put

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out Leadbitter’s booklets on Goldband and Crowley swamp blues, formally inaugurating the field of inquiry. In the recent retrospective *Blues Unlimited: Essential Interviews from the Original Blues Magazine*, its editor and longtime *BU* photographer, contributor, then editor, admits frankly that Jay Miller’s Excello blues were “firm favorites with the *BU* team.”

![Figure 43. Mike Leadbitter's 31-page *Crowley, Louisiana Blues* published by Blues Unlimited Press, 1968.](image)

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Slim Harpo was the subject of *BU* articles in 1966, 1969, and just ahead of his death in 1970. Between 1968 and 1972 Lightning Slim appeared in *BU* 52, 69, 71, 81, and 91. Notably, after Lightning gained international notoriety thanks to his appearance at AFBF 1972, *Blues Unlimited* no longer wrote on him. Lightning Slim’s sometime harpist Schoolboy Cleve was profiled in 1970, Lonesome Sundown twice in 1971. Silas Hogan was the hot topic of the year, with two articles in *BU*, a visit from Mike Vernon to record Hogan and company in a “Baton Rouge Blues Super Session” funded by Excello, followed by specials in British *Sounds*, French *Soul Bag*, a discography in the brand new *Alley Music*, and topped off by an album from Blue Horizon (UK release of Excello). There would not be this much print interest in Hogan again until his death in 1994. After John Broven, Mike Leadbitter, and Robin Gosden went to Louisiana, Mississippi, and Chicago in 1970 they ran a *BU* series titled...
“Behind the Sun” that included pieces on Jin, Shreveport’s resident record man Stan Lewis, Baton Rouge blues, and SWLA r&b.231

It is barely possible to name all the researchers who contributed to the literature on the swamp blues across English-language blues publications, and therefore it is certainly beyond the scope of this project to treat issues related to the literature fairly. For a thorough listing of these early blues discographers and encyclopedists, and the generations following, see the sections with those names in Robert Ford’s A Blues Bibliography (2007), and as pertains to this magazine in particular, see the introduction to Blues Unlimited: Essential Interviews from the Original Blues Magazine (2015). For a thorough discussion of the original mavens of the blues-in-print, see Cushing’s 2014 Pioneers of the Blues Revival, which includes interviews from previously mentioned core members of the Blues Unlimited team John Broven (who contributed from 1963-1978), Mike Rowe (contributing 1965-1984), and Jacques Demètre (1963-6, 1968, 1970); and friends who helped behind the scenes and occasional contributors Paul Oliver (1963, 1964), Robert Dixon (1963), Bob Koester (1963-4, 1966-7, 1970, 1977-8), Jim O’Neal (1970-1, 1981-2), Dick Spottswood (1963), Chris Strachwitz (1969-72 passim, 1976), and David Evans (1966-73, 1977). And still, more work is needed that

delves into the connections, compromises, cross-pollinations, and successions between magazines that cultivated the flourishing world of blues research of 1960s Britain.

**Mike Leadbitter: Canonized Saint of the Swamp Blues**

Of all the writers on the swamp blues—and the obscure blues in general!—Mike Leadbitter outshone them all by far. This is the claim, at least, at the basis of Leadbitter’s appointment to the sainthood, which occurred sometime during the waves of swamp blues LP releases from reissue labels of the latter 1970s and 1980s. Other researchers, most notably John Broven for the swamp blues, have published more total works on the swamp blues than Leadbitter. After his retirement from banking in 1991, Broven was formally hired by Ace (UK), today’s foremost reissuer of the Louisiana swamp blues and swam pop, after had had already been consulting and writing for them for years. Bruce Bastin, who wrote forty-five of the 55 LJMS album notes, also wrote more than Leadbitter’s paltry two or three dozen album sleeves. But importantly, no writer’s oeuvre on the swamp blues was as early, and trailblazing, nor are there any whose density compares to Leadbitter’s output during his lifetime.²³² For perspective, in Robert Ford’s 2007 edition of *A

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Blues Bibliography, Mike Leadbitter-authored works appear on 280 pages and number over 300 total. In individual artists, labels, regions, or other thematic entries, where one work of his appears, generally there will only be one or two total. His contributions number to five or more works in fewer than a dozen instances—with one notable exception. The greatest conglomeration of his works is found under the regional Louisiana blues heading, where 11 of the bibliographic entries were written by Leadbitter.

To illustrate the proportionality of this representation, the general “History and Background” section, for example, numbers 2,404 bibliographic entries of which 4 are Leadbitter pieces (0.17%). On Big Walter Price, one of Leadbitter’s earliest intense studies, he wrote 4 of 16 total entries (25%). Mike Leadbitter’s longtime passion, the promotion of Juke Boy Bonner, gathers eight Leadbitter works in its bibliography of 55 (14.5%). In contrast, he wrote one of 40 pieces on James Booker (2.5%); one of 61 on Eddie Boyd (1.6%); 2


In booklet form, beyond BU publications, Leadbitter compiled a 22 pp. discography of Specialty’s 1946-1964 singles, published privately by Tez Courtney in 1966 and a 38 pp. The Transatlantic Blues Book from Transatlantic Press, 1973. He left his day-job as an editor at Hanover for a job at Chess in 1972, where he worked on a complete Genesis project in 1972-3. Other writing for record labels had been ongoing since the mid-60s. Before 1970, he wrote sleeve notes for the following mostly British labels: Decca (UK 1965), Flyright (1969), Bell (UK 1968), Liberty (UK 1969), and Blue Horizon (UK 1969-70). In 1971 together with Mike Vernon he compiled a double-LP companion album for CBS, to complement his collection of interviews from the first fifty issues of BU, the book NBTB (UK 1971). In the last three years of his life he wrote sleeves for domestic, American, French, and Scandinavian labels: Sunnyland (UK 1970, 1973), Ember (UK 1971), Barclay/Blue Star (France 1971), RCA (USA 1972), Atlantic (USA 1972), Polydor (UK 1972-3), Storyville (Denmark 1973), Checker (USA 1973), and UK Specialty, distributed through Sonet UK 1974.

233 Under the regional “Louisiana blues” portion of the encyclopedia (separate from a dedicated New Orleans blues category), which houses overviews of Shreveport’s r&b scene, Zydeco, some of the peripheral figures of the swamp pop and electrified Cajun scenes who toed the blues line, all in addition to listings on the swamp blues, 13 articles are from Leadbitter. That is 13 works on the state alone—notably not on individual components or facets of the Louisiana blues like artists, instruments, musical form, ensembles, labels, or producers.
of 58 on Louisiana Red (3.44%); 3 of 72 on Magic Sam (4.16%); two of 82 on Arthur Big Boy Crudup (2.4%) (Leadbitter had been an important figure in Sam’s and Crudup’s “rediscovery”); and seven of 142 on Elmore James, on whom Leadbitter was also deemed to have had expertise (4.9%).

In the average subject where Leadbitter wrote, ten, his small-scale works including discographies, studies of contemporary activity, biographies, and interviews, tend to constitute about 2% of the total (selected) available research. This 2% percentage is less in cases of particularly famous bluesmen, who would have been studied by the broadest public (e.g., Leadbitter wrote 5 of 333 on Muddy Waters (1.5%), 0 of Jimmy Reed’s 105 (0%), and 5 of 538 on B.B. King (0.9%)), and higher within his wheelhouse. The percentage rises to 5% among musicians whose oeuvres he was to have held special knowledge. It indicates special focus on the Louisiana swamp blues, then, when his writing averages 7.5% of the world’s research on these musicians—well above the 5% standard of his usual expertise. The swamp blues is where he spent the most of his time and resources. He is responsible for 2.5% of the Lazy Lester bibliography (1 of 40) and 3.8% of the referenced works on Katie Webster (2 of 53). These numbers are low because the majority of activity on Lazy Lester’s music was written after Leadbitter’s death, in the latter 1980s and first half of the 1990s, and the same is true for Katie Webster whose 1987 comeback generated considerable attention. The rest of the works on swamp blues musicians came from Leadbitter at a rate of 5% and up: 5% of Lonesome Sundown (2 of 39), 6.6% of Lightnin’ Slim (4 of 61), 6.9% of Slim Harpo (4 of 58), 8.3% of Clarence Garlow (1 of 12), 12.9% of Silas Hogan (4 of 31), and
14.3% (2 of 14) of Hop Wilson works, whom he visited multiple times.\(^{234}\) This pattern is repeated among blues label listings, with exceptions only in the cases of Louisiana labels, Excello and Goldband in particular.

From Leadbitter's devotion came a similar bent in *Blues Unlimited* to publish on the swamp blues music of Louisiana. In addition to its weekly issues under Leadbitter’s coeditorship, in the latter 1960s *BU* printed specialist pamphlets that serve as many blues arenas’ first mini-monographs, including the swamp blues of Lake Charles and Crowley, Louisiana. Table 5 below lists all the booklets published by Blues Unlimited Press. Not counting the reprint of a Memphis Housing Project Study, a total 373 pages were authored by members of the Blues Unlimited team. Of those, 93 pages are on the Louisiana swamp blues, and an additional 15 on Cajun music. A total 29% of all of *Blues Unlimited*’s supplemental output is about Louisiana music.

For all his encyclopedic genius, however, Leadbitter’s colleagues at *BU* have recalled that his grasp of business operations was severely lacking. His inability to make a nest egg for himself was bad enough, but especially unfortunate was his failure to bring financial gains to the musicians for whom he conducted rigorous campaigns, most notably Juke Boy Bonner. On May 1, 1964 Eddie Shuler even wrote to Leadbitter scolding him on a recent failure; Leadbitter’s response read, “No slip ups this time as I’m getting the hang of this business now! This time I’ll really do something with it. Ok!” How, then, did his pipedream *Blues Unlimited* become the one of the first institutions of

\(^{234}\) This pattern is not unique to musicians; Leadbitter also wrote 8.3% of the works on Jay Miller (2 of 24), and 18.2% on Eddie Shuler and Goldband (2 of 11).
blues research, collect some of the only interviews of the greats of blues history, and attract swathes of zealous subscribers for over twenty years? Fortunately, Simon Napier, with his background in small business, was to the operational and financial end of things what Leadbitter was to research. Between 1963 and 1971, Napier alone was responsible for subscriptions and distribution, while Leadbitter’s “encyclopedic brain” and “investigative mind” was in charge of correspondence with record producers and co-owners of labels. Furthermore, where Napier’s interests were in prewar blues, including hillbilly, rockabilly, and gospel, Leadbitter’s interests constituted the counterpart postwar scene. Between the two of them, Broven points out, their interests covered “the whole spectrum of black music as we know it”, and their skills together made up the twin pillars of content and form that was the magazine’s source of strength.\(^{235}\)

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<td>1964</td>
<td><em>Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley</em></td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td><em>John Lee Hooker</em></td>
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<td>Eds. Leadbitter, Rotante,</td>
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\(^{235}\) Leadbitter-Shuler 24 May 1964.; Broven-Bernard interview 1992; Broven in Cushing, 172; Greensmith, xv-xviiii; The distribution of labor and tenure across the other leads of the BU team were as follows: Broven and Napier both contributed from its genesis in 1963 until 1978, when a promotion in Broven’s banking career precluded keeping such an advanced hobby, and whereupon Napier had felt he served his time. From 1976 to the last issue in 1987, the magazine was run by Rowe, Greensmith, Turner, and Huggins, who gradually published with less frequency in an effort to maintain top-quality, according to Greensmith. Mike Rowe managed the magazine until 1985, with contributions from Tony Russell. Bill Green Smith was photographer and photo editor, and moved to the U.S. in 1985 but continued to contribute from there. Bez Turner wrote reviews and handled subscriptions until 1985. Cilla Huggins handled the typesetting and layout once the magazine transitioned from the setup in Napier’s parents’ shop attic with him at the stapler, and Broven and Leadbitter assembling and stacking the early runs. Whereas BU originally printed new issues every 1-1.5 months from 1963-1973, in 1974 it dropped to bimonthly, in 1978 to one issue every 4 months, in 1980 to every six months, in 1983 to 9 month intervals, and in its last three years, BU published one issue per 15 months. (Broven 2003: 278; Greensmith xcv; Broven in Cushing 174-6.; Broven 1992.)
Swamp Blues Discography and the Mike Leadbitter Legacy

The appearance of quantitative research is a useful benchmark in burgeoning fields of study. For the swamp blues, Mike Leadbitter first began inquiring into Goldband artists in his third letter to Eddie Shuler, in 1963.

John Broven has said that many of the Blues Unlimited (Leadbitter, Napier, Broven, Slaven) pioneers had struck up, or attempted to strike up, correspondence with American indie record label owners in hopes of reaching artists through them. John Broven corresponded with Jay Miller. Early American subscribers who wrote in got tapped to become satellite interviewers and eventually wrote for the magazine themselves. Several of these names, Broven points out, have become leading, familiar figures in blues research including Jim O'Neal, founder of Living Blues magazine, David

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Information on these starred booklets is not available in detail; titles marked with an asterisk have no documented length. Where I have entered estimates, they are based on the highest page number I have found referenced.
Evans, and Pete Lowry are among these. In short succession, Broven and Leadbitter were publishing individual discographies of swamp blues musicians in the magazines who gave space to the blues. Leadbitter was at the helm of an eight-page blues column inside Jazz Statistics that published discographies from Broven and himself. Writing to Eddie Shuler in October of 1962, Leadbitter offered “One of the first things I’d like to do, is to bring attention to Goldband, through this column, as a thankyou for the information and records you have sent me.” Broven also published discographies in Record Research. Once BU was running, discography was a clear early priority. In the opening letter from the editor in the fourth issue, Napier begs for information from subscribers’ personal collections, which were viewed as community databases for BU projects.

“The purposes of “Blues Unlimited” are several-fold. To find out more about singers is an important one. To document their records equally so. [...] We are publishing near-complete discographies in the hope that you, the readers, will fill in the gaps. A very small proportion of you are helping us in this way. [...] Only by interviewing the artists, noting accompaniments...can these invaluable listings be complete. Please help us to this end. I have yet to meet a discographer who made any financial gain from his hobby, but with your cooperation the end-product will be a lot more satisfying for all concerned.”

By their explicit account, Blues Unlimited writers and subscribers should interview artists to get discography personnel straight; not to learn more about artistry or musicality, and not to inquire as to the musician’s ideas, thoughts, or positions musical or otherwise.

John Broven has said that Mike Leadbitter, for all intents and purposes, invented blues discography. I will address this claim in two ways, the first of which is to give some context to the initial reception of Leadbitter’s
most substantial single work. Contemporary reviews of Leadbitter’s early metadiscography of the blues, *BRSD 1940-1966*, critically panned it, with complaints of typos, pages either omitted or bound out of order, the absence of relevant musicians, and inaccurate personnel or session details. The first two complaints bear witness to the single-handedness of the book’s production, with Mike Leadbitter alone handwriting all his research, and Slaven acting as secretary, typewriting and typesetting, laying out and pasting, and no other editorial oversight to speak of. The last two complaints, about omissions and inaccuracies, have more to do, first, with the reader’s personal impressions of what constitutes the blues genre or what should constitute a book on the blues. Secondly, these critiques are truly complaints of the field, and should not have been considered to reflect faults in Leadbitter’s work.

The limits of space and practicality necessitated the construction of artificial genre boundaries. But most obviously, Leadbitter and Slaven were digging up and compiling research from scratch, from a field (commercial popular and race music recording, usually run in one-man independent label operations) that historically had never kept personnel records, had commonly misplaced or discarded original tapes, and generally had little vested interest in keeping other documentation. To critique the mistaken placement of a heretofore invisible and undocumented musician was to miss the groundbreaking achievement that the book represented. Attention given to Leadbitter in the past few decades has increasingly recognized his importance as a trailblazer, and has contextualized these critiques as nominal and potentially unfair, given the rudimentary state of the field. It is fitting, then,
that almost simultaneous to the completion of their work, *Down Beat* magazine’s annual review declared their calling “Discography, A Thankless Science.”

Having contextualized the contemporary views on Leadbitter’s contributions, I now move to the second address to Broven’s claim, which is to restore power and some historic influence to Broven himself, in addition to others in their circle, as primary pioneers in blues discography too. I say this not to diminish Leadbitter’s singular role, but his early death at age thirty-two does aid his appointing to the sainthood. The earliest published discographies of individual swamp bluesmen appeared in 1962 and 1963 in *Jazz Statistics* and the one-issue *Blues Statistics* journals. John Broven compiled the discographies of Lightnin’ Slim, Lonesome Sundown (part one), Lazy Lester, and Slim Harpo; Leadbitter wrote discographies for Guitar Junior and part two of the Lonesome Sundown piece. In the early days when *BU* was the only outfit of its kind, because of the magnitude of work that was to be done each leg of the *BU* team had their own miniature oceans to cover. It would have been a luxury of time and resources to share projects, so the number of jointly written works between Leadbitter and Broven are surprisingly few. The most of their overlaps occurred in Louisiana. The shared two-part Lonesome

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Sundown discography mentioned above is one such example. They also together wrote on Silas Hogan, Moses “Whispering” Smith, and New Orleans pianist Henry Gray (BU 74), Lightning Slim’s activities of 1972 (BU 91), as well as combination efforts outside the swamp blues like a report on the AFBF 1963 (BU 7), parts of the “Behind the Sun” series (BU 76, 77, 79, and two each in BU 74 and 78), a piece on New Orleans musician Archibald (BU 76), and the first B.B. King (BU 2) and Elmore James discographies (BU 5). They wrote for periodicals outside of BU only twice, both times on the SWLA swamp blues: the Slim Harpo story for R&B Scene (1.4, Feb 1965) and what they viewed as a postmortem on Excello’s halcyon days, for Jazz & Blues (Nov 1971).

Before the recent upsurge in appreciation for Leadbitter’s legacy as an empathetic writer, diligent researcher, and “blues activist”, the greatest contribution tied to his name was his discographical work, most notably, the groundbreaking *Blues Records: A Selective Discography, 1943-1970* he compiled with Neil Slaven. His colleagues and friends Godrich and Dixon had

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recently published their equally landmark *Blues and Gospel Records, 1890-1943*. In the process of expanding and completing their work, they discovered the necessity of drawing an at times arbitrary line to cleave off what constituted blues and gospel, and where rhythm & blues, jump blues, rockabilly blues, and electric blues lay. Leadbitter and Slaven took up their book with the 1943 start date as a purposeful self-placement in continuation of Godrich and Dixon’s work.

Though years had gone into the compilation, research, organization, philosophy, and typesetting of *Blues Records 1943-1966*, its first edition in 1968 felt, and looked, rushed to print. Its critics concurred and attacks on the perceived sloppiness of typos were transferred to assumptions about historical inaccuracies, and personal reactions against the book’s delimitation of blues genres were in turn projected onto Leadbitter personally. The book’s majorly expanded second edition, extended to 1970, and published twenty years later was hailed as a great improvement and an even greater achievement, buoyed in part by the recognition of the original work’s significance in the field, a sense that by now had begun to take hold. In light of the discography’s overarching importance, minor mistakes of typesetting and personnel in either edition were now leveled to peccadilloes. One of the major “improvements” of the second edition that quashed reader angst, for instance, was the addition of “*A Selective Discography*” to the book’s title.²³⁹ But by the

²³⁹ Greensmith xx.; Two years after founding *Juke Blues* magazine, Broven together with Bob Gaddy and Ray Topping completed Bob Gaddy’s discography that Mike Leadbitter had begun over a decade prior. So this 1987 article is also credited as a co-authored Broven and Leadbitter (and Gaddy and Topping) piece, but I do not list it above as a project the two pioneers worked on together.; Leadbitter, Mike and Neil Slaven. *Blues Records 1943-1966*. 
second edition Leadbitter had died, and instead of re-establishing his reputation as one of the demigods of blues research, the second edition felt like a post-print retraction of prior misattributions or insults to character. Leadbitter’s name had been entrenched as one of the impassioned if flawed components of the British blues research machine, forever busy and eternal head of his own empires of principle and opinion. Although the Leadbitter and Slaven work has long now been one of the bibles of blues research and discography, alongside the Dixon and Godrich, Arnaudon, the Charters and Oliver and O’Neal interviews, Larkin, Herzhaft, Santelli, Cohn, Russell, and many more, Leadbitter’s name has remained more attached to his role at Blues Unlimited than to the other, large-format works of which he was part. Bill Greensmith neither minced nor exaggerated when he said “the book became the foundation of all later work.”

The Museumification of British writing on the Blues
I mentioned earlier that the BU mission had been to restore the “humanity” of black musicians to rhythm & blues fandom that had been lost in the age of jazz collecting. Writers of Leadbitter, Napier, and Broven’s generation saw themselves as performing the kind of person-oriented work that fought folkloric mystery. Where the “museumification” of jazz writers


240 Leadbitter gained the nickname Mike “Back-biter” in honor of his strongly opinionated letters, responses, and record reviews of those whom he viewed as blues traitors and imitators.
who wrote on the blues involved an intent focus on the past, the blues writers at *BU* and its heirs focused on the “new and strange”. The researchers learned, were enlightened, praised, and wrote about the blues with awe at downhome authenticity. When British blues researchers went stateside to seek out facts and recordings, they were nevertheless stockpiling fieldtrip souvenirs to discuss in their magazines once home. Tony Russell referred to their activities on fact-finding missions as those of “mapmakers”, going in “every direction to plot the landscape of the blues.”

Later, researchers “combed the South” seeking actual bluesmen to bring back to the U.K.; worse, they were bringing musician-relics back to England to perform for the growing blues community across Europe. Yes, generally researchers were uninterested in the commercially beneficial possibilities of the blues boom, unlike the ultimately profit-driven American record men. But no matter how well-meaning the intent of researchers, they were still practicing in the trade of black bodies, or at least the sounds and romantic fantasies thereof, whether or not the researchers reaped any benefits per se.

It is hard to deny that most of the world of British blues fandom before 1965 was made up of white collar, or light-blue collar men, who despite efforts to break the curio cabinets in which jazz fans had placed black music and musicians, ended up merely reframing the cabinets to include live performance, first-person interviews, and benefactor campaigns. The researchers who ran blues magazines did not want to interfere in black culture

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as they documented it; they believed in their own invisibility as observers.

Peter Narvaez leveled one critique at American Living Blues editors as “enthusiastic bystanders”, whose delight at observation did nothing to prevent the construction of a bourgeoisie of collector-fans. For Living Blues editors and the originators at Blues Unlimited alike, their zealous drive not to interfere was negated by writing with an air of expertise and authority that automatically made them elitist.242

On the companion double-LP to Nothing But the Blues in 1971, Leadbitter wrote sincerely, but with presumption nevertheless, “I hope that this album may lead you to the book or even vice versa. I also hope that both may lead you to the real blues, if you somehow got lost on the way.” By the 1971 date of this declaration BU was a recognized beacon in blues research. Seven years prior, however, in its first issues the team was already writing with affecting authority. In issue three, Leadbitter defended an earlier attack of British imitator r&b; the tone of his defense, however, has the confidence of an editor who knows his core audience is loyal enough that his opinions need no diplomacy. “My offhand dismissal in “BU” 1 of Cyril Davies’ abortionate recording on Pye brought several letters of protest from irate readers,

accusing me of all sorts of purism, bias and lack of judgment. ... musical midgets such as he are in very bad taste...” Elsewhere in the letter he speaks with even more blatant in-group language: “...blues enthusiasts had a good laugh when various white American artists latched onto the commercial possibilities of R&B...Now we find it happening all over again, this time in England! ...Cyril Davis [sic], ...power mad with the success of his “Country line special”...writes in a musical publication that Jimmy Reed is rubbish. Our chuckles turn to indignation!”

In an advisory section on “good R & B” to pursue, Broven and Leadbitter acknowledge that collecting prewar discs, especially, could be cost-prohibitive. Even though prewar discs existed in higher quantities than postwar discs, their cost was often higher. Most British reissue labels had sprung up to issue postwar records; domestic labels could be sold with no extra import tariffs, so once British labels were reissuing postwar records, they were less pricey than the prewar discs that had to be imported from America with additional duties. Taking this into consideration, the recommendations range from reliable reissue labels and record auctions—sources for how to procure material goods—to discographical and statistical magazines and fan clubs—sources not for goods, but for a different form of capital: information. Most of the tips relate to the affordable, if harder to come by, postwar records. In contrast, those high-tariff pre-war records appear under caveats like “If you can afford pre-war blues discs...”

The nature of such recommendations reinforce two characteristics of British blues fandom. First, that it was comprised of a longterm membership of white-collar, mostly male middle-class who could afford the bourgeoisie pastime of “collecting” and who relished the communal aspects afforded by sharing obscure knowledge of the blues. One of the standard components of BU was an extended classifieds section for those looking to buy or sell records and lengthy lists of upcoming record auctions. So striking was the size and emphasis on discography, and this portion on material accumulation in particular, that Amy van Singel, one of the three founding editors of Living Blues magazine, recalled her shock at first subscribing to Blues Unlimited: “I wanted to hear about the music and the creators of the music, not just statistics.”

The consistent advertisement of sales where subscribers could “add” to budding collections, and the increasingly frequent appearance of suggested discographies, furthermore assumed a certain continuation, and assimilation, across the magazine’s readership that reinforced a specific definition of community, and a defined a specific ideal collector-fan who was male, white, interested in rote memorization, and had expendable income. In her recent book on today’s obsessive, “oddball fraternity of men” collectors of rare 78s, Amanda Petrusich suggests the very impulse driving the collector boom might itself have been tied to ideas and traits related to masculinity, thereby deepening the depiction of the record collecting world as small, insular, and self-reinforcingly male. For collectors of the blues, especially, the hobby

244 “Good R & B.” BU 1 (April 1963): 2.; Van Singel, quoted in Adelt 177.
fostered a cloistered environment. The self-perpetuating endogamy of blues fandom was so strong that in New York, a group of gatekeeping enthusiasts arose who came to be known as the “Blues Mafia.”

Second, the consumption of information, and concomitant categorization, marked that the new “productive encyclopedism” of the blues boom was actually a reincarnation of the same obsessive impulse to historicize that had grabbed hold of jazz fandom, and which the blues cognoscenti had explicitly set out to combat. Taking from Petrusich’s comments on the nature of collecting, it would seem that the gravitational pull of collecting had predetermined certain traits of the pioneer collectors, as well as the boom itself. Furthermore, just as the British blues pioneers failed to see how they were repeating the Victorian-like collecting hysteria of the jazz generation before them, many researchers also lacked ethnographic self-awareness. When asked to reflect on his own romanticization of blues musicians, Paul Oliver believed he had none. The absence of such an awareness contributes to romanticization most obviously by ignoring the possibility of performing to the audience. Such a belief, in the researcher’s personal unity with the performer, ignores that decades old dilemma of the

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Petrusich’s book is about the underground world of collectors of 78rpm records, which she and members of the community emphatically separate from the world of collecting LPs or 45s. She learns from her interviews that “the distinction [between collecting 45s versus 78s] is acute, comparable to collecting pebbles versus collecting diamonds.” (Petrusich 11) Critics of the book who are familiar with 45- and LP-collecting have suggested this distinction is exaggerated. (O’Halla, n.p.); The full list of members of the “Blues Mafia” and their professional association has been enumerated as follows: Don Kent, Steve Calt (liner notes, books), Samuel Charters (RBF), Larry Cohn (CBS/Epic, Columbia/Sony); John Fahey (Takoma, aka “Blind Joe Death”), Stefan Grossman (Kicking Mule Records, aka “Kid Future”), Tom Hoskins (aka “Fang”, and “re-discoverer” of Mississippi John Hurt); Bernie Klatzko (Herwin), Jim McKune, Nick Perls (Yazoo, Blue Goose), Phil Spiro (“rediscoverer” of Son House along with Nick Perls and Dick Waterman), and Pete Whelan.
participant observer that plagued the Lomax-breed of folklorists earlier in the century. Namely, informants visiting Great Britain like Juke Boy Bonner, Lightning Slim, and Whispering Smith might give performances they thought were desired, as opposed to the kind of performance that ostensibly took place in Louisiana, whether in the white-run professional setting of the studio, the public spaces of a white-audience nightclub, or the black-audience private-space house party—each of which furthermore differed from the next.

Speaking of the Lomaxes, it should be noted that by the early 1960s, the British “serious press” had adopted Alan Lomax’s folkloristic paradigm toward the blues. This purist viewpoint conceived of the blues as a folk manifestation of American black culture, defined not by practice, planning, or deliberate styling, but instead by emotion and earthy sincerity. That purity, they believed, led the music to achieve transcendence. This mystical viewpoint chimed with the mainstream press in London, who soon began to self-righteously moralize to the public. The American blues were going mainstream, but the mainstream filtered out worldiness and commercialism, whittling the blues down to abstractions of ethereal truths. It was quickly becoming the privilege of the middle-class collector-fan to historicize the blues, and the role of the bluesman to enact these versions of history on British stages. Myopic stringency against so-called commercialism was not only the product of Lomaxian legacy or mainstream essentialism, because for one, in cases where critics for the “mainstream” press had not come from the indie magazines to begin with, they were commonly current, occasional contributors. Seedlings of mysticality, then, had been on BU pages since its
first edition. Second, the rise of British r&b imitators contributed to visceral reactions against the faux-blues of Britishers that were eventually transferred onto modernized black American blues.

Mike Leadbitter was one such writer who “intensely disliked” British rhythm & blues, and therefore welcomed critical remarks from African-American visiting musicians. Broven too was a “fervent purist” believed by some to be the “toughest critic in Britain” for American newcomers and local Skiffle groups alike. The BU team fell solidly within the conservative camp for the first decade of its run. For them, while they emphasized creativity and modernism in the profound experiential qualities of the blues, the complexity of daily life and living forms got erased when the written works ended with sentimental crutches. In their heralding of “sincere, emotional expression”, Blues Unlimited writers set two unintentional precedents. First, their work carried an implied villainization of “conscious artistry” even as Leadbitter excitedly wrote about Goldband’s electrified ensembles and Hop Wilson’s Hawaiian-meets-Californian guitar lines. So, sincerity and artistic consciousness are opposed to one another henceforth in British discussions of the blues. The two are clearly a false dichotomy; but authenticity, in contemplations of black music in the British independent and mainstream.

246 Oliver, in Cushing 17.; It is not missed by the author that Leadbitter, Broven, and the rest of the British blues cognoscenti had at the core of their devotion to “purist” blues an equally severe definition of what kind of black music-making they permitted to exist under the blues, and r&b, aegis. However, such problematic definitions of adequate blackness and their peaceable existence on BU pages, definitions determined by an all-white, upper middle-class British board of content programmers, have implications that merit much further discussion than the scope of this chapter allows.; Schwartz 152, 159.; Newton quoting Lomax on his folkloric paradigm for qualifying the blues, Jazz Scene: 86; In counterpart to the purists is a more liberal, fluid understanding of the blues: “that the blues was a living tradition and its relevance and meaning fluctuated in response to social and economic changes in the African American community.” (Schwartz 163-4).
press, had been antipodal to commercialism for a long time already by 1964. In fact, for *Blues Unlimited*, commercial success in the U.S. was assumed to signify a reduced inherent value in a record’s quality. In *BU*’s very first issue, Broven wrote of Slim Harpo’s Top-thirty hit “Rainin’ In My Heart” that “although a commercial success this does not detract from the merits of the record...”

One other conservative Lomaxian writer went so far as to call some African-American musicians “Bad City Negroes” who had adopted “glossy commercialism” in lieu of “earthy and honest” music-making. Most of the purists however blamed American A&R men, not the musicians, for over-commercialized records. In 1968 John Broven lamented the palpable commerciality of John Lee Hooker’s “Boom Boom” on Bluesway, decrying, “those A&R men! When John sings ‘boom boom’ the guns should be pointed at them!”

In this very act of shifting blame, though, such critiques wholly deprived black musicians of artistic control, agency, or cognizance of the artistic stakes at play.

The self-selecting panel of conservative judges made value judgments on blues pieces based in large part upon the extent to which they felt musicians had successfully relayed emotion. Subjective and mystic, this criterion, taken to the extreme, was not only preposterous but it also defined a specific means of encountering music that simultaneously required the listener to perform the contradictory processes of close examination and

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abstraction; of punctilious osmosis. By the time Flyright released its first *LJMS* album, Albert Murray had already explained how the purist camp with all its false dichotomies that lambasted modernization, updated aesthetics, conscious commercial appeal, and its essentialist purism was missing the heart of the blues. He said,

“the implication that blues music does not require artifice but is rather a species of direct emotional expression in the raw...ignores what a blues performance so obviously is. It is precisely an artful contrivance, designed for entertainment and aesthetic gratification...”

To summarize the arc of British writing on the blues, the blues revivalism shepherded by the *Blues Unlimited* team sought to rehumanize, deobjectify, appreciate, learn, and campaign for an underdocumented, but still-living blues medium in the U.S. The philosophies of these blues cognoscenti constituted a patchwork “productive encyclopedism” of the blues that would, in theory, both document the objective criteria of discography, chronology, recording place, influences, and authorship—this being the same work done by the jazz fandom of the 1930s-1950s—and the subjective qualities appealing to the civil rights generation, including a study of semiotics, signifying, and the political. Although the encyclopedism of this fraternity comprised of Leadbitter, Broven, Napier, Slaven, Rowe, Bastin, Stevens, Topping, Templeton, and others, stopped short of writing about metaphysics and politics, the burgeoning counterculture, the subject of the next portion of this chapter, would quickly pick up these threads, connect them to the blues, and reproduce the music as a vehicle for their own self expression.

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248 Murray 87.
Ideas of poetic symbolism, secondary subtexts, and political agency would be particularly attractive to the generation of youth coming of age in the sixties, and are part of what helped transition the blues from its documentation on the pages of *Blues Unlimited* early in the decade to a mainstream audience in the mid- and late-sixties. This mainstream audience would be less devoted to blues study, and as such, could be generalized as having grasped superficial sonic qualities like distorted timbre, drone, flatted sevenths, and disregard to other conservative European rubrics of tonality, homophony, and meter. These abstract concepts or impressions of “rejection”, “undisciplined” musicality, “loner” individualism, and “outside the box” and “redefining” artistry were easily transferable and malleable—“rejection” becomes “rebellion”, “untrained” and “undisciplined” musicality becomes the maverick “refusal to conform”; “outside the box” becomes “individualist god” of “intense inward focus”—in contrast to the comparatively unchanging parameters of historical fact-finding, and social contextualization, prized by Leadbitter et al. 249

**The Transition from Black Vinyl to Black Performance, 1958-1972**

The live blues that arrived in Europe was well into the era of electric amplification, and the adoption of electric guitar, bass, and even organ. It was...

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249 Feld and Brenneis 463.; where I imply that the sixties counterculture practiced shallow engagement with the swamp blues, I speak of the blurry shift between collector-fan cognoscenti fandom to a somewhat evolved version of bobby-socks fandom. The *Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures* discusses the extent to which fandom contributes to identity formation by way of “ideas of belonging, forms of distinction, credentials of authority and sources of self-esteem.” Speaking broadly, the language of authority over the swamp blues came from Leadbitter et al’s generation, and the ideas of belonging apply to the countercultural fandom. To distinguish between these two however is problematic and comfortably reductive, as “where audiences end and the realms of fandom begin is complex, uncertain, and always liable to shift.” (Pickering 235.)
a living music, experiential and meaningful. To British white youth, the blues music offered new life, experience, and political fuel. By the time black musicians were coming into the U.K., in almost all cases their music had preceded them by a few years through the increasing accessibility of American records, in part due to their licensure by English labels like London-American (mid-1950s), Pye International (1958), and Stateside (1962). Another vehicle for the dispersal of American rhythm & blues records was the combined efforts of the blues fanclubs and budding magazines who arranged British representation of indie labels on a one-by-one basis. In April 1963 Eddie Shuler and Mike Leadbitter, for instance, entered into a one-year contract for Leadbitter to be Goldband’s representative overseas. When it expired the next year, Shuler asked if they could renew for several years at a time, so a few months later in June 1964, they renewed for four years, with Mike Leadbitter acting as “Promotion Manager” for Goldband and its subsidiaries, vested with the power to release Goldband recordings on any label at any quantity as he saw fit.

Figure 45. Rider to vest Mike Leadbitter with promotional authority for Goldband Records abroad. This was the first such contract between the Blues
Eddie Shuler had never taken inventory of his recordings and did not have a catalogue when Mike Leadbitter first contacted him with discography-related questions. In the years that followed, however, not only did Leadbitter inspire Shuler to update and create a catalogue, but through their correspondence he was able to get in contact with swamp blues musicians, and for the first time document their unchaperoned utterances. *BU* began devoting hefty portions of space to interviews upon the launching of the American Folk Blues Festival (AFBF) in 1962. It had a successful initial run that began to peter approaching the 1970s; there was no 1971 festival, and after 1972 the program went on an eight-year hiatus. Partly out of fear of what was not being documented elsewhere, first-person accounts from swamp blues musicians picked up steam in those latter seventies, after Leadbitter had died. As the years went on, the prose in *BU* was increasingly in service of visual documentation. Longtime photographer for the magazine Bill Greensmith later recalled that “interviews were often extended to accommodate all the photos we wanted to use.”\(^{250}\) Before 1972, there is very little print documentation of their perspectives.

The first public printing came by correspondence between Leadbitter and Juke Boy Bonner in *BU* 51, when Juke Boy Bonner wrote a letter to the magazine in 1968. Swamp blues musicians who rose to levels of fame to have nationally publicized concerts also were interviewed around the concert date.

Slim Harpo and Lightning Slim were each interviewed by Jim Delehant, printed June and July 1969; Slim Harpo died just a month ahead of his first scheduled European tour, in January 1970. Ahead of Lightning Slim’s October tour with the AFBF 1972 he had several more interviews printed, including one with Tony Russell, and more at Melody Maker, Jazz & Blues, and Boogie Woogie & Blues Collector. Separately, John Broven interviewed Lazy Lester and Jimmy Dotson for profiles and discographies. The British documentarians believed they were annotating swamp blues current events as they queried them, and in so doing they created a garland of first-person accounts to which all following researchers, including myself, are crucially indebted. Barring foreign interest in the foundering swamp blues, the musical recordings would have been left decaying in Miller and Shuler’s desolate storage crypts, which they were when the first fieldtrips by Bastin and Leadbitter inspired their conservation. Similarly the musicians’ perspectives, personal histories, and personnel histories, had been entombed in disillusioned retirement or buried with them in Houston, California, Detroit, and across small-town Louisiana, mostly unknown to posterity. Without the

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251 Of all the grassroots efforts to aid important, yet impoverished blues musicians, BU editor Bill Greensmith said “if one artist was truly championed by BU it was Juke Boy Bonner.” Greensmith xx. In light of the album produced from the campaign funds, Leadbitter was confident in 1970 that Bonner had a “bright future”. See Simon Napier’s notes to LBS 83319.; Other early published interviews with swamp bluesmen appeared in Soul Bag (Lazy Lester 1971); Mike Leadbitter and the BU team had the largest and most in-depth interaction with swamp bluesmen of all the pre-1980s interviewers. Dennis Dithering, Bob Pearce, and Guido van Rijn interviewed Lightning Slim for the AFBF tour, this last an interview in the Dutchman’s home. These three are the totality of Lightning Slim’s print interviews. Dithering, Dennis. “Lightnin’ Slim Talkin’” Melody Maker (24 Jun 1972): 24; Pearce, Bob. “Musicians Talking: Lightnin’ Slim.” Jazz & Blues 2.2 (May 1972): 11; Rijn, Guido van. “Lightnin’ Slim Interview at My Home.” Boogie Woogie & Blues Collector 14 (1972): n.p.
1960s blues writing of Britain, the swamp blues would have much more closely risked being lost to history.

Before swamp blues records had these sponsors in Great Britain, English awareness of the music had previously been through written-word discussions in jazz and blues journals and magazines, fan club newsletters, and imported American industry journals like *Billboard* and *Cash Box*. As David Howes has pointed out, this “electric age”—in the blues, in the consumption of popular music generally, or otherwise—“ruptur[ed] the silence which had been imposed by print...” In other words, black musicians, black bodies, and black artistry had been wiped off the page during the time that their music was foremost represented as an object of print discussion. But in this second phase of the blues in Britain, starting around 1958 and which I have analogized to the British Blues *Movement*, black bodies are returned to the picture. More, living, breathing, moving black bodies were performing in front of British youth. The performance of that American blackness was a reminder of the underlying synonymity the boomer generation felt they shared with, or at least empathized with, the black experience.

Thus, we enter a phase of a new phase of blues “movement” in Britain, which in itself is twofold in meaning. In the first sense, the “movement” going on is the arrival of dark-skinned authors of the blues in Europe for the first times to perform their blues music; their music which was being swallowed whole by a demographic who had never seen a black Southerner in the flesh. The blues promoters, however, of Leadbitter’s generation who brokered the
blues tours, heralded their arrival, especially prizing the undeniable authenticity of their black-made blues. In the second sense, “movement” is British youth picked up on the blues and reinterpreting it. This appropriation at once divested the music of its expressivity of black experience while revesting it with political agency—although the political agency of a young, white, British populace. The first sense of “movement” prizes the arrival African-American musicians in the flesh; the second, the second is a commentary on the economy of that flesh.

Here, the swamp blues got reformed in white hands, again, that were coming of age in radical, Labour Party Great Britain, now harnessing and redefining the blues impulse as symbolic mascots for hybrid consumption-mad, countercultural crusades.252 These youth map the shell of the Blues Idiom onto the circumstances of their 1960s counterculture, broadly defined, and take the wheel both within the music, such as Mayall and Clapton’s re-interpretations, and without it in forms like psychedelic experimentation, and the hippie culture embrace of earthiness as a white interpretation of “authenticity”. These things together, where countercultural and consumer energies converge, constitute what Michael J. Kramer called “hip capitalism” in his recent The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture. Hip capitalism negotiates the appearance of political-activist motives with the pop consumerism that proliferated in postwar surplus; in

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252 Howes 171-2.; Debolt and Baugess explain that this generation’s rejection or redefinition of traditional values, and the notion of continued values between older and younger generations were traits widely associated with postwar privilege. Debolt and Baugess, Eds. Encyclopedia of the Sixties: A Decade of Culture and Counterculture. Greenwood Press, 2011: 80-81, 735-8.
other words, it matches the fundamental commercialism of the boomer generation with the idealized rejection of commercialism that was congenital to this generation.\footnote{253}

In this era of live-performance swamp blues, then, we witness the commercialization of a British sixties subculture, itself based upon the commercialization of American blackness. The image of an anticommercial, perceived-primitive folk artist has more purchase with white middle-class bohemians—American and British alike—than the reckoning with poor black musicians working (dare say hustling) to make ends meet across multiple vocations, whether by manual or skilled labor or through music-making. The initial attraction to the black musical performance, formerly heard on record, 

\footnote{253 Michael J. Kramer’s Republic of Rock offers a fascinating and eye-opening connection of Hip Capitalism and Hip Militarism (this latter being the Vietnam-based experience of the former), and how a sneaky commercialism formed within the subculture that had originated to fight it. In 1979 Fredric Jameson famously pointed to a similar analysis of the Culture Industry in the works of Adorno and Horkheimer. He noted that “The force of the Adorno-Horkheimer analysis of the culture industry...lies in its demonstration of the unexpected and imperceptible introduction of commodity structure into the very form and content of the work of art itself.” (Jameson 132) As Kramer points out, the commodity structure introduced in his case studies of rock music in Vietnam came partly from the industry created under the aegis of the British Blues Boom. The commodity structure, he explained, had always been in the blues boom in embryo, given that the blues following had been built upon the purchase of consumable relics. In other words, one of the sources of hip capitalism was the consumer cachet held by key-attributes “lost”, “forgotten”, and “undiscovered” blues records. He emphasizes that the so-called counterculture had no central community, but instead was diverse, and provisional. This characterization maps well onto the scattered and partial massmarket reception of the swamp blues.}

After the inherent commercialization that drove a British fan-base to embrace the blues, the “counterculture” part came in thanks to a few historic convergences. Marshall McLuhan believed that sixties youth were the first to live out what he called “the logic of the electric age,” in their emphasis on full-bodily involvement By this he emphasized that for them dance, dress, music, and hair were all constituent elements of the self. Each of these facets corroborated not only a generational ideal “look” but also a generational “sound”—which I argue drove the accelerated adoption of black American musical aesthetics, and the confounding ease with which the boomer generation seemed to wear the mantle of black experience—followed by a generational “touch” that unified all the senses. Touch, in particular, being the segue to psychedelic experience, in the ilk of a boomer surrogate of the sublime. (Howes 171-2, citing Carey 1969: 288). See Adorno, Theodor and Richard Leppert. Essays on Music. Transl. Susan H. Gillespie. UCLA, 2002; See Jameson, Fredric. “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture.” Social Text 1 (1979): 130-148.; See Kramer, Michael J. The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture. Oxford, 2013.
and having now become “Live” in Britain, transmutes to a new reception of the blues. Now, those masses who had previously consumed black musical sounds were face-to-face with a black performative performance, of a specific brand of blues that aligns with the preferred mythic discourse of those white middle-class youth.\footnote{Brackett, David. “Preaching Blues.” \textit{BMRJ} 2012: 115.}


\textbf{African-American Blues Musicians in the Flesh}

In May 1964 Leadbitter wrote to Shuler that he was friends with “the guy who brings blues artists to Europe”, and that if Shuler could contact Juke Boy Bonner, “there is a strong chance that I could get [him] over.” This would offer would not materialize for five more years, until Bonner’s tour with the 1969 American Folk and Blues Festival (AFBF), pictured in Figure 46 above, but it points to the fact that Juke Boy Bonner, through his own correspondence with Leadbitter, was aware of interest in the swamp blues
overseas, and more tangibly, of paying jobs as early as 1964. The veritable era of blues tours, festivals, and the festivalization of American blues, began in 1962. With this wave of live performance, British fans and the white, British rhythm & blues bands that were paired with the American performers on the spot, finally connected bodies to voices, persons to narrative personas, and improvisational wit to the flourishes pressed onto the blues record.255

The collecting impulse of the prior two followings of African-American music in Britain, the prewar jazz intelligentsia and the postwar blues pioneers, carried over into the throngs of boomers who were picking up the blues through the mainstream. Only the material they collected was not records-focused, but performance-focused. Attending festivals, for these youth, was a mode of collection. The collection of experiences was heightened by the hype of festivalization that accompanied the big package blues tours. The ultimate commercial object became not the material artifacts of the subculture—records new or old—but of the culture the records signified; that supposed living culture for which the records were presumed surrogates. The folkloristic paradigm that collectors worked by directly presaged the commercialized “hip capitalism” subculture the records would spawn.

Once arrived, Mike Rowe recalled, “We talked to all the artists that came over, who were generally amazed that anybody had even heard of them, let alone their records, or that people wanted to talk to them. I think we engendered a tremendous amount of goodwill among the artists, which was

really nice.” The surprise of blues musicians at their warm reception in Europe is not a new theme; In 1963 John Lee Hooker said both he and Shakey Jake wanted to stay in Europe for good. In his 1993 autobiography, Buddy Guy recalled feeling like he had been a relatively unknown musician in the U.S., and was amazed at the crowd’s response during his nearly back-to-back first tours in England. Just a few performances in he knew it was more than fluke: “I felt like somebody there...” The wild crowds, perhaps it should be specified, were not made of the now 30- and 40-something blues writers who knew the musicians. It was a mainstream, boomer youth who were filling the theaters and buying out concerts. Mike Leadbitter felt sure of the continued promise of the blues in England: on January 7, 1964 he wrote to Eddie Shuler, “1964 is going to be a blues year here in England; no doubt about this. Artists like Muddy Waters and Sonny Boy Williamson are in the hit parade! So Eddie, if you have any good old blues in the can which you'll never release in The States can you send it to me? I’ve got plenty of plans, if only I can have enough good r&b or blues to play around with.” The promise Juke Boy held in Europe could not have come as more of a shock to the Goldband recordman, however. Usually in their correspondence, neither minced words, and it was unusual for either one to repeat himself across letters. In three letters back to back, however, Shuler reiterated his disbelief at the disparity between American and British r&b markets. “[D]ownhome blues is a thing of the past in this

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country...[there is] a very limited market.” he said. Two weeks later he wrote again with incredulity, “It’s interesting that r&b is so popular in your country. Here you can’t give the stuff away.” And still in disbelief another month later, he states plainly “the type of music he [Juke Boy Bonner] plays will not make money in this country.”\textsuperscript{257}

And yet, in the midst of generally positive receptions all around, the old gatekeeping still remained: Neil Slaven, joint compiler with Leadbitter of the \textit{BRSD}, wrote that he thought Buddy Guy was among the first performers to “[do] it the way he did it at home”, and to model for young British musicians “a new kind of authenticity.” T-Bone Walker toured not long after Guy, and after an infamously rocky start with the white Skiffle ensemble backing him, Walker replicated Guy’s performance of a younger 1960s modern electric guitar player. While American blues, and rhythm & blues, were kings in the records scene and radio, jukebox, and coffee houses, as early as October 1962—just as blues festival stagers were promising pay dirt—Robert Schwartz tells us in \textit{How Britain Got the Blues} that British bands playing rhythm & blues were already the resident live music of London, then Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Edinburgh.\textsuperscript{258} The momentum of American blues was tentatively hitting its stride, but would soon be lost amid the success of British blues-rock groups, and their spinoff subgenres of psychedelic and progressive rock.


\textsuperscript{258} Neil Slaven’s favorable opinion of Buddy Guy’s performance is reprinted in Guy’s 1993 autobiography. Wilcock, Guy, and Siciliano, 67-8.; Schwartz 128.
The British Invasion, 1964-1967

Meanwhile, musical and pop cultural milestones are being set on U.S. soil by British imports. On 18 January 1964 the Beatles enter the “Bubbling Under” charts at #45. On January 26 “I Want to Hold Your Hand” reaches #1 on the Hot 100 and holds its position for 7 weeks, only to be replaced by their own “Can’t Buy Me Love” which holds #1 for an additional 8 weeks. The Beatles album takes the #1 pop albums position shortly thereafter, and for the next months, Beatles songs occupy the top three slots consecutively on pop charts. On February 9 the Beatles appear on the Ed Sullivan show to a record 73 million viewers, setting the record for the most-watched television program in history. Immediately they created a sensation. For many historians, February 1964 marks the beginning of the British invasion.259

Even though the invasion was a fossilizing extinction event for black r&b in America, beat music appealed to American youth for many of the same reasons that the blues appealed to young Brits: emotional unleash, the welcome loss of Victorian facades, notions of authenticity, and individuality were all mirrored by both sides of the Atlantic. The obvious irony it that British Invasion catharsis and candor was a direct pantomime of African-American music reckoned passé in the U.S. and that was just starting to make a splash back in the U.K. As Merseybeat and Skiffle acts continued to proliferate and wash ashore in the U.S. lesser-stylized blues-inspired acts like

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Eric Clapton, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Jimmy Page, and Eric Burdon are dubbed the British Invasion “second wave”. They affected the timbres, timing, musicianship, and improvisations of their blues heroes, and were spawning the blues-rock movement back in the U.K.

**III. The British Blues Boom: Blues-Rock Idolatry, 1967-1974**

John Mayall and Eric Clapton were two important protagonists in the blues-rock boom. In the form of the narrative that aligns the lived experiences of blue-collar locals to that of African Americans, these two transitional Hermes figures helped to translate the American roots music into a relevant music for modern youth. Where the blues were bold, white British interpretations could be raucous; its emotional transparency begat a new affective freedom for the guitar amid the instrument’s rising importance in the rock’n’roll and blues ensembles. The modern electric medium as modeled by Jimmy Reed and Buddy Guy held further appeal to the ripening Boomer generation.\(^{260}\)

Mayall and Clapton did not belong to the progressive generation that would soon gorge itself on the music of ageing black Americans, but these two musicians were pivotal in reshaping, or perhaps reframing, that music for

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boomers. Eric Clapton would stand in history as a tastemaker of the blues, with mass popular appeal on both sides of the Atlantic that led him to be called the springboard “who introduced blues” to broad American and British audiences after 1965. In a sense, he was a missionary of the blues, as suggested by the frequent religious language associated with his legacy of evangelizing for the blues. The two soon-to-be guitar gods fashioned themselves after blues idols of their own. Buddy Guy has been called the “catalyst behind Clapton.” Following, if history characterizes Clapton as having spread the blues gospel, then John Mayall had been its most zealous living disciple. Considered for a time the “most serious and dedicated blues player in Britain”, Mayall’s role in the boom was in mentoring young talent in the medium.261 In other words, a generation of British youth based a large part of their understanding of blues music on Mayall and Clapton’s interpretations of the blues.

**Mayall and Clapton as Instruments of Transition and Transmission**

In this section I configure Mayall and Clapton as characteristic members of the Silent Generation, a generation who grew up amid jazz fandom in Britain and who in 1964 were in their twenties and early thirties. Leadbitter, Broven, and the rest of the *BU* team were also a part of this generation. I am interpreting their approach to the blues tradition as one that abides by the philosophies attributed to their generation, taking their role to have been to “save” the blues for generations following. I contrast Mayall and

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261 Schwartz 193.
Clapton’s figuration in pop culture to that of their fans, a following who as members of the Boomer generation, or the teenagers of 1964. They have been characterized as approaching the blues with intent to enjoy, as opposed to uphold; to take pleasure in the music as opposed to venerate; and to have celebrated the hedonism they found in the blues idiom and reconfigured it, believing it their own.

Mayall and Clapton, born 1933 and 1945 respectively, happen to bookend what has been called the Silent Generation, the “Sandwich Generation”, and the “Peculiar” generation. Born between the great wars, often to WWII vets, and coming of age in the 1950s, this so-called “sandwiched” portion of the American and British populations identified less with the sixties counterculture and more with the “adaptive” mode of living often attributed to their cohort. The cold war, McCarthy hearings, and Roosevelt’s passing were the national political traumas of their childhoods, as opposed to the assassinations of JFK and Martin Luther King, Jr., advances in space science and technology, and civil rights era molds that formed the stereotypical Boomer consciousness. The folklore boom and what Karl Hagstrom Miller has termed the folkloric paradigm are the products of this Silent Generation who are characterized as being highly interested in conservation values and who attribute lesser importance to openness to change values. The Silent Generation keywords “conservancy” and “benevolence” chime with the folkloric impulse to safeguard folk traditions,

\footnote{262 The Silent Generation is widely defined as those born between 1925 and 1945, narrowly defined, 1933-1945.}
especially isolated or at-risk traditions such as the African-American country and folk blues music tradition that includes the swamp blues. A sense of “duty” and “responsibility” toward family and organizational groups further silhouette the sterile encyclopedic, or museological bent many folklorists displayed with respect to living traditions. In short, a textbook blues fan of the silent generation would act in guardianship of the blues, and promote a folkloristic revival past, unchanging idioms. The BU team were cast in this mould.

In contrast, the quintessential member of the Boomer generation is characterized as independent, a maverick, highly prizing openness to change, actively seeking personal challenges, self-enhancement, and self-gratification. The first three of these traits map onto an interest in crossing social, racial, economic barriers; the last two foreshadow the upcoming drug culture and sexual revolution. These qualities together situate the appeal of African-American roots culture to white British and American youth as the result of a convergence of generational ideals.263 In other words, if the stoic Silent Generation believed in fostering a “kinder, gentler”, and more socially conscious nation, then their Boomer children brought that meditation on social rights onto the world stage.

John Mayall and the Blues Breaker’s 1967 album Crusade bears witness to this paradoxical social-minded self-interest. The album’s title suggests Mayall is taking up arms in search of converts to the blues; the

263 It should be noted that in the U.S., American youth were more interested in fostering and pursuing white folk culture, which would spawn the hippie and neo-folk movements soon following. American interest in the white past, and disinterest in the black recent past, stands in contrast to English interest in black American culture.
musical content is intended to be homage to Mayall’s blues heroes Albert and Freddie King, Buddy Guy, Sonny Boy Williamson, Willie Dixon, and Otis Rush. The record sleeve is a visual carnival of symbolic bombast.

Furthermore, as the era of LP album-as-art took over approaching 1970, there was a perceived devaluing of black music and artists in the record industry.\textsuperscript{264} The creative efforts put into the record sleeve and the blatancy of Mayall’s political mascotting exemplify its intended status as a symbolic beacon of the zeitgeist, or a cultural object of study, whereas black music continued to be perceived as functional, simple, music. The album of black blues was still just a string of songs, no matter how good the groove. The Blues Breakers, on the other hand, were groovy, political agents.

Designed by Mayall, the covert art features repeated Christ-like images of a shirtless Mayall, with shoulder-length shaggy hair and a middle part that highlights the narrow, elongated nose associated with both white European standards of beauty and Western Messianic iconography. The main image, in blue, is of Mayall’s bust backgrounded by the posts of large picket signs in front of a tall corn-row, which recall imagery of the hill, and the stipes of the three crosses at Calvary. Five subordinate images feature the rest of the band bearing picket signs (or war “crusade” banners) with pro-blues messages. One image is filtered in green, one in yellow, and three are in faded color. Two of these are also situated in the pastoral field, which alludes both to the physical country setting and figurative folk roots of the blues. The other three images place the band against the backdrop of a mossy stone wall, which positions

\textsuperscript{264} Wald 252, 256.
the band on the mossy softer, and safer side of walled-in industrial sites of blues collar labor—or in its most extreme, the socioeconomic prison confinement of African Americans. Further driving home the blues-as-personal crusade are the group’s picket signs that read “THE BLUES FOREVER”, “JUST LISTEN,” “OTIS RUSH FOR BRITISH TOUR,” plus two concert posters for John Mayall’s Blues Breakers, grouping their own work with the holy subject itself. The most aggressive and coincidentally the most self-interested of them reads “WHY ARE THE BLUES BREAKERS LIVING IN EXILE IN ENGLAND,” and the most blatantly evangelizing proclaims “THE BLUES NEEDS OUR SUPPORT.” The viewer is given no clear view of any person’s face, each of which conceals features obstructed by curtains of hair, sunglasses, heavy shadow, or disposition to the camera. This de-emphasis of the face ostensibly foregrounds the mission over the musician, a visual gesture that in itself is more diabolic self-promotion disguised as altruism.

Figure 47. Images of picket signs reading, from L-R, in the left image “THE BLUES NEEDS OUR SUPPORT!”; “WHY ARE THE BLUES BREAKERS LIVING IN EXILE IN ENGLAND”; and a concert poster for an Otis Rush tour;

265 For more on the landscape as prisonscape and limited typographies of being for African Americans in Southern Louisiana, see Thadious Davis’ chapter on Ernest Gaines’ literary use of the same, “Parishes and Prisons” in Soundscapes, 291-334.


It is the end of 1967, and Mike Leadbitter is committing the education from his Louisiana fieldwork to paper. He publishes Crowley, Louisiana Blues in 1968 and From the Bayou: The Story of Goldband Records in 1969.

In the interim his and Neil Slaven’s pet project of ten years has come out, the groundbreaking Blues Records 1943-1966. His nose buried in writing, Mike Leadbitter had barely noticed the climbing record sales and mounting cultural interest in Blues Unlimited’s early issues. The collecting impulse is alive and well in Britain, and buyer interest has shifted away from the empirical, and preservationist pursuits of Leadbitter, Napier, Slaven, Broven, and Vernon’s generation. Young record buyers’ choices have more to do with activist politics than history.
Once albums like these martyred American bluesmen, whatever momentum there had been in the mainstream market for American live blues was lost as the new generation of British blues-rockers took off. They were the new pantheon, and their salvage rhetoric for the blues only deepened its grave. To British blues rockers, the American blues players were sacred, living salvage materials whose careers had been “revived” by the blues researcher communities. To large-scale festival promoters, American blues players fueled their American folk tours and the festival industry’s accompanying live-performance recording syndicates from companies like Liberty, Blue Horizon, L+R, and CBS through the 1970s and into the early 1980s. To the British mainstream audiences, American blues players were little more than fading relics. And last, to American audiences, while big names like Muddy Waters, T-Bone Walker, Buddy Guy, and other headliners continued gigging home and abroad, the returning swamp blues heroes of Europe mostly went back to mundane lives. In the U.K., lacking a preponderance of live performances of American blues musicians in the flesh, the record returns to importance.

Scholars of British popular music of this era have said that interest in the blues, American or British revisions of it, faded somewhat anticlimactically, with no decisive shift to mark the beginning of the denouement nor any dirge to mark its death. Scholars of the British Invasion have noted similarly that the end of that phase remains in question. The best conclusion proposes that both were subsumed into the American popular culture landscape: the pop side of Swinging London and Carnaby Street dovetailing into the American mod scene, and the American blues-fueled
blues-rock of the Stones, the Kinks, Cream, and the Who reinjecting their appropriations in American folk, progressive, and psychedelic rock.  

IV. The British Blues Postmortem, 1989-2016: Canonization

In this last stagnant, yet longest-lasting state, the swamp blues rest a safe, marketable, capitalist consumer product designative and representative of an unencumbered place, safely tucked in a specific, and permanent moment in time. Grounded in authentic, undeveloped Louisiana soils, the swamp blues would hang in an unchanging tableau vivant until new crops of labels or series would reproduce them digitally. This fixity of the swamp blues in place and time made it an attractive prospect for reuse and repurposability in the form of British blues-rock covers early on, while maintaining a safe and uninvolved distance from the original perpetrators. The swamp bluesmen thus joined many other African-American musicians and musical forms in history in becoming part of a cycle of disposability to white artists and audiences. After this last “boom” iteration of the swamp blues in Britain, the swamp blues held a frozen attractiveness to white audiences, who just as easily consumed and disposed of them, whereupon the swamp bluesmen returned to their lives in the U.S., relatively anonymous and generally impoverished, where the blues had long since died.

All but two of the original generation swamp bluesmen (Lazy Lester and the former Guitar Jr.) died between 1970 and 1999, starting with Slim Harpo in January 1970 and ending with the youngest of the iconic players, Katie Webster in 1999. The Louisiana blues scene died along with most of its participants, trickling off without fanfare or eulogy across three decades. It was revived in name by a second generation in the late eighties and nineties by musicians who named their albums “swamp blues” but played outside the original aesthetic (Rafael Neal, Larry Garner, Battlerack Scatter, T Bone Singleton). Then in the late 2000s, the original swamp blues began to receive recognition again as part of a broad return of popular interest to Louisiana indigenous musics that came after the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Beyond New Orleans jazz, this interest reached SWLA Cajun and Zydeco, and swamp pop. In the festival format, for example, the most successful and with the highest-profile among live audiences is the Ponderosa Stomp Festival in New Orleans. It is named for the Lazy Lester song and devoted to the “unsung heroes of American music”.

The Return of the Record, or the Rise of the Reissue Label, 1972+
With the declining success of the giant promo tours of Lippman and Rau in Europe starting around 1972, an age of commemoration and memorialization arises in Britain. Together with the Cajun Revival ongoing in

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267 Among the earliest academic responses to these storms’ endangerment of New Orleans’ musical culture were Blues for New Orleans, a joint effort from Nick Spitzer, John Szwed, and Robert Farris Thompson that came out of the University of Pennsylvania Press in 2006. After the wave of reactionary works came new scholarly attention to the area. See, for instance, Matt Sakakeeny’s 2008 dissertation “Instruments of Power: New Orleans Brass Bands and the Politics of Performance.” Mick Burns’ Keeping the Beat on the Street: The New Orleans Brass Band Renaissance (LSU 2006) is nonacademic, but was the first book to cover the brass revival.
Louisiana, the swamp blues get swept into several Louisiana-themed packages that canonized Louisiana cultural artifacts while erasing both the contributions of non-Creole black actors from the historic landscape of SWLA and the swamp blues aesthetic from its soundscape. When Lightning Slim and Moses “Whispering” Smith’s tenure ended at the AFBF 1972, the last swamp bluesmen were returned from Europe’s grand stages. In Britain and the U.S. alike, swamp blues musicians’ records had at this point been out of print (if ever in print) for ten or more years. Meanwhile, swamp blues musicians had been dying out, starting with Slim Harpo’s unexpected death in January 1970, followed by Lightning Slim’s in 1974, Hop Wilson in 1975, Juke Boy Bonner and Big Chenier in 1978, which both lent propriety to the notion of creating lifetime-achievement-minded albums and attention, as well as providing a fillip to sales of their recordings.

As such, Goldband, distributed mostly by Charly and Flyright, and Excello, distributed mostly by Flyright and Blue Horizon, represented an important source of continued, and renewed influxes of material in the first half of the 1970s. In 1975 pioneer Bruce Bastin made his esteem of Goldband clear. In a corrective to Jazz Journal he wrote, “Goldband...is only the most significant blues label in Louisiana.” (original emphasis).268 Reissue labels run by former pioneers of the blues revival, like Robin Gosden and Bruce Bastin’s Flyright, Mike Vernon’s Blue Horizon (with much help from Simon Napier, he often says), Mike Rowe’s P.W.B., plus Ace, Storyville, Charly, and Sonet

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greatly contributed to sustaining interest in the downhome blues. In typical pendular fashion, the swamp blues had returned to the underground and now the reissue labels stood for special interest cachet, despite the fact that these records had been out of print for a decade or more in the U.S., and interest in them dead longer than that.

Another manifestation of the living-legend memorialization of the swamp blues, new blues magazines crop up just as mainstream interest in the blues is evaporating. At the height of the mushroom, Neil Slaven and Mike Vernon open *R&B Monthly* (1964), followed by the establishment of *Blues World* (1965), *Jefferson* (Sweden 1968), and *Soul Bag* (1968). At the tail end of the boom, *Living Blues* opens in Chicago (1970) followed by *Block* (ND 1975), *Blues & Rhythm: The Gospel Truth* (UK 1984), and Broven’s *Juke Blues* (1985) run with former *BU* editors Cilla Huggins and Bez Turner. The compilation of mega-discographies and mega-encyclopedias on the blues also increases in the 1970s and 1980s, as detailed earlier in this chapter. This new wave of interest is simultaneous to the fadeout of *BU* which ended its run at #149 in Winter 1987, further signifying the close of one generation of blues writing and research, and the rise of a new one. Where the stalwart early blues journals did not close, many underwent fundamental changes such as changeovers of editors, publishers, and housing, like the 1983 relocation of *Living Blues* from Chicago to the University of Mississippi.

**Reissue Phantasms**

The swamp blues had their first wide exposure to retail masses, and not just those privy to the inventory of specialist dealers, came from Stateside in
1963 and 1964. Two albums were released with considerable success as *The Real R&B* and its follow-up *Authentic R&B*. These albums claim, rightly so, to be the first album issues of swamp blues released in the U.K., which they did just as *Blues Unlimited* was setting up shop. The fronts of each proudly name Slim Harpo and Lightnin’ Slim, whom sleeve-note writer Guy Stevens says were at the time equal to each other in fame, although, he continues, the former had a hit in 1961 and the latter had yet to have a hit record. These albums exposed the audible swamp blues to Britain’s widest audience yet, and their notes were possibly the first and only contextualized, and localized information on the music that the wider pop audience would have. Heavy was the burden, then, in Guy Stevens’ influence on the commercial future of the swamp blues. He fixed them in a wave of waxing popularity first: “Fortunately,” Stevens opened, “the authentic exponents of this music are becoming increasingly popular in their own right over here, and consequently many fine recordings are now being issued in this country.” But the immensity of talent and discovery lay in Jay Miller’s hands as a scout in Stevens’ account, instead of in the masterful songwriting or poetic performances of Slim Harpo and Lightning Slim, the catchy consistency of Lazy Lester songs, or the encapsulated zeitgeist of Lonesome Sundown and Silas Hogan’s troubled blues.

Following, the album falsely historicizes Jay Miller’s patriarchal place over the swamp blues, at once contributing to the hyped Jay Miller Mythology I will discuss in a moment, and to the erasure of the swamp blues musicians from their own, admittedly rich, legacy. “The man who is responsible for
discovering and recording these and many other excellent blues singers in the ‘delta’ area goes by the name of Jay Miller. [...] Slim Harpo...was soon spotted by Jay Miller, who signed him to a recording contract immediately...” Jay Miller did not discover them. Lightning Slim was introduced to Miller by a Baton Rouge deejay, and Slim Harpo and Lazy Lester were brought in by Lightning Slim. So far was Miller’s interest in recording Harpo that two years into Harpo’s residence as Lightning’s harpist, Lightning had to make private special request of Miller to get Harpo a session. Every one of the other swamp blues players from these albums also were not scouted or found, but came to Miller by third parties or on their own: Jimmy Anderson was introduced by the bus driver and band manager Edge Smith. Lonesome Sundown approached Miller on his own with demo tape in hand. Slim Harpo brought in Silas Hogan and his Rhythm Ramblers band. Silas Hogan later brought in his friend Moses “Whispering” Smith. Stevens’, and Stateside’s last disservice to the swamp blues was that nowhere on the sleeves of its three swamp blues albums does it make the connection between the “authentic” and “real” rhythm & blues on the records and their Louisiana roots. The city of Baton Rouge is mentioned several times in passing as the hometowns or current residences of individual artists, and Baton Rouge is (mistakenly) identified as the terminus of the Mississippi delta. Crowley is cited as where Miller records musicians before sending the tapes to Nashboro Record Co. in Nashville. Nowhere are the two words “Louisiana” and “blues” found paired, even
though all three albums are of exclusively Jay Miller swamp blues recordings.\textsuperscript{269}

Figure 49. Stateside's \textit{Authentic R&B} Stateside SL 10068 and \textit{The Real R&B} Stateside SL 10112, released in 1963 and 1964 and featuring swamp blues musicians, from most represented to least, Slim Harpo, Lightning Slim, Lonesome Sundown, Silas Hogan, Jimmy Anderson, Moses “Whispering” Smith, Lazy Lester, and Leroy Washington.\textsuperscript{270}

Figure 50. Rear sleeves to the above, where Guy Stevens’ historicization erases the roles of African-American blues players from the music. “The man who is


\textsuperscript{270} Leon Austin, Earl Gaines, and Arthur Gunter are artists who each have one song on SL 10112, but given their relative irrelevance to the recording activities in Lake Charles and Crowley, I do not list their names.
responsible for discovering and recording these and many other excellent blues singers in the ‘delta’ area goes by the name of Jay Miller.” Stevens wrote, continuing “He [Slim Harpo] was soon spotted by Jay Miller, who signed him to a recording contract immediately…” (SL 10068).

This is one example of the means by which swamp blues music was able to make it to the top ranks of British pop (sub)consciousness, but their names and the in-placedness of their music as a cultural product of SWLA was fully unknown to the same British ears who could hum the virile opening guitar slide from “I’m a King Bee”, and the earwig ostinato of the rhythm section in Jimmy Anderson’s nasal refrain “Keep on naggin’, naggin’est woman in the land”. After a line of questioning about whether the Rolling Stones re-discovered Slim Harpo for Americans, in a 1968 interview with Rolling Stone magazine Mick Jagger famously responded rhetorically, “I mean, what’s the point in listening to us doing ‘I’m a King Bee’ when you can listen to Slim Harpo doing it?”.

The point was exactly that most people listening to the Rolling Stones do “I’m a King Bee” did not know that Slim Harpo did it.

The appearance of these Stateside albums were the first in what would become a race to reissue swamp blues recordings among the European labels including Stateside, Storyville, Flyright, and Blue Horizon. The race would last about twenty years. At first, these reissues initiated a cosmic ripple in the lives of Louisiana blues musicians who remained unnoticed in the American market. On the one hand, these reissues brought renewed attention to some, who began receiving letters from European blues magazines for interviews, and requests for how to get more of their recordings. On the other hand,

musicians were realizing, especially those who had not traveled to Europe themselves, that their music was well-known there, it was selling well, and there was significant interest in the personal lives and careers of these musicians. In some senses, interest in the swamp blues was at an all-time high thanks to the sheer number of blues magazines that had proliferated by the mid-1980s. But for all the attention, and given such widespread familiarity with old Zynn, Feature, Goldband, and Excello records, why were they the last to know? Sore wounds over dodged payments, crooked contracts, and embezzlement were re-opened.

Jay Miller’s blues had meanwhile also been the subject of countless articles and interviews over the years in now-defunct blues magazines. Much of this attention is due to the efforts of Bruce Bastin at Flyright, whose particular contributions to the reissue market curated the development of what I have called the “Jay Miller Mythology” through the indiscreetly named Legendary Jay Miller Sessions series that I have evoked throughout this dissertation. Through this series, Flyright reshaped the swamp blues for consumption in the U.K., and consequently for the U.S. since the swamp blues’ transition to CD has been almost in carbon copies of the old Flyright packages.

Before I delve into the LJMS, a brief situation of Flyright’s beginnings. Flyright was a U.K. reissue label founded in 1969 from the former Jan & Dil label, which had been set up in 1966 by John Broven. Flyright was incorporated in 1970 by blues revival pioneers Mike Leadbitter, Simon Napier, John Broven, Robin Gosden, and Bruce Bastin. Because of these
fourfold direct ties between Flyright and *Blues Unlimited*, the Flyright productions tend to share the same idealism and sentimentality as *BU* pieces had over the years. Similarly was the label’s Louisiana bias clear from the beginning: fresh from a fieldtrip to Lake Charles and Houston, Leadbitter wrote to *Billboard* in August 1969 stating Flyright’s first releases “feature authentic Southern blues recorded in the South.” Juke Boy Bonner’s LP 3501 was first, followed by a two-album set titled *Jambalaya on the Bayou* “devoted to all aspects of Louisiana blues.” A *Melody Maker* review of Vol. 2 called the collection an “intriguing selection” and recognized its contents as part of a discrete and already recognized musical grouping, addressing potential buyers as “Those with a taste for Louisiana and Gulf Coast blues”. They did not, however, mark it “RECOMMENDED.”  

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272 The Flyright LP catalogue shows a magnitude of Louisiana-centric research that was going on from the world’s foremost blues researchers. Suitably, other region-centric series from Flyright each came from the work of a specialized contributor, like David Harrison, Bruce Bastin, and Kip Lornell’s work in the Carolinas, John Cowley and the early country blues, Mike Rowe with JOB Records and Alan Balfour with Cobra, Kip Lornell on Albany, and John Broven on the New York City and New Orleans repertoires. Leadbitter certainly led the front on the Louisiana and Texas repertoire from Goldband, and Bruce Bastin wrote everything for the first two-thirds of the *LJMS Louisiana* coverage. However, the burden of research and note-writing for Louisiana repertoire was shared by numerous resident contributors. John Broven was the house expert on New Orleans, having just come off the publication of his still-seminal *Walking to New Orleans* (Pelican 1974), but he also contributed to thirteen *LJMS* album texts directly and another two indirectly through citations of his book *South to Louisiana* (Pelican 1983) and articles. Ray Topping contributed to the discographies of thirteen albums himself; Mike Leadbetter’s writing informed six albums even after his death. James La Rocca, Dave Travis, Wayne Russell, Terrance Patison, Norbert Hess, Chris Strachwitz, Ann Savoy, Lee Hildebrand and Paul Harris all earned reference by name for their contributions, by way of interviews they permitted to be reprinted (interviews of Katie Webster, Lionel Prevost, and Rockin’ Sidney with Paul Harris; Clarence Garlow with Norbert Hess; Silas Hogan with Terrance Patison; Jimmy Dotson and Rockin’ Sidney with John Broven), or by whose record collections the discographies and timelines were clarified (Ray Topping, John Broven) and sometimes even dubbed (Chris Strachwitz)! Musicians Harry Simoneaux, Al Terry, Abe Manuel Jimmy Newman, and Johnnie Allan also are thanked by name for their aid and interviews, some of which stood in for the perspectives of deceased bandmates.; “Soul: FILET OF SOUL.” *Billboard* (23 Aug 1969): 79.; Leadbitter, Mike. *Jambalaya on the Bayou Vol. 1: Cajun Dance & Blues*. Sleeve notes. Flyright Records LP 3502, UK 1969.; Broven, John. *Jambalaya on the Bayou Vol. 2: The Blues*. Flyright Records
Much of what we know of Miller’s recording process and output sprang from a handful of separate and joint visits to Miller’s attic space by researchers John Broven, Mike Leadbitter, Robin Gosden, and Bruce Bastin. After first making contact by letter, Broven and Leadbitter had introduced themselves to Miller as record researchers, cofounders of Blues Unlimited, and critics seeking independent label blues records for review. Their correspondence culminated in a 1970 visit to Louisiana from Leadbitter, Broven, and Robin Gosden.

Bastin especially was amazed in 1975 by what he found in Jay Miller’s “awe-inspiring and perplexing array of master tapes” in the storage space.

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above the old studio. As they dug through unlabeled and mislabeled tape boxes—Bastin occasionally framed album notes with a narration of how particular tapes came to be discovered (see Figure 52)—the hours blurred into days, and when he returned home he quickly mapped out a plan to release their findings on a series to be named after the producer Bastin wrote in 1971 that there were initially 18 albums planned, with a possible expansion to “over twenty”. The first 8 would be released simultaneously in 1976. What he did not expect was for the series to go on for 55 albums, involve half a dozen genres and 158 different title artists, nor did he foresee the process taking sixteen years to complete. Bastin wrote the sleeve notes for 45 of the albums, covering all but eight of the swamp blues releases. Other note writers on the blues are Ray Templeton (Vols. 32, 56), John Broven (Vols. 43, 49), Dave Williams (Vols. 47, 52), Paul Harris (Vol. 50), and Jeff Hannusch (Vol. 55). The 55-volume series counts 635 cuts in all, nearly half of which are swamp blues. Four albums are devoted to Lightning Slim who is by far the most represented title artist across the series, three to Lonesome Sundown, three to Slim Harpo, two to Lazy Lester, and two to Katie Webster, the only pianist and the only woman to receive special recognition in the series. Four others are devoted to single musicians and the rest of the swamp blues albums are compilations. The representation of swamp blues artists across the series by number of credited songs is listed in Table 7 below.
Table 7. Representation of swamp blues musicians in the *LJMS* by number of songs credited to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musician</th>
<th>Songs</th>
<th>Other Musicians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lightning Slim</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Charles Maddog Sheffield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slim Harpo</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Jimmy Dotson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonesome Sundown</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Blue Charlie Morris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy Lester</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Clarence Locksley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie Webster</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Henry Gray/Grey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabby Thomas</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Ramblin’ Hi Harris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silas Hogan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sylvester Buckley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leroy Washington</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Joe Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel Torrence</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarence Garlow</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Blue Boy Dorsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy Anderson</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Honey Boy Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Calhoun /</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tal Miller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vince Monroe /</td>
<td>/1</td>
<td>Whispering Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vince Monroe</td>
<td>/1</td>
<td>Wild Bill Phillips</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The early installments of the series from 1976 and 1977 (Vols. 1-10) introduce and contextualize Miller’s recordings, specifically that which distinguished them as a discernibly singular style of blues played in South Louisiana. Bastin’s writing has an encyclopedic, no-frills approach whose clarity helps to contextualize the music from the haze of confusion he found it in. Early LP sleeves tended to follow the same formula: an introduction to the artist(s) and brief biography, a discussion of some or all of the tracks and the extent to which they may be considered representative of the “Louisiana/Miller” sound, fitted with a sprinkling of comments on the circumstances of the session. Over fifty volumes later, by the last releases in 1988 and 1989, the anthologists’ notes presuppose a familiarity with the Miller sound, moreover not just with the sound but also its players. “Louisiana has become synonymous with the swamp-pop sound which I shall not attempt to describe...” summarizes Vol. 52, followed later by a cutting to swamp blues shorthand: the “Crowley studio regulars...”

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274 Broven 2010, 4.; Bastin FLY LP 517, 518, 529 all say same awe-inspiring quote.; Of 635 individual tracks across the *LJMS*, 279 could be considered swamp blues (44%), 157 swamp
The liner notes to these original LPs, written by blues journalists, scholars, and critics—again, mostly writers from *Blues Unlimited* and *Living Blues*—remain the closest studies of the music and its makers ever published in wide distribution, and a benchmark for its discussion. Reissue labels since have taken their cues from this series rarely deviating from the historicity established in them. Perhaps surprisingly, the Flyright LP series never had a second pressing, and outside of eBay listings from large collections in the UK, greater Detroit, and other outposts of ageing blues devotees, the records are hard to come by. The *LJMS* was never issued outside of the U.K. and Europe, and yet this series defined and historicized the swamp blues across the globe.

![Figure 52. Rear of LJMS Vol. 8 FLY LP 529 where Bruce Bastin narrates the discovery of tape boxes and the process of elimination by which he and Jay](image)

pop (23%), 111 rockabilly/Cajun swing (17.5%), 78 Zydeco (12.3%), and 10 New Orleans rhythm & blues (1.6%). The absence of Cajun songs may be attributed to the series programmers’ desire to package Jay Miller’s oeuvre as thoroughly modern. On albums that would appear to feature Cajun music, Bastin explains the cross-influence of rockabilly and the Cajun tradition as follows: “[The] recordings contain both cajun roots and the rough edge of the emergent south Louisiana music, as yet unnamed and unidentified but which was to be that state’s own brand of rock-and-roll and rockabilly, like elsewhere, a mutation and fusion of elements from hillbilly, country and rhythm-’n’-blues, but with south Louisiana’s distinctive touch of Western Swing and, more notably, Cajun music.” Bastin FLY LP 571; Williams, FLY LP 617.
Miller identified artists and other personnel, and recording dates. The passage opens, “It is very difficult to give an impression of Miller’s studio and the wealth of tapes which are there…and the feeling you get as you unearth yet another tape-box listing “Un-known blues singer” or unheard-of titles by the known Miller greats like Slim Harpo, Silas Hogan and Lonesome Sundown. Let me take you through a couple of these tape-boxes. Perhaps I can project some of the scent of the hunt, the excitement of hearing new songs, different versions, trying to identify unknown artists, listening to the command-ing piano of Katie Webster, or seeing if Lazy Lester was in Miller’s studio at every session, as he turns up on so many tapes…”

**Goldband Collectors Item series**

Even Eddie Shuler got in on the reissue compilation game. The same year Flyright’s *LJMS* began, Shuler inaugurated an inconsistent “Collectors Item” series on Goldband. This series presents the opportunity to compare what the world saw of Eddie Shuler blues in the mid-1970s. The simultaneity furthermore invites a comparison between the two series that is not inaccurate in what it reveals about the operations of the two record men. Jay Miller was a perfectionist when it came to audio balance, tonality and timbre, and in wrapping each song into an individual gem-like package. Jay Miller’s house label records felt like the result of a team effort of professionals. His records that were picked up by Excello benefited even more, thanks to the impressive appeal of a national operation, easy access to the records, and an orderly catalogue. Eddie Shuler, in comparison, ran a one-man operation (his wife Elsie kept the books) that sounded like a one-man operation; his “three-take max” rule was intended to lend downhome authenticity, but instead it brought audio disturbances and cacophonous “arrangements” that did not come together until halfway through the first refrain. His ear was not attuned to pitch and his ideas of novel engineering techniques were based on his perception of the desires of the market (more “dance beat”, brighter sax, blanket amplification of the rhythm section), instead of his perception of the
train-wrecks occasionally happening in the sound-room (clanging rhythm section, piercing treble, “lacking bottom”, absent bass).

The *LJMS* added a third and fourth filter to the Miller recordings beyond his own meticulous process and the vetting at Excello. For instance, third party professionals designed the cover design and graphics. All of these releases had been remastered for optimal sound, some by Jay Miller’s son Mark (Vols. 7-16), some by professional sound mixers and engineers in England (together with the Millers on Vols. 10-16, solo remastering Vols. 17-37, 43-57). All of these had also been thoroughly researched by blues experts—the very existence of which was unbelievable in Louisiana—who carefully confirmed personnel, sometimes interviewing the musicians, and contextualized the recordings within the artists’ larger oeuvres. The liner notes are poetic, informative, and include subjective opinions from these bastions of blues taste that mail-order record buyers found desirable. For an example of this commercial packaging see Flyright LP 608 in Figures 11 and 12 below. Eddie Shuler’s low-level attention to sonic detail is matched in his inattention to copy, as illustrated in Goldband 7780 and 7804, two Katie Webster LPs released ten years apart, seen in Figures 13-14 below. Early overseas releases of Goldband music had been spruced up by the packaging of Mike Leadbitter’s research with narrative sleeve notes, but by the time Shuler felt he needed to produce something on par with Flyright’s canonical *LJMS* series, Leadbitter had passed away and Eddie Shuler’s own skillset was all he had to lean on.

Beyond internal comparisons, these albums furthermore amplify some
of the differences between Eddie Shuler’s operation and Jay Miller’s that led Miller to have such greater success than Shuler. Shuler, far less diligent in his audio production and other detail-oriented aspects of his businesses, suffered from running his one-man show. In a mix between his pride and realism, Shuler had always been wary of direct comparisons between his and Miller’s work. In correspondence from January 1964, Mike Leadbitter wrote to Shuler that two songs on the recent master tapes Shuler had sent him had noise and were distorted beyond usefulness. He closed the letter with a request that almost certainly stung Shuler while highlighting the undeniable appeal of Jay Miller’s production values: “Could you ever record someone like Lightnin’ Slim or Slim Harpo, if I could guarantee you a release over here? Let me know about this, as it may solve our problems. Or, are thre [sic] any other good blues singers around that you could get hold of? I’m serious about this!”

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275 Leadbitter-Shuler 7 January 1964.
Figure 53. LP cover to Vol. 43 of the LJMS series, The Great Jay Miller Studio Band, featuring Lionel Prevost Katie Webster & Warren Storm, 1961-63. Photo of J.D. Miller’s Modern Music Center, 413 N. Parkerson Avenue in Crowley, Louisiana. Jay Miller’s recording studios were located in the second storey of the brick building in the background. Flyright Records FLY LP 608, UK 1985.

Figure 54. Close-up of sleeve rear to LJMS Vol. 43 above. John Broven’s notes read, “None of the recordings on this album were hits, not even remotely so. Some twenty five years on it hardly matters, for we can admire without any commercial intrusions yet another treasure trove of Louisiana music, Jay Miller’s qualities as a producer and above all, the super musicianship of the Crowley Studio Band.” Flyright Records FLY LP 618, UK 1985.
Figure 55. LP sleeve to *Katie Webster Has the Blues*. Photo of Katie Webster at the piano in Goldband Studios. Cover design and notes by Eddie Shuler. Goldband GRLP 7780, US 1979.

Figure 56. The text reads, “Katie Webster is without doubt [sic] one of the greatest keyboard and vocal artist [sic] around today. She has played with many top name artist [sic] in her long illustrious career...Many Europeans have tried almost everything to hurry this release of Katie Webster doing the blues here at Goldband. This release of A Blues LP by a female artist, is a first for us, and we are extremely proud of our choice in the artist we selected. And, now at last the collectors around the world can be elated and satisfied [sic] because here is what they wanted most, Katie Webster and all her “Blues Things” in vinyl. I am sure
the artistry displayed here will make you a Katie Webster fan forever. Sincerely yours, Eddie Shuler”

The Jay Miller Mythology

From the series title, the anthologizing nature of serial issues, and the lionizing notes that accompanied the LJMS, something of a mythology built up around this series. As the founder of the series, it would make sense that Bruce Bastin, of all the writers, would seem to demonstrate a duty to relating the selections under an overarching consanguinity. His notes seem obliged to draw rootsy connections between the mythology of South Louisiana and the music presented on the LJMS albums. Blues albums in particular invoke front-porch language: “Sit back and enjoy these sides and, as you do, be thankful not only that Jay Miller recorded them in the first place but that he kept all his material.” On the textbook rockabilly volume, Bastin proclaims fiddle solos “uncompromisingly Cajun-inflected”, and summarizes the brothers’ hybrid style as “retaining their Cajun flavor and good-time country boogie feel,” when it is arguable whether any such Cajun influence is audibly present at all. Where I find shuffle drum kits matched to a yodeling steel guitar and harmonized verses sung in running fourths, Bastin has named these songs hybrid-Cajun without specifying which musical elements point to which of the six or seven styles he laundry-lists in their descriptions. While Bastin veers from rosy-lensed prose and generally acknowledges, if not praises, the impressive commercial awareness of the swamp blues, Dave Williams tended to be irreverent and reductive. Writing about the generally unruffled, and gentlemanly Lightning Slim, Williams remarked “I doubt if a complicated thought ever crossed his mind and it is impossible to imagine
him rushing into anything.”

Another element of the constructed Jay Miller mythology present in the *LJMS* series is the consistent send-off to Miller’s mystic, singular skill as an arranger and producer. In the blues albums and the rockabilly issues alike, Miller’s “early work” is accredited especially with the gift of purity, and freeze-framed authenticity. Sometimes, and in the case of blues albums especially, the authenticity is referred to in terms of a frozen black American past. On an album devoted to *Baton Rouge Harmonica*, John Broven, describing Baton Rouge as a clean, bustling city writes of the impossibility that the swamp blues could coexist in such industrious and infrastructured modernity.

“As you drive into Baton Rouge from New Orleans on I-10, it is hard to imagine that...[it] ever harboured a bluesman let alone an active blues scene in the 1950s. Downtown is antiseptic modern America; lush parks and serenic lakes surround the State Capitol and Louisiana State University. The Standard Oil refineries are tucked well out of sight, as are the shotgun-shack black communities...Did Lightnin’ Slim really ever tell Lazy Lester here to blow his harmonica, son?”

Other albums featuring mostly white players are depicted as freeze-frames of what live performance “for their south Louisiana listening audiences” were like, in a precommercialized Urtext: “No frills.”

The assumption is made that Miller is the Zeus of the blues, having encapsulated a moment in time as though the recordings featured here are transparent field recordings of musicians in studio. One early album sends up Miller’s nonexistent scouting and his alleged invisibility in the recording process: “It is a tribute to J.D. Miller that he was able to seek out artists of the caliber of those heard here, to record them well and to do so without hampering their own individualities of sound...Miller’s cajoling, encouragement and constant search after a new or better sound...has been moulded by his good musical taste and inate [sic] sense of what he would call ‘gut-bucket blues’.” The compilers do not acknowledge, for one thing, that
Miller wrote many of his artists’ songs in-studio and recorded them on the spot. This was a signature of his writing-recording method. Musicians often prompted him with themes or stories to write on, which is why many songs are credited both to Miller and the artist as co-writers. If he did not write songs on the spot, Miller commonly, and famously, married songs from his repertoire with different singers and different bands until one of the releases ‘hit’. The take-home is that for Miller recordings of this era, far more common are Miller-written songs and far less common were songs musicians came in having prepared themselves: thus the “moment in time” folkloristic theory of authenticity does not stick. Passages like

“[I]t is in the rough-hewn quality of many of these sides that much of the excitement of Miller’s early recordings lies. This is the tough, undiluted country music of the bayous, unadulterated by overlong association with the slick commercial world and without the rigid programming which that world found necessary in order to pigeon-hole its musical styles...”

though trite, are common. Words like “undiluted”, “unadulterated”, “raw and unpolished”, “near loss” and “obscure” are prevalent in this series’ sleeves.276

**Postlude: State of Blues in Britain since 1989**

The last of the *LJMS* albums was released in 1989, the same year that label and Ace (UK) both switched to the CD format. The advent of the digital age changed both the format and the transit of blues writing. Just as the early blues magazines had passed the torch to LP sleeves, the blog world has taken over from the record companies in part due to the no-cost nature of blog appreciation, in contrast to the rising cost of box sets and CD “complete

276 Bastin FLY 571; Bastin FLY 529; Williams FLY 612; Bastin FLY 571.; Bastin FLY 517; Broven FLY 614. In her work on folklore, Regina Bendix reminds us that vocabulary related to “sense of loss”, prior “harmony”, and false dichotomies like the ones I have mentioned throughout this chapter are the vocabulary of authenticity, and as such, the vocabulary of heritage politics and exoticism. Bendix 72, 163, 182-3, 186, 191, 196.
recordings” anthologies. In some cases, the most heavily trafficked blogs that discuss the swamp blues are institutional, run by special collections libraries that own these holdings, such as the Southern Folklife Center blog, in whose archives the Goldband Records papers are housed. The University of Mississippi Center for the Study of Southern Culture, where *Living Blues* magazine is based, also has such a blog that touches on swamp blues content.

The universe of online cult fandom of the swamp blues has been a surprising resource in this dissertation. Unpublished, non-academic, and with its own share of pitfalls including shaky reliability, this vox populi domain is a tentatively useful source for historical facts. For instance, on the *Home of the Groove* blog, Charles Sheffield’s daughter in 2010 and granddaughter in 2015 wrote of his passing, and their appreciation of the blog’s interest in his music and treatment of his story. Many of the constituents of this fandom population are the ageing baby boomers, primarily American and British, who had been enthusiastic subscribers to the British blues magazines that originally carried information and news of the swamp blues on its pages in the sixties, seventies, and eighties. The blog world offers another contribution in that its comments sections offer amendments to personnel, or first-person anecdotes about concerts or shows whose events were undocumented beyond concert poster advertisements.

Gérard Herzhaft’s *Blue Eye* blog promotes the blues gospel in a twenty-first-century form of the British contingency’s devotion from sixty years prior. Where the Brits wrote to low-paying subscribers and funded their research trips, projects, organization, correspondence, and promotion themselves,
without anticipation of return for the investment,—the Blues Unlimited fold all held down full-time day jobs, after all—Herzhaft has also performed and organized hefty research projects, then posted them on various online channels for free. He has been writing on Louisiana since 1979, most recently publishing in 2002 on genres including Zydeco, Cajun, Shreveport downhome blues, and the swamp blues. The French blues historian, encyclopedist, and former librarian has effected a personal record label within his bilingual blog, with multiple self-fashioned album series of niche blues styles and “Complete Recordings” anthologies. Each of these “albums” has its own notes in both French and English, “cover” art, and complete personnel and recording data. Most famously to music researchers he is the author of the Grande Encyclopédie du Blues (Fayard 2015) now in its ninth edition.\(^{277}\)

**Herzhaft Encyclopedia as case study of the Jay Miller mythology**

According to the English translation Encyclopedia of the Blues, the Louisiana Swamp Blues are defined by a 1989 Ace CD of Jay Miller recordings. If that were not enough of a measure of Jay Miller’s shadow over the musical aesthetic, Herzhaft even calls this album “The ideal anthology of Jay Miller’s swamp blues, the creator of this blues style.” The verbs in this entry furthermore all belong to Jay Miller; the artists who actually defined the style, on the other hand, are static, not even belonging to a sentence. Herzhaft

gestures with their names, potent symbols that bear more meaning for the encyclopedic audience than other information about their techniques, oeuvre, or songwriting would. The entry continues, “Slim Harpo, Lightnin' Slim, Silas Hogan . . . [sic] When one listens carefully, one can hear the bullfrogs.” More copy is devoted to the author’s fantasy than to the actual proponents of the swamp blues. This pattern, unfortunately, is representative of most writing on these Southwest Louisiana musicians and their music.

As for individual artists’ entries in the Encyclopedia, Lightnin’ Slim has about a page to himself. Slim Harpo, half a page. J.D. Miller, in contrast, has five pages. Larry Garner and Kenny Neal, second-generation bluesmen (born ca. 1950) whose music came of age in the 1970s and 1980s when the Louisiana blues were at death’s door, occupy half a page of the encyclopedia each. By Herzhaft’s 1992 publication, the popularity of outbranches of swamp blues like the “swamp rock” of Tony Joe White, the modern blues of Marcia Ball, and the “Slydeco” of Sonny Landreth (all born ca. 1950), and of third-generation “swamp” blues (born ca. 1965) from Tab Benoit were just on the rise. While Herzhaft was five to ten years too early to document their success, in other similar works from a few years later, around 2000, these musicians get even lengthier treatment.278 Back to Herzhaft, the entry for Clarence Garlow—a vastly underrated early influence in not just the vibrancy of SWLA’s rhythm & blues scene, but also in its actual sound as the man who coached Eddie Shuler, by Shuler’s own account, in how to record the blues—

refers the reader to J.D. Miller. Under “Lonesome Sundown” it also reads “see J.D. Miller.” So do the entries for Lazy Lester, Silas Hogan, Katie Webster, and Clarence Edwards—this last a musician who did not even record for Miller! Herzhaft, however, folds him into the J.D. Miller entry by justifying he “certainly should have”. In Herzhaft’s encyclopedia, and others like this, swamp blues musicians are categorically placed beneath Jay Miller’s curatorial cloak.

My point here is not to perform a critique of the niche comprehensiveness of Herzhaft’s work. Instead, it is to show the systemic and institutional absence of attention to these pivotal figures of a blues movement in ripples that were felt worldwide, even as minor figures descendent from them (the Larry Garners, Raful Neals) receive apt treatment. After Mike Leadbitter’s passing in 1974, the door closed on an era of fresh attention to the swamp blues. True, many other blues journals and their subscribers would write about them, post reviews to Excello compilations of old takes, and even occasionally interview them. But the big projects, like career-long discographies and monographs, were buried with Leadbitter. No more big fieldwork trips came after Bastin’s last in 1976 and Broven’s in 1979. Sure, British fans and editors of blues zines still were making pilgrimages to Goldband’s studios and the original site of J.D. Miller’s studio as late as 2007, but they were ceremonious in nature; visits to a site for posterity; photo opps.279

279 Herzhaft (1992) 116-7, 188, 140-144, 74, 123.; See, for instance, the many visits covered by the editors of the online blues magazine Tales from the Woods at www.tftw.org.uk.
Ace Records (UK)

Most recently the British reissue label Ace Records, to whom Eddie Shuler sold the rights to his Goldband masters, has released eight compilations in the last three years (2013-2016) of 1960s Louisiana popular music, including “bop,” “pop,” and blues entries. In both of the blues albums, Ace pairs Miller and Shuler’s works. The first, *Bluesin’ by the Bayou – From the Vaults of J.D. Miller and Eddie Shuler* ACE CDCHD 1368 (2013) features the swamp bluesmen, in order of appearance, Silas Hogan, Slim Harpo, Lazy Lester, Lightnin’ Slim, Jimmy Dotson, Blues Boy Dorsey, Boogie Jake, Talton [Tal] Miller, Lefthand [Left-handed] Charlie, Lonesome Sundown, Leroy Washington, Jimmy Anderson, and Sylvester Buckley—alongside an additional nine swamp pop and zydeco musicians. The second of these was released in April 2015, *Bluesin’ by the Bayou – Rough ’N’ Tough*, ACE CDCHD 1403. Ace took its cue from the watershed and augustly titled *LJMS* Flyright LP series that had effectively defined the swamp blues genre thirty years prior, and Jay Miller’s precedence in the field is upheld by Ace’s contents and organization.

Ace has a penchant for releasing previously unheard takes of Miller and Shuler music, irrespective of the relative noteworthiness between different tracks issued in the 1960s or on the 1980s Flyright albums. In fact, like Flyright did thirty years prior, Ace categorically separates the previously unissued tracks from previously distributed ones, and journalistic coverage of the Ace releases prioritizes these disclaimers to insiderness. Announcing the release of one such album, *Living Blues* “cautions” readers that not all tracks
were unheard as advertised, having been previously seen on the single run of *LJMS* volumes, even though the rarity of the Flyright albums already lessened the likelihood that any of those released tracks, even, had been accessible to the listening audience.

Ace has packaged and programmed their swamp blues material with help from renowned pioneers who previously worked on Flyright projects like John Broven, Chris Strachwitz, or alongside Flyright programmers like Ace director Ted Carroll, and Ian Saddler, among others. Flyright’s white programmers, then, have had the luxury of defining and historicizing the black-made swamp blues not once, but many times over, at their will through history without the burden of input from the cultural actors who created the music. All the while, however, labels like Ace make claims to historic authenticity with liner notes describing painstaking transfers from eroded masters and visual gestures that evoke transparency. Ace’s CD cases frequently copy old album sleeves exactly, such as with the *Authentic R&B* and *The Real R&B* Stateside reissues, as well as some of the projects from Excello material. This act of replication is at once a performative act claiming hipness to the past and a suggestion of Ace’s role as transparent documentarian. Retro album covers further speak to Ace’s anticipation of an in-group purchasing audience to whom owning “original” black cultural artifacts might appeal, and secondly to whom such undeviating album art might imply the unadulterated transfer of masters to digital.

I close my brief overview of Ace’s recent role in the swamp blues with examples of the historicizing and cultural messages built into Ace’s packaging
pictured below. First, the design for Ace’s definitive *Story of Goldband Records* compilation is an invention that crosses genres, styles, and eras. The “Eddie’s House of Hits” subtitle is a reference to his breadwinning television repair business Eddie’s Quick TV Service that he ran alongside Goldband for some decades—possibly another in-group reference for potential CD buyers. The case’s black background is suggestive of museum presentation, and therefore museum-quality curation, and the black-and-white photo of the Goldband Recording Studios sign on the front exaggerates the sign’s distressed vintage, further emphasizing historical trueness of content on top of reminiscing the segregation era of black and white photography that produced the music contained herein.

Second, After AVI bought Excello in 1994, they contracted Ace to do a systematic reissue of Excello successes. (See “Excello” in Appendix B.) Four Slim Harpo albums are pictured following, three of which are visual gestures at Excello-era albums and one of which is of an unprecedented live recording from a college show played by Slim Harpo’s live band the “King Bees”. The *I’m a King Bee* album of Figure 58 includes unsuccessful and little-known songs that have been labeled by Ace as "early swamp-blues classics". The 1995 *Shake Your Hips* album cover also pictured in Figure 58 is an almost identical match to the nearly eponymous AVI/Excello album *Hip Shakin’* released the year prior, but their contents differ entirely, and the Ace album proudly featured 13 previously unissued recordings that the AVI/Excello version lacked. Last are images from three Ace Lightning Slim albums. Figure 60 is a single Ace-Germany CD compilation of two former Excello LP albums, *Rooster Blues*
Excello LP-8000 (US 1960) and *Bell Ringer* Excello LP-8004n (US 1960), and Figure 61 shows the covers of two early Lightning Slim reissues of the AVI/Excello partnership. The *Rooster Blues/Bell Ringer* material has previously been reissued on Blue Horizon BH 7-6863 (UK 1970), P-Vine PCD-2326 (Japan 1991), and four years after the Ace, it would be issued in the U.S. for the first time by Hip-o on HIPD-40134 (US 1998). For material whose discographical information would seem to have been vetted by Excello, Blue Horizon, P-Vine, and Ace, the songwriting credits printed in this release offer an example of Ace's surprisingly moderate historical accuracy, or at least the moderate extent of detail that their packages seek to convey. This rear cover reads "All titles written by Jerry West except where noted." Of the 24 songs on CD, the only tracks not credited to Jay Miller's blues-writing pseudonym "Jerry West" are two to "JD Miller", a redundancy that seems careless to those who know even a little of the convoluted history of songwriting credits in Miller's studio. Otis "Lightning Slim" Hicks is credited as the secondary author of 8 songs.

Figure 58. Ace CDCHD 510 (UK) 1993 and CDCHD 558 (UK) 1995, reissues of Slim Harpo material made for Excello.280

Figure 59. Ace CDCHD 606 (UK) 1996 and CDCHD 658 (UK) 1997, Ace reissues of Slim Harpo material made for Excello. While this last album was recorded live, Excello owns the rights.281

Figure 60. 1994 German-made reissue of two previous Lightning Slim Excello LPs, Ace CDCHD 517.282


Conclusion

This chapter has conceived of the travel, performance, reception, and reincarnation of the blues in Britain through three different attitudes toward them. The folkloristic approach, leading the pack between 1947 and 1959, conceived of the swamp blues as a subject of archaeology. Adopted and appropriated by white youth, the swamp blues next became a signifier for alterity in the mid-60s; it was fodder for an early prototype of postmodern bricolage. Feeling the blues applied to, and expressed, their plights, the swamp blues became part of a vehicle for expressing those generational ideas: the swamp blues as a boomer mascot. And last, like all explosions, the swamp blues entered outer-atmospheric levels of currency and recognition briefly, flowered broadly, then the source-fire disappeared as smoke and fumes took their place. Even as the swamp blues songs “I’m a King Bee” and “Moody Lightnin’ Slim. I’m Evil: Rare & Unissued Excello Masters Vol. 1: The Later Excello Sessions. Excello CD 3002, US 1994. Reissued with notes by Cub Koda under AVI as AVI EXD-4204. US 1997.; Lightnin’ Slim. Winter Time Blues: The Later Excello Sessions” Reissues of Excello singles 2215-2267. Compiled by John Broven, notes by Dave Sax, with thanks to Ray Topping for transfer from original analogue masters. Ace Records CDCHD 674, UK 1998.
Blues” were at the forefront of musical revolution, Lightning Slim, Slim Harpo, Lazy Lester, Lonesome Sundown, Juke Boy Bonner, and Katie Webster were entirely choked out of the mainstream. All that remained was the rubble: late package tours of the 80s, and attempts to duplicate old successes of old recordings by labels like Arhoolie and Alligator. The so-called heroes and kings of the swamp blues disappeared in an instant. In their place came psychedelia, white folk, Eastern influences and the sitar; in black music, even soul had passed and funk ascended. Robin D.G. Kelley has said blues music and the blues aesthetic reminded urban populations in decline or living in industrial blight of the failure of urban promises; nothing could more exemplify this failure than the physical trek of swamp blues musicians who left the AFBF stages of Paris and Amsterdam to return to canning factory jobs and chicken processing plants. This ultimately led the swamp blues to be seen as ash, dusty debris of past social and musical issues. The blues were not living fire; the black blues had burned out.

I map the historical overview outlined above to three separate impulses, or agenda. Specify my differentiation of first, the British Blues Revival, which references the fan, the collecting impulse and related folklore paradigm which ignores or is oblivious to the commercialization of the swamp blues, and to the economy of American blackness in the mid-century fandom of that music in Britain. While interest in the blues grew, it was rooted in a preference for the record—both audio and written—over a live experience of the music. Second, the British Blues Movement to me implies social activism among a generation of youth who extracted elements of the swamp blues for
the mainstream while remaining mostly ignorant of swamp blues practitioners or the original Goldband, Feature, and Excello recordings that spawned interest in them, an abstraction I consider the British Blues Boom. I argue there is usefulness in considering these separate iterations of the blues boom chronologically, and in this chapter lay out the boom’s development, apex, and denouement with them. Lastly I have considered the reissue histories of the swamp blues, and the means by which these anthologizing, and canonical albums mythologized Jay Miller and his “stable”, and in so doing froze the swamp blues in time and space.
Bibliography


Conclusion

The history of race relations is long and intricate in Southwest Louisiana, but by 1960 the record industry’s two-caste legacy of racial, rather than sonic, categories had overtaken professional music-making arenas there, including the musical activities in Eddie Shuler’s Goldband Studios in Lake Charles and J. D. Miller’s recording outpost in Crowley. Whatever unique interracial practices and putative tolerance existed ahead of the rise of the indie record studios—and which has been the subject of a disproportionate amount of scholarly treatment on Louisiana cultures, musical and otherwise—was in fact all but dissipated in the assimilating years of commercial music-making that followed the war. Under the black-white binary aegis of the postwar record industry, non-Creole African-American musicians who may have grown up sharing musical practices, or at least common-tone influences, with black Creoles, Cajuns, or Anglo-Germans on the prewar South Louisiana and Southeastern Texas prairies began to develop a uniquely black musical aesthetic in the region, called the swamp blues, that history has failed to recognize or remember.

Based on a sparse interpretation of the rock’n’roll ensemble format, the swamp blues built on a tripartite electric guitar-bass-drum rhythm section—which became four-part when Katie Webster, who played for both recording houses, anchored the group on piano—that many commenters have pointed to as the cornerstone stronghold of the “swamp sound”. History has been on the side of
Jay Miller’s studio band in particular, which has come to prominence retrospectively as the backbone of the swamp blues. With Bobby McBride on bass, Al Foreman on electric guitar, and Warren “Storm” Shexnider leading on drums, this trio held down innumerable Crowley sessions including the swamp blues; the only hitch is all three of these musicians were white. For swamp blues sides, the rhythm section was augmented by blues harmonica, blues guitar, and blues singing tropes. Later J.D. Miller would say he felt the white backing musicians would lend crossover appeal to Slim Harpo’s post-1961 “comeback” recordings. But in reality, with African-American Rufus Thibodeaux alternating for McBride on bass, the three rhythm musicians plus Katie Webster, and saxman Lionel “Torrence” Prevost, constituted Miller’s famed five-piece stalwart band that he paired with swamp pop crooners and solo bluesmen alike from 1958 to about 1966. However even this revisionist history that shifts musical and artistic responsibility from the producers to musicians’ hands, restored in the 1970s and 1980s mostly by researchers of the Blues Unlimited and Flyright schools, is flawed. Jay Miller slotted in several different bands and combinations of bands to play in sessions. The swamp popper Guitar Gable’s band, for instance, was frequently called upon to back bluesmen in particular, and his band was comprised of mostly Creole musicians including Gabriel “Guitar Gable” Perrodin himself on guitar and his brother Etienne “Sticks” Perrodin on drum; Silas Hogan’s band the Rhythm Ramblers were called in sometimes after 1962. Some of these mix-and-match ensembles ended up recording some of the classic slides
of the swamp blues; some of them did not. So even while what Mike Leadbitter called the “Storm-led trio” may have seemed a defining presence, many songs that do not include the trio lay squarely in the swamp blues canon. It is interesting, then, that the foundational element of Miller’s famous “wall of sound” can be present, or not.

Music, after all, is made of more than just instruments, musicians, and singers: and it is those extramusical sounds and silences in the swamp blues that count among its most notable features. Deep reverb, heavy echo, percussive novelty, and the magic acoustics of Miller’s pre-1961 “old studio” were his four Aces. Eddie Shuler’s “three-take max” rule, unrehearsed band, and having Katie Webster’s gospel-meets-barrelhouse-boogie piano on standby might be considered his. Excepting the exceptional Katie Webster, Jay Miller and Eddie Shuler are often singled out in tidy liner notes as the unifying forces behind the swamp blues because the rest of these sound effects are mostly sourced to the producer. All the above is in addition to Jay “microphones in his ears” Miller’s fêtéd giftedness, and the entrepreneurial Eddie Shuler’s incredible foresight in the indie record scene and SWLA’s popular music horizon. These things together, the swamp blues aesthetic was rarely replicable on stage, since perhaps the most notable aspects of the soundscape are mechanically engineered sound effects. For all of Jay Miller’s perfect pitch and Katie Webster and Lionel Prevost’s virtuosity, no single voice reached out from the vinyl the way these unvoiced percussive utterances did. It is arguable that the genius of the swamp blues, then, came in
large part from multiple lines of overdubbed percussion, microphones perched at lead musicians’ feet to pick up foot stomps, “echo box” solos that evoked the loneliness of the blues-as-such and the unpretentious safety of wide landscapes; Miller’s wallowing reverb, and Shuler’s incorporation of soundroom clatter.

As such, the swamp blues were a fundamentally commercial creation that traded in notions of downhome authenticity, the anticommercial, the unglossy, and the unpushy. and therefore, slipped easily into trite reductions of the unrefined, the unrehearsed, the slapdash, unambitious, lazy, and static. Indeed Miller's assignation of stage names were mockeries that dealt in these same tropes: Lightning Slim so named for his slow speech and gait, Lonesome Sundown and Lazy Lester for their delay, the antiphrastic Whispering Smith for his booming voice. These names and the swamp blues songs so often written by Miller, like “My Starter Won’t Work”, “I’m Evil”, “Learn to Treat Me Better”, “Long Leanie Mama”, in addition to his characterizations of nearly every blues musician as an unreliable alcoholic, do not evoke a thoroughly modern machine. These were packaged for white record executives’ hands as anticommercial jewels, and later they would be interpreted by white audiences as anticommercial interventions. In a sense, the “two” races of the record industry did overlap in the record studios of Eddie Shuler and Jay Miller, where African-American blues musicians harnessed essentialist ideas about black American identity to commercial ends. Shuler and Miller saw themselves as invisible actors shaping
black music in a black music-making scene, while at the same time bragging for years about the extent to which the swamp blues bore their watermark.

The rhythm & blues records made in these two independent studios archive the ways in which the performance of ethnicity, practices of professional-based community, and recording studio circuitry intersected to produce a uniquely identifiable collection of swamp blues recordings in this postwar, pre-civil rights window within Southwest Louisiana. For all the positive attention and description SWLA, and indeed, all of the state of Louisiana has been given through the years as a melting pot of ethnicities and cultures, I aim to highlight the importance of situating the swamp blues as apart from other regional musics. Those common analogies for South Louisiana’s hegemonic culture imply that creolization is the pith of cultural survival, or in other words suggests that cultural dilution-by-aggregation is both a priority and within the prerogative of oppressed cultural forms. Indeed, such an assumption first, idealizes cultural dynasty while ignoring the fascinating complexities of the fleeting or assimilated. Second, “melting pot” narratives generally come from a history written by the victors, a place of privilege that the swamp blues of segregation-era, pre-civil rights SWLA would never reach.

Instead, the swamp blues have laid in a historical margin of immense cultural and economic activity, where swamp blues musicians made music that reflected fluid and dynamic identities, and where long Louisianian musical heritages combined with the urban blues influences of Jimmy Reed, Howlin’
Wolf, and Ray Charles; the West Coast r&b of Bob Geddins, Modern, Specialty, and Imperial Records; the Western swing of Texas, and the rock’n’roll of contemporary radio. Doreen Massey and other social geographers have said any understanding of culture relies on an understanding of the locale’s social structures, which themselves depend greatly upon the physical geographies that bound, divide, group, and otherwise define space for society. As SWLA’s industries and economic forces changed when lumber and agricultural economies (1850-1930) shifted to petrochemical (1940-), swamp blues musicians’ day jobs followed a parallel course. The cultural territory defined by South Louisiana was reshaped into a Southeast Texas and Southwest Louisiana musical byway; the Crawfish Circuit was an economic creation here that fueled musical exchanges heightened by migrations to SETX and the new economic climate of the modern petrochemical age.

The standard musical narratives told from this area are troubled by the presence of the swamp blues, which defies the familiar, if complicated rise of Zydeco in Houston and the Cajun lap-land of SETX, as well as the urban Houston blues sound. The swamp blues took from and partook in both scenes by association, but existed somewhere between and yet beyond them. The same is true of New Orleans’ piano-based rhythm & blues and the swamp pop that emerged around the Cajun heartland. The swamp blues rejected none of these, yet neither did it claim those histories either. Part of the beauty of the marginal, aesthetic Third-space is the escape it can offer from hegemonic systems. Black
music-making in SWLA, then, could occur in this cultural margin without the onus of the hegemonic black-white racial system that legally segregated bodies and tried to enforce segregations of sound. This margin, I believe, is an important space to critically engage Southwest Louisiana’s unique articulations of race.

The history of the swamp blues is not linear, as the swamp blues have borne meaning and represented something different at different points in time, to different groups of people, sprinkled across different continents and cultural contexts. One salient example of this alternative life for the swamp blues was its existence in Great Britain, and the appearances, roles, influence, and usages that arose for the music there, just as the blues were dying out in the U.S.. There, swamp blues records came to represent a discrete, permanently past version of American blackness conceptualized in the Lomax vein. As the long sixties progressed, the swamp blues served the political interests of British youth, as sonic entities deployed and appropriated in wider waves of cultural change. In these British encounters with the swamp blues, interest in the music in its material, sonic, and agential forms was quantitative in nature; that is, that the majority of fans of the swamp blues were drawn to it as part of greater empirical quests to collect, organize, and quantify an economic product of black Americans. Regarding the swamp blues this way underlines a tendency for an intentional, if superficial engagement with the music for some, without denying personal attraction to the music for many others.
In one last reconfiguration, the swamp blues stood in as a prototyped phantasm for the blues-rock gods of the latter sixties. Through the British mainstream erasure of blackness from the blues, they were both taxidermied and etherealized—at once rendered so permanent, dull, and hard as to easily ignore, and so invisible and forgotten that their existence could appear to be in question. Revivalist blues hunters of the 1970s and 1980s re-searched and re-quested musicians out of retirement to continually fuel the blues festival circuits of Europe, for whom Juke Boy Bonner, Lightning Slim, Whispering Smith, and later, Katie Webster had been recruited to re-manufacture their “classic” sounds for “new” copycat records for distribution by live-performance and revival labels. The swamp blues by that point were an imagined, idolized, and idealized relic, an object of memorialization even as its living authors waited in the stage wings for their cue that never came.

The New Yorker’s Adam Gopnik accredits the American pop music communal trough with a particular kind of popular amnesia. He says the process by which we fill that trough is arbitrary and slapdash. Informed predictions of what hits will, or should, last often fail to be realized. He calls the discrepancy between the should-have-beens and the canonical stars our “doubled past”, divided into the accessible and the archived.284 The swamp blues have spent several decades laid waste in the quieter part of that doubled past, archived among the things worth remembering that vanished.

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My wish for this work is to contribute to the transfer of the swamp blues from one trough into the other. I hope Southwest Louisiana might exist as something more than a blank cultural space between Gulf Coast end-caps Houston and New Orleans, and instead as a place whose recognized history of unconventional race relations was yet more complicated, and host to complex and artistically productive intersections of black ethnicities. I hope that little-known African-American names like Otis Hicks, Katie Webster, James Moore, Weldon Bonner, Leslie Johnson, Cornelius Green, Lionel Prevost, and Monroe Vincent become the frontrunners of their own musical history. In the swamp blues, sophisticated social structures and contracts produced a virtuosic musical life-world in Southwest Louisiana, where the specificities of place, space, and social conventions among non-Creole African Americans not only folded into this music, but also play a far more exquisite role in American music history than the conventional narratives have told. The swamp blues are due to be better heard, their history better known, and the contributions of their authors better told, revisited, and studied.
APPENDIX A
Swamp Blues Timeline

1944:
Eddie Shuler records “Broken Love” and “(Is There) Room in Your Heart for Me Darling” with the All Star Reveliers in New Orleans. Lacking money to press record, it sits shelved for two years.

1945:
Returning from war duty, J.D. Miller, an electric mandolin player and professionally playing musician since 11, quits music performance on the eve of his wedding to Georgia Sonnier, daughter of famed Cajun fiddler Lee Sonnier.

J.D. Miller and wife open M&S Electric Company, an electric supply store in Crowley, Louisiana.

Eddie Shuler copyrights “Broken Love”.

1946:
Eddie Shuler puts out “Broken Love” on Goldband Records, reasoning, “This is going to be a goldmine, so I’ll just call it Goldband.” Some records indicate the song was issued in January 1945.

Eddie Shuler hosts a radio show on Lake Charles’ KPLC. Contrary to some accounts, Shuler was never a disc jockey at KPLC. He hosted an hour-long radio show three days a week for his All Star Reveliers band to play live for the full hour.

June: J.D. Miller records Cajun singer Happy Fats at Cosimo Matassa’s New Orleans studio.

October: J.D. Miller opens his own studio using a portable recorder bought at Gates Electric in Houston. Founds and closes the Fais Do Do label, releasing Hillbilly and Cajun music first.

1947:
By some accounts including his own, and some business papers, this is the year Eddie Shuler founds Goldband records in Lake Charles.

15-year old Juke Boy Bonner wins a talent contest in Houston, resulting in a recurring radio show performance.

J.D. Miller establishes the Feature label for country, then blues records.
T-Bone Walker: “Call it Stormy Monday”

1948:
Second Petrillo ban forbids making records in 1948
James Moore, the future Slim Harpo, and bride Lovelle start writing songs together
21-year-old blind French Cajun accordion player Iry LeJeune approaches Shuler to play his KPLC show and record. Shuler founds Folk-Star for LeJeune, whose 1949-1955 recordings make history as the first postwar commercial outlet for Cajun music. Shuler sometimes gave the date of this introduction as 1946

*Jazz Journal* (UK) founded in London

1949-51:
John Lee Hooker: “Boogie Chillen”
Elmore James: “Dust My Broom”
LSU in Baton Rouge is the first university of the Deep South to admit a black student
Eddie Shuler travels, playing with the All Star Reveliers, while recording on the side and keeping the KPLC radio show for exposure
Eddie Shuler founds the Folk-Star label for Cajun releases from Iry Lejeune; George Khoury launches Khoury also for Cajun, and swamp pop; J.D. Miller founds Zynn

*Jazz Podium* (DE) monthly journal founded

1952:
Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton: “Hound Dog”
Ruth Brown: “(Mama) He Treats Your Daughter Mean”
Ernie Young founds Excello records in Nashville
Goldband undergoes major expansion, moves to permanent site
J.D. Miller’s “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky-Tonk Angels” makes Kitty Wells the first female country star. It holds C&W #1 for six weeks, peaking at #27 in crossover to the Hot 100. The royalties from its one million sold copies will help fund J.D. Miller recording and business operations for years, including immediate expansions: Miller begins hosting local radio program “Stairway to
the Stars” on KSIG, and buys the local El Toro nightclub where he features his recording acts

Karl Emil Knudsen founds Storyville Records (Denmark) to import American music, initially focusing on New Orleans Dixieland jazz

1953:

Guitar Slim: “The Things That I Used to Do” influential recording from New Orleans

Jimmy Wilson records the blues classic “Tin Pan Alley” for Bob Geddins in California, which Shuler would have Jimmy Wilson redo for Goldband in 1958

West German TV produces short film in Houston and Lake Charles, featuring two Cajun acts as the main attraction, also including Houston-based Goldband blues artists Hop Wilson and King Ivory Lee Semien

J.D. Miller enters songwriting contract with Acuff-Rose

1954:

Eddie Shuler stops playing music professionally

J.D. Miller meets Ernie Young through Murray Nash

Early swamp blues classics from Lightning Slim appear on Miller’s Feature label, with local success that spurs the producer to lease future Lightning Slim material to Excello

- Lightning Slim “Rock Me, Mama” /“Bad Luck” (Feature 3006)
- Lightning Slim “I Can’t Live Happy” /“New Orleans Bound” (Feature 3008)
- Lightning Slim “Bugger Bugger Boy” /“Ethel Mae” (Feature 3012)

Lowell Fulson: “Reconsider Baby”

Muddy Waters: “I’m Your Hoochie Coochie Man”

Big Joe Turner: “Shake, Rattle and Roll”

Brown v Board of Education requires integration of schools

Hilda Combre v. John McNeese State College results in court-ordered desegregation of Lake Charles’ local university. Fifteen black students register for Spring 1955

City of Crowley, LA elects two African Americans to city council, the first city in the state to do so
1955:
Zydeco king Clifton Chenier invites Cornelius Green, later to be known as Lonesome Sundown, to join his band both in residency at the Blue Moon Club in Lake Charles and on tour as far north as Chicago and as far west as Los Angeles.
Lightning Slim and Harmonica Slim, the future Slim Harpo, amass considerable following in Baton Rouge. Future Silas Hogan band drummer Jimmy Dotson frequently plays drums, bass, or guitar for Lightning Slim during this period. He also accompanied his school classmate Lester Johnson, the future Lazy Lester, on harmonica.
Beginning of golden age of recording the swamp blues
J.D. Miller closes Feature, releasing all blues to Excello, and testing on future Zynn, Action, Spot, Rocko, or Cry labels.
Eddie Shuler and wife Elsie grossing $200,000 annually from their main breadwinner, Eddie’s Quick Service T.V. Repair, which is purported to have sold between 45-100 TVs daily. They also operate the in-house Eddie’s Music House store.
October: Excello releases its first swamp blues record:
- Lightning Slim “Lightnin’ Blues”/“I Can’t Be Successful” (Excello 2066)
Appearance of earliest swamp pop recordings: Bobby Charles’ “Later Alligator”
Liberty Records (UK) launched for new recordings of “rediscovered” blues musicians; Sonet (Sweden/Denmark) founded; Decca (UK) London-American arm shifts focus to indie African-American music

1956:
Howlin’ Wolf: “Smokestack Lightnin”
Fats Domino: “Blueberry Hill”
Cornelius Green leaves Clifton Chenier’s band, and brings demo tape of original material to J.D. Miller, who eventually suggests the stage name Lonesome Sundown. He will record with Miller for eight years.
Silas Hogan forms the Rhythm Ramblers band, who will become core session players for J.D. Miller for the next ten years.
Goldband goes “commercial”, buying the state-of-the-art floor model Ampex 350, which Shuler will use into the 1970s, as well as buying and moving into Goldband’s permanent location, a former Holiness Church at 313 Church Street in Lake Charles. The former altar becomes the studio sound room.
Opening of Excello’s swamp blues floodgates:
Lightning Slim makes six sides, including “Sugar Plum” and “Bad Luck and Trouble” (Excello 2075, 2080, 2096)

Lazy Lester’s signature pairing “I’m Gonna Leave You Baby”/”Lester’s Stomp” (Excello 2095)

Vince Monroe/Mr. Calhoun, the belting baritone (Excello 2089)

Lonesome Sundown, styling himself after Muddy Waters (Excello 2092)

Prosegregation Amendment 16 to the Louisiana Constitution goes to vote; only three newspapers in the state openly oppose it. They are all in Southwest Louisiana, including the largest opposition from the Lake Charles American Press

Big Bill Broonzy plays European tour and publishes autobiography

1957:

Muddy Waters: The Best of Muddy Waters

Height of swamp blues recording in Eddie Shuler and J.D. Miller’s studios.

Big Chenier “Let Me Hold Your Hand”/”Please Try To Realize” (Go 1051)

Guitar Junior “Family Rules (Angel Child)”/”I Got It Made (When I Marry Shirley Mae)” an immediate classic with audible swamp pop influence (Goldband 1058)

Lonesome Sundown “My Home is a Prison”, written by J.D. Miller, becomes iconic (Excello 2102)

Lightning Slim “Mean Ole Lonesome Train” (Excello 2106)

Tal Miller “Life’s Journey”/”Mean Old Kokamoo” (Goldband 1059)

Lazy Lester “They Call Me Lazy” (2107)

Lazy Lester “Tell Me Pretty Baby” (Excello 2129)

Lightning Slim “Hoo Doo Blues” (Excello 2131)

Lonesome Sundown “I’m a Mojo Man” (Excello 2132)

Lonesome Sundown sees six more sides on Excello this year. Lightning Slim has six total, Lazy Lester four, and J.D. Miller will finally give into Lightning Slim’s harmonicist James Moore, christening two sides under the name “Slim Harpo”

Eddie Shuler starts the Kamar/KMAR publishing company with business partner Don Pierce; Floyd Soileau establishes the Swallow label for Cajun music

July: Slim Harpo’s debut singles “I’m a King Bee” (A) and “I Got Love If You Want It” (B) will appear on the future 1964 debut albums of the Rolling Stones (A), and the Kinks and Yardbirds (B), respectively (Excello 2113)

August: Carol Fran’s swamp pop classic “Emmitt Lee” is a B-side from J.D. Miller’s studio. Session musicians “Guitar Gable” Perrodin plays guitar and Clarence “Jockey” Etienne is on drums. Fran will later recall that in signature Crowley blues fashion, in the session “Jockey didn’t play drums, he played on a
box.” (Excello 2118)
Sam Cooke: “You Send Me”

1958:

Katie Webster plays on some hundreds of records on staff at Goldband through this time. Her first solo work will not come out on Goldband for another fifteen years.

Eddie Shuler establishes solo publishing venture Tek.

Goldband churns out more of the swamp blues classics, with almost all sessions anchored by Katie Webster’s barreling piano:

- Guitar Junior “Roll Roll Roll”/“The Crawl” (Goldband 1068-A, 1076-A)
- Hop Wilson “Rocking in the Cocanut [sic] Top”/“Chicken Stuff” combines Chuck Berry with California pop-chic jungle exoticism (Goldband 1071-A)
- Jimmy Wilson “Big Wheel Rolling” another downhome ensemble classic (Goldband 1074-B)
- Hop Wilson downhome anthem “Broke & Hungry” (Goldband 1078-B)
- Ashton Savoy “Juke Joint”/”Denga Denga Hollywood” (Goldband 1081)

Swamp blues factory also continues at Excello:

- Slim Harpo “Strange Love” (Excello 2138-B)
- Lightning Slim “My Starter Won’t Work”/”Long Leanie Mama” (Excello 2142)
- Lazy Lester “I’m a Lover Not a Fighter”/”Sugar Coated Love” (Excello 2143)
- Leroy Washington “Wild Cherry” (Excello 2144-A)

J.D. Miller founds rock’n’roll label Rocko, later shifting its focus to be a tester label for leasing ensemble r&b artists to Excello; Floyd Soileau forms Jin for swamp pop.

Swamp pop’s golden age begins:

- Rod Bernard “This Should Go On Forever” (Jin 105)
- Jimmy Wilson “Please Accept My Love” (Goldband 1074)

B.B. King covers “Please Accept My Love”, charting at #9 on R&B.

Teenagers Mike Leadbitter, John Broven, and Simon Napier together begin uncovering obscure American blues and r&b through Decca’s London-American arm especially.

Muddy Waters tours England, amplified.

1959:

March: Civil Rights class action suit *Brown v. Gray* (Lake Charles NAACP v. Lake Charles public transportation) reaches the United States Supreme Court on appeal

September: Lake Charles’ city bus segregation ordinance struck down after *Brown v. Gray*

Swamp blues songs will achieve their greatest American mainstream success in the next half-decade.

- Lazy Lester “I Hear You Knockin’” (Excello 2155-A)
- Guitar Jr. “The Crawl” (Goldband 1076)
- Elton Anderson “Secret of Love” (Trey 1011)
- Al Smith “If I Don’t See You” is a rare harmonica blues for Goldband in this era (Goldband 1092-A)
- Lonesome Sundown “If You See My Baby”/”Gonna Stick To You Baby” (Excello 2163)
- Lightning Slim “Rooster Blues”/”G. I. Slim” (Excello 2169)

Displeased with prospects in Louisiana, Lee “Guitar Junior” Baker, Jr. moves to Chicago and changes stage name to Lonnie Brooks

Eddie Shuler records four country songs written by thirteen-year-old unknown, Dolly Parton

Eddie Shuler opens and closes Trey label; Sam J. Montalbano founds Montel label for blue eyed soul in Baton Rouge; Charles “Dago” Redlich founds Viking label for swamp pop in Shreveport; Carol Rachou founds La Louisianne for mostly traditional Cajun in Lafayette

swamp pop hits:

- Phil Phillip “Sea of Love” (Khoury 711) produced by Eddie Shuler goes gold
- Jivin’ Gene “Breaking Up Is Hard To Do” (Jin 116)

Slim Harpo introduces J.D. Miller to Silas Hogan

December: Lightning Slim’s “Rooster Blues” makes *Billboard* R&B #23

*Blues Research* (US) established

1960:

Mance Lipscomb “rediscovered”

Muddy Waters: “Got My Mojo Working”

Dolly Parton’s debut single “Puppy Love” is released on Goldband (GR 1086-A)

Katie Webster leaves Goldband, enters exclusive contract with J.D. Miller as session pianist
Blues recording activity already begins to wind down at Goldband Excello and J.D. Miller refuse Katie Webster material, which is released on Miller subsidiaries Action, Spot, Rocko, and Cry instead to little success

The Excello-Miller blues factory reaches peak recording in 1959. Released in 1960:

- Lightning Slim “Rooster Blues”/“G.I. Blues” (Excello 2169)
- Slim Harpo “King Bee” follow-up “Buzz Me Babe”/”Late Last Night” (Excello 2171)
- Lonesome Sundown “Learn to Treat Me Better” (Excello 2174-A)
- Slim Harpo “Blues Hangover” (Excello 2184-A)

At Goldband:

- Juke Boy Bonner “Can’t Hardly Keep From Cryin’”/“Call Me Juke Boy” (Goldband 1102)
- Bill Parker & his Showboat Band’s Ray Charlesian instrumental “All Day All Night” (Goldband 1110)

*Rooster Blues* is the first Lightning Slim LP, and Excello’s first album (LP-8000)

Lee Lavergne founds swamp-pop oriented Lanor Records in Church Point, LA; Chris Strachwitz founds Arhoolie in California

*R&B Panorama* (Belgium), *Record Research* (UK) founded

**1961:**

Jimmy Reed: “Big Boss Man”

Harpo attempts furtive recording session for Imperial in New Orleans; Miller threatens legal action and Imperial cancels

Slim Harpo and Miller reach agreement. Harpo is guaranteed total songwriting credit and all future royalties

Lionel Prevost begins traveling the globe in ship work for the next nine years, during which time he will perform and record only intermittently

Excello swamp blues enter a transitional phase amidst tension and change of locations at the J.D. Miller studio, whereupon the Jay Miller “swamp sound” changes:

- Slim Harpo “Don’t Start Cryin’ Now”/“Rainin’ In My Heart” (Excello 2194)
- Charles Sheffield “It’s Your Voodoo Working”/“Rock ‘n’ Roll Train” pair mismatched proto-soul and outdated rock’n’roll. Indicative of a turning point in Excello ensemble r&b sound in consequence of the new, post-1961 studio (Excello 2200)
- Lonesome Sundown “Lonesome Lonely Blues” (Excello 2202-A)
Charles Sheffield “I Would Be a Sinner”/“The Kangaroo” (Excello 2205)
Lazy Lester “Whoah Now” (Excello 2206-B)
Big Chenier and his Night Owls “Let Me Hold Your Hand” is one of the last
downhome ensemble swamp blues records at Goldband (GR 1131-B)

Miller launches and closes Action, Kry subsidiaries; Shuler opens Tic Toc

May–June: Slim Harpo’s swamp-pop inflected “Rainin’ In My Heart”, with
Lightning Slim on guitar, is the first swamp blues to chart nationally. Peaks at
R&B #17, Hot 100 #34

Slim Harpo live bookings spike. J.D. Miller receives no royalties, further souring
relationship

*Rainin’ In My Heart* is the first Slim Harpo LP (Excello LPS-8003)

1962:

John Lee Hooker: “Boom Boom”

Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau start the AFBF, which runs on and off until 1985

NAACP sees 90% success rate in black voter registration campaign in Lake
Charles between 1962 and 1964, double and almost triple the rate of most
Louisiana municipalities; lunch counters “quietly” desegregate in Lake Charles
and Lafayette

Eddie Shuler re-releases Jimmy Wilson’s “Tin Pan Alley” on Goldband 1142,
marking the end of the classic-era Goldband swamp blues

Silas Hogan, 51, records his first and only solo sides for J.D. Miller.

A slew of Excello-Miller recordings are released this year, but none approach the
old sound quality:

- Tabby Thomas “Hoodoo Party”/”Roll On Ole Mule” another urban proto-
soul/downhome pairing (Excello 2212)
- Lonesome Sundown “My Home Ain’t Here” (Excello 2213-A)
- Jimmy Anderson “Naggin'” (Excello 2220-A)
- Silas Hogan “Trouble at Home Blues” (Excello 2221-B)
- Lightning Slim “Winter Time Blues” (Excello 2224-B)
- Lightning Slim “I’m Evil” (Excello 2228-A)
- Silas Hogan “Airport Blues”/”I’m Gonna Quit You Pretty Baby” (Excello 2231)
- Whispering Smith “Mean Woman Blues” (Excello 2232)

Warren Storm, stalwart session drummer, leaves J.D. Miller studio. The “Storm-
led trio” that underpinned many classic swamp blues is permanently ruptured.
Austin Broussard steps in on drums

Carol Fran leaves J.D. Miller for rival Lyric, run by George Khoury in Lake
Charles Miller session band begins to disintegrate

Booker T. & the M.G.’s: “Green Onions” and *Green Onions*


Stateside (UK) launched by EMI to issue American blues in competition with London-American and Pye International

Mike Leadbitter begins corresponding with Eddie Shuler

1963:

Mississippi John Hurt “rediscovered”

Juke Boy Bonner hospitalized in Houston for severe ulcers and half of his stomach is removed; in recovery he begins writing poetry

April: *Blues Unlimited* (UK) magazine prints its first issue under the leadership of Simon Napier and Mike Leadbitter. The first issue features a profile of Jay Miller’s blues written by John Broven, based on correspondence with Ernie Young and Jay Miller, and Broven’s own collection of Excello records. Leadbitter’s focus is on discography

Beatlemania spreads to the U.S. The British Invasion closes the golden age of swamp pop, the golden age of independent record studios, and the golden age of swamp blues

Canonical swamp blues songs released this year are:

- Lonesome Sundown “I’m a Samplin’ Man” (Excello 2236-B)
- Slim Harpo “I Love The Life I’m Living” (Excello 2239-A) features an accordion-like harmonica and a 6/8 metric lilt that gives the song an undeniable traditional Cajun sound. The flip side follows in the bee vein with “Buzzin”
- Lightning Slim “Don’t Mistreat Me Baby” (Excello 2240-B)
- Lazy Lester “A Word About A Woman” / “The Same Thing Could Happen To You” (Excello 2243)
- Slim Harpo “Little Queen Bee” / “I Need Money (Keep Your Alibi)” (Excello 2246)

October: Eddie Shuler writes of r&b records to Mike Leadbitter, “You can’t give the stuff away here.”

Stateside’s influential *Authentic R&B* album released in the U.K., with tracks from Slim Harpo, Lightnin’ Slim, Silas Hogan, Lazy Lester, Jimmy Anderson, Lonesome Sundown, Whispering Smith, and Leroy Washington (Stateside LP-10068). Ace (UK) director Ted Carroll would later say that for young longhairs
like himself, this was “one of the coolest records to carry around in the 60s”

1964:
The Beatles: “I Want To Hold Your Hand”

_Civil Rights Act_ outlaws segregation

The first “Cajun Renaissance” scholarship appears

Bobby McBride, longtime Miller session bassist and stand-in guitarist, hands reins to Rufus Thibodeaux. The stronghold of the Miller blues sound is effectively dismantled

Slim Harpo releases four single 45s this year but none make a great splash

Swamp blues canon grows despite dwindling market:
- Silas Hogan “Dark Clouds Rollin’” (Excello 2251-A)
- Lightning Slim “Greyhound Blues” (Excello 2252-A)
- Silas Hogan’s swamp-pop influenced “Everybody Needs Somebody” (Excello 2255-A)
- Jimmy Anderson “Goin’ Crazy Over T.V.”/”Love Me Babe” (Excello 2257)
- Lightning Slim “Baby Please Come Home” (Excello 2258)
- Lonesome Sundown “Hoo Doo Woman Blues” (Excello 2259-A)
- Lonesome Sundown “Gonna Miss You When You’re Gone” (Excello 2264-B)

The Animals: “House of the Rising Sun”

July: “rediscovered” Son House plays Newport Folk Festival with Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Sleepy Jon Estes, Pete Seeger, and Phil Ochs

December: Sam Cooke dies

Swamp blues covers in Britain:

Slim Harpo’s “I’m a King Bee” opens the B-side of The Rolling Stones’ debut album on Decca. The U.S. version of the album reaches #11 and goes gold;

The Kinks’ debut album covers Harpo’s “I Got Love If You Want It” and Lazy Lester’s “I’m a Lover Not a Fighter.” The U.S. version withholds Lester’s song;

September: Slim Harpo’s “Don’t Start Crying Now” cover is the little-heard first single from an unknown Northern Irish group called Van Morrison & Them

December: the Yardbirds cover “I Got Love If You Want It” on their debut album _Five Live Yardbirds;_

December-January: A band alternately performing as The Tea Set, The Sigma 6, and the Abdabs—and who would eventually become Pink Floyd—record “I’m a King Bee” in their first session. The recording is not released until 2015
*R&B Monthly* (UK), *R&B Scene* (UK) magazines founded

Stateside’s equally influential *Real R&B* released in the U.K., again including tracks from Slim Harpo, Lightnin’ Slim, Jimmy Anderson, Silas Hogan, Whispering Smith, and Lonesome Sundown (Stateside LP-10112)

Stateside releases final Slim Harpo/Lightning Slim compilation album *A Long Drink of Blues* in the U.K., featuring the downhome guitar man on side 1 and the buzzing harpist on side 2 (Stateside SL-10135)

### 1965:

Big Mama Thornton and Mississippi Fred McDowell record together in London for Arhoolie

Clifton Chenier: *Louisiana Blues and Zydeco*

February: Jimmy Wilson, whose biographical details are sketchy, aged somewhere between 42-48, dies of complications related to alcoholism in Dallas, TX

Lonesome Sundown, disillusioned and barely surviving a rough divorce, leaves music for church ministry

Slim Harpo makes his last recordings with J.D. Miller studio, not with the standard Storm-Foreman-McBride rhythm section but with his own King Bees Rudy Richard and James Johnson. They produce the infamous “chicken scratch” guitar lick

Swamp blues releases:

- Silas Hogan “Baby Please Come Back” (Excello 2266-A)
- Lightning Slim “Can’t Live This Life No More”/”Bad Luck Blues” (Excello 2267)

July: Bob Dylan goes electric at Newport Folk Festival

The Righteous Brothers: “Unchained Melody”

*Bell Ringer* is Lightning Slim’s second Excello LP (LPS-8005); *The Louisiana Blues* LP, curated by Mike Leadbitter and released on Denmark’s Storyville Records, exposes Goldband blues to an international audience for the first time with songs from Juke Boy Bonner, Ashton Savoy, Lazy Lester, Katie Webster, Big Chenier, and Hop Wilson. Paul Oliver wrote the notes (SLP 177 (DK))

*Blues World* (UK) magazine founded

*R&B Scene* (UK), *Rhythm & Blues Panorama* (Belgium) discontinued

### 1966:
Slim Harpo’s contract expires and he leaves J.D. Miller.

Swamp blues releases:

- Slim Harpo “Baby, Scratch My Back”/”I’m Gonna Miss You (Like the Devil)” (Excello 2273)
- Slim Harpo “Shake Your Hips” (Excello 2278-A)

Harpo goes to Excello’s Nashville headquarters and records the decidedly more funk “Tip On In (Part 1)” and “Tee-Ni-Nee-Ni-Nu”

April: Otis Redding covers “Baby, Scratch My Back” on *The Soul Album*

The Grateful Dead begin including Slim Harpo’s “I’m a King Bee” regularly in their live concert sets

“Baby Scratch My Back” holds *Billboard* R&B/Soul #1 for two weeks and crosses over to #16 on the Pop Hot 100. This is the biggest swamp blues hit in history

J.D. Miller and Excello unamically part ways. In the wake of their split, Miller artists like Silas Hogan, Lonesome Sundown, and Lazy Lester lose their music prospects and gradually leave the business

J.D. Miller launches segregationist Reb Rebel Records label for spoken-word and musical white supremacist records

July: Slim Harpo’s “Shake Your Hips” (Excello 2278-A) has a one-week blip as #116 on the Bubbling Under chart

*Baby Scratch My Back* LP released by Excello (LPS-8005)

December: Still coasting eleven months later on the runaway success of “Baby, Scratch My Back”, Slim Harpo’s “I’m Your Bread Maker, Baby” (Excello 2282) spends the New Year bubbling under for two weeks at #116

John Broven founds Jan & Dil (UK) label, to grow into Flyright Records in the next three years

*R&B Monthly* (UK) folds

1967:

Aretha Franklin: “Respect” and *Respect*

*Loving v. Virginia* anti-miscegenation laws ruled unconstitutional

January: Aaron Neville “Tell It Like It Is” earns R&B #1 spot for five weeks, and #2 on the Hot 100

Crowley blues sessions almost at a standstill; blues sales drop off in face of imminent Civil Rights battles

March: unknown band The Doors plays “I’m a King Bee” in weekend sets in San
Francisco. Recordings of this cover are not released until 2008. They continue to perform the song in live venues through 1970.

Excello’s funky, moderate successes recorded in the Nashville studio:

- Slim Harpo “Tip On In (Part 1)” / “Tip On In (Part 2)” (Excello 2285)
- Slim Harpo “I’m Gonna Keep What I’ve Got” (Excello 2289-A)

J.D. Miller completes construction on new $300,000 Master-Trak studio and Modern Music storefront, passing music business mostly to his youngest son Mark while he takes new job as Housing Director for the city of Crowley.

May-July: Mike Leadbitter makes first fieldtrip to the USA, spending three months in Texas and Louisiana with Simon Napier, focusing on Goldband in Lake Charles. During this trip, at J.D. Miller’s record shop no blues records were in stock.

In her third trimester of pregnancy, Katie Webster opts not to tour with Otis Redding and band. Back in Houston, Mike Leadbitter meets with her and arranges the release of an album. Coyly, he will title the *Blues Unlimited* article from this interview “Katie Webster: ‘200 Pounds of Joy’”, which few realized was a reference to her advanced pregnancy. The LP album will take the same name, and Leadbitter takes a photo of her for the album cover. Later uninformed writers will falsely claim “200 pounds of joy” was Webster’s adopted nickname.

Juke Boy Bonner’s poetry begins regularly appearing in Houston’s weekly African-American newspaper *The Forward Times* for the next two years.

July-August: “Tip On In (Part 1)” charts R&B #37, crossing to Pop Bubbling Under at #127.

*True Blues* is Lazy Lester’s first LP, from Excello (LPS-8006).

November: bubblegum pop Baton Rouge band John Fred & His Playboy Band pastiche the Beatles, and knock them from #1 Pop spot for two weeks in surprise international hit “Judy in Disguise (With Glasses)”, closing the blues and R&B era in Louisiana, and marking the end of the first-wave British Invasion (Paula 282).

December: Otis Redding and band die in plane crash, closing the golden era of soul music in the U.S. Redding’s second pianist Katie Webster was not on the trip; she takes hiatus from the music industry. Joe Johnson records the swamp blues tribute “Otis is Gone” with J.D. Miller early next year.

*Blues Research* (US) folds.

*Record Research* (Brooklyn) bimonthly magazine founded.

Mike Vernon finds Blue Horizon Records (UK).

1968:
B.B. King appears at Fillmore West
CODOFIL is formed in Louisiana to preserve the French language
Lonesome Sundown is “rediscovered” living in Opelousas by Bruce Bromberg
Eddie Shuler activates ANLA for soul releases
Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana, of which Lake Charles is parish seat, is court ordered to desegregate public schools

More funk recordings from Excello’s Nashville headquarters:
- Slim Harpo “Te-Ni-Nee-Ni-Nu”/”Mailbox Blues” (Excello 2294)
- Slim Harpo “Mohair Sam”/”I Just Can’t Leave You” (Excello 2301)

March-April: “Te-Ni-Nee-Ni-Nu” peaks at R&B #36. This will be Slim Harpo’s last chart appearance

*Tip On In* is Slim Harpo’s third LP from Excello (LPS-8008)

Bruce Bastin visits Louisiana and hears Katie Webster’s band play in residence at the Bamboo Club in Lake Charles

October: Mick Jagger says to *Rolling Stone* Magazine, “I mean what’s the point in listening to us doing “I’m a King Bee” when you can listen to Slim Harpo doing it?”

Mike Leadbitter and Neil Slaven publish the poorly received first edition *Blues Records, 1943-1966*

December: Lightning Slim and Slim Harpo appear in concert in New York City

Jefferson (Sweden), Soul Bag (FR) founded

1969:

Opening of the heyday of the blues festival, with renewed attention to and increased performance opportunities for swamp blues musicians especially in Great Britain

B.B. King: *The Thrill is Gone* turns the tide of public perception against contemporary blues, especially among American black audiences

Louisiana-born country singer Tony Joe White, who will later cornerstone the “swamp rock” sound, covers Slim Harpo’s “Baby, Scratch My Back” in his debut album *Black and White*

Ann Arbor Blues Festival begins as an attraction for primarily white male audiences

Juke Boy Bonner plays the American Folk and Blues Festival (AFBF) in Europe with Clifton Chenier
Mike Leadbitter’s second trip to Louisiana, with Simon Napier. He records at Goldband, priming musicians to imitate the “downhome sound” of Lightning Slim by playing the (“rival”) Crowley blues musician’s records. Leadbitter and Napier visit Louisiana, Mississippi, and Memphis

*The Best of Slim Harpo* is Slim Harpo’s fourth album for Excello; Excello compilation *The Real Blues* LP includes Silas Hogan, Jimmy Anderson, Lightnin’ Slim, Lazy Lester, and Slim Harpo (LPS-8010, 8011)

Leadbitter commits the education from his travels in Louisiana to paper, publishing the 27-page *Crowley, Louisiana Blues* in 1968, and the 59-page *From the Bayou: the Story of Goldband Records* in 1969

**1970:**

January: Slim Harpo unknowingly punctures a lung over the weekend doing engine repair on one of his trucking business trucks; a week later he suddenly dies of a heart attack

New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival begins

Newport Folk Festival canceled permanently

Led Zeppelin begins using “I’m a King Bee” in their live “Whole Lotta Love” medleys

*Lonesome Lonely Blues* is Lonesome Sundown’s first Excello LP; Excello also releases posthumous *Slim Harpo Knew the Blues* album. Blue Horizon releases an expanded version in the U.K. (LPS-8012, 8013, BH S7-63854 (UK)); *Swamp Blues Volume 1 and Volume 2* albums from Excello (LPS-8015, 8016)

John Broven visits Louisiana for the first time with Mike Leadbitter and Robin Gosden. It is Leadbitter’s third and final trip to the U.S. They visit New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport

Flyright Records founded by Bruce Bastin, Robin Gosden, and Simon Napier under Interstate Music, Ltd; J.D. Miller starts the unrelated Blues Unlimited record label

Simon Napier hands editorial reins of *Blues Unlimited* over to Mike Leadbitter

*Living Blues* (US) magazine, the first American blues periodical, is founded by Jim and Amy O’Neal

September: Jimi Hendrix dies

Mike Vernon cements the “rediscovery” of Silas Hogan, Moses Whispering Smith, Arthur Guitar Kelley, Clarence Edwards, and Henry Gray by naming an Excello-sponsored fieldtrip the “Baton Rouge Super Session” recordings

December: Lightning Slim “rediscovered” by Detroit-area blues promoter Fred
Reif

December-January: A two-part Juke Boy Bonner interview is published in Blues Unlimited, the first interview published of any swamp bluesman. Sparks renewed interest in him and new recordings

1971:
Jean Knight: “Mr. Big Stuff” and Mr. Big Stuff
Blue Horizon releases second posthumous Slim Harpo album Trigger Finger (BH 2431 013); Excello releases Lightning Slim High And Low Down (LPS-8018)
Bruce Iglauer forms Alligator Records, Eddie Shuler launches BOLD for funk

1972:
January: Lightning Slim plays the Chicago Folk Festival
Katie Webster solo singles begin to appear on Goldband, GR 1244 and following
Eddie Shuler begins mailing around drafts of How to Become a Successful Record Producer manuscript to publishers
May: The Rolling Stones cover Slim Harpo’s “Shake Your Hips (Do the Hip Shake, Babe)” on their tenth studio album, Exile on Main St
Silas Hogan, Whispering Smith, Lightnin’ Slim, and Blues Live in Baton Rouge albums released by Excello (LPS 8019, 8020, 8023, 8021); Excello begins issuing retrospectives with double-LP The Excello Story (LPS-8025/8026)
La Foundation CODOFIL establishes the annual Festivals Acadiens in Lafayette
Lightning Slim and Whispering Smith play the AFBF tour in Europe
Blue Horizon Records (UK) closes

1973:
During a visit to Graceland, Elvis Presley asks Baton Rouge bubblegum pop musician John Fred, of “Judy in Disguise (with Glasses)” fame, to tell him about Slim Harpo
Bruce Bastin makes first fieldtrip to Louisiana, focusing on J.D. Miller vaults in Crowley
Marvin Gaye: “Let’s Get It On”
Ace (UK) director Ted Carroll visits Louisiana for the first time, focusing on Floyd Soileau in Ville Platte
*Blues Link* (UK) magazine starts
Stateside Records discontinued

**1974:**
July: Lightning Slim, 61, dies of stomach cancer in Detroit, MI
October: Mike Leadbitter dies unexpectedly of long illness become spinal meningitis
John Broven, Mike Rowe, Bez Turner, Bill Greensmith, Neil Slaven jointly run *Blues Unlimited*
John Broven publishes *Walking to New Orleans* (UK, Blues Unlimited Books)/*Rhythm & Blues in New Orleans* (US, Pelican), the first book on New Orleans r&b
Charly (FR/UK) reissue label founded, J.D. Miller creates Showtime label
*Blues World* (UK) magazine ceases production

**1975:**
Lazy Lester moves to Detroit, renting a room from Slim Harpo’s sister. This will lead to mistaken claims from later writers that the two bluesmen were brothers-in-law
August: Harding “Hop” Wilson, 54, dies of brain disease in Houston, TX
Floyd Soileau establishes Maison de Soul label for zydeco
*BLOCK* (NL) quarterly magazine formed by Rien and Marion Wisse
Bear Family Records (DE) formed
*Blues Link* (UK) folds
Bruce Bastin acquires the rights from J.D. Miller to being issuing unreleased materials on the *LJMS* series on Flyright (UK)

**1976:**
January: “I’m a King Bee” sketch on Saturday Night Live features John Belushi singing Slim Harpo’s song in a bee costume
The Legendary Jay Miller Sessions Vols. 1-6 issued to the UK and Europe by Flyright (UK)

Excello combines two prior Slim Harpo albums with five singles in the double LP Slim Harpo...Knew The Blues (Vol. 2) (Excello/Nashboro 28030)

Stevie Wonder: Songs in the Key of Life

1977:

Lonesome Sundown is convinced by Joliet’s Bruce Bromberg and Dennis Walker to come out of retirement to record the ultimately unsuccessful Been Gone Too Long

Bruce Bastin returns to Crowley to do more archival work at J.D. Miller’s vaults

Katie Webster’s LJMS album Vol. 9 sets off a Katie Webster craze in the U.K., leading to invitations to tour Europe and record

1978:

Baton Rouge bluesman Tabby Thomas opens his landmark Tabby’s Blues Box and Heritage Hall, where many retired swamp bluesmen will take residence for the next few decades

June: Weldon “Juke Boy” Bonner, 46, dies alone in Houston of stomach and liver illness

Morris “Big” Chenier, 49, dies in Lake Charles

Earth, Wind & Fire: “Serpentine Fire” and Serpentine Fire

John Broven leaves Blues Unlimited

Ace Records (UK) formed as reissue arm of Chiswick (UK) by Roger Armstrong, Trevor Churchill and Ted Carroll

1979:

John Broven tours Louisiana to research his upcoming book. On this trip he tapes interviews with Warren Storm and Katie Webster

Katie Webster returns to Goldband to record a comeback album, Katie Webster Has the Blues (GR LP 7780)

Folk Roots (UK) monthly magazine begins
1980:
Professor Longhair: *Crawfish Fiesta*
The W. C. Handy Awards founded
*Black Music Research Journal* established in Chicago
First attempts to form a Louisiana Music Hall of Fame
*Blues Forum* (DE) magazine opens

1981:
Muddy Waters records “I’m a King Bee” as the title song to his new album *King Bee*
German promoter Norbert Hess travels to Lake Charles to meet and interview Katie Webster for *Jefferson Blues Mag* (Sweden). He invites her to Europe next year

1982:
Katie Webster records second Goldband album *You Can Dig It* to little domestic success (GR LP 7785)
Katie Webster tours Europe billed as “The Queen of Louisiana Swamp Boogie Blues”, in the first of sixteen European tours in the next long decade
*Blues Unlimited Magazine* inducted to the Blues Hall of Fame as one of the Classics of Blues Literature

1983:
John Broven publishes *South to Louisiana: The Music of the Cajun Bayous*. It is the first and only full monograph devoted to discussing the variety of popular and indigenous musics of South Louisiana. Its appearance causes a small revival of swamp pop music in Louisiana. The term “swamp pop” is introduced to readers in Louisiana, and enters common usage
Eddie Shuler is the subject of a film made by OK Noise Productions in Chicago; they coin the “Shuler Complex” phrase that Shuler will enjoy for its hyperbole, and that other later writers will duplicate without the original comedic nuance
*Living Blues* magazine moves to the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi; *Il Blues* (IT) quarterly magazine founded
1984:
Chicago Blues Festival begins
The World’s Fair and Exposition is in New Orleans
Chris Strachwitz records an hour-long interview with Eddie Shuler
April: Moses “Whispering Smith”, 52, dies in Baton Rouge, LA
November: Elton Anderson, 54, dies in Ville Platte, LA
Ace (UK) shifts focus to licensing American music for reissues
*Blues & Rhythm—The Gospel Truth* (UK) monthly magazine founded

1985:
*Juke Blues* quarterly magazine founded by former *Blues Unlimited* heads John Broven, Cilla Huggins, and Bez Turner
Slim Harpo posthumously inducted to the Blues Hall of Fame
Leadbitter and Slaven’s *Blues Records 1943-1966* (first edition, not the expanded, corrected, and well-received second edition that is not yet printed) inducted to the Blues Hall of Fame as one of the Classics of Blues Literature
Nick Spitzer edits a hefty six-chapter, and 9-appendix, booklet on Louisiana Folklife for the State Office of Cultural Development. It contains significant scholarship relating to the swamp blues, but is little seen, not promoted, and never circulated
AFBF canceled permanently

1986:
July: Clarence “Bon Ton” Garlow, 75, dies in Beaumont, TX
J.D. Miller moves shop again in the mid-80s, resulting in another change in sound but also in the discovery of more untapped master-tapes
*Record Research* (UK) folds

1987:
*Offbeat* (US) monthly magazine founded in New Orleans
*Blues Unlimited* (UK) folds after 24 years and 149 issues, *Blues Forum* (DE) also folds

**1988:**

Johnnie Allan, veteran swamp popper, publishes *Memories: A Pictorial History of South Louisiana Music*, a softbound coffee table-sized book with photos, short discographies, and biographical information on South Louisiana musicians divided generically and racially among swamp blues, Cajun, zydeco, swamp pop, and other SWLA and SETX genres from his own collections.

Katie Webster, now a contracted Alligator artist, records another comeback album with guests Bonnie Raitt and Robert Cray. *Swamp Boogie Queen* reestablishes her primacy in the gulf coast blues. One quarter of the album is old swamp blues repertoire: “No Bread, No Meat”, “Whoo-Wee Sweet Daddy”, and “Sea of Love”. This comeback will bring more invitations to European and American tours.

Mike Vernon reopens Blue Horizon, together with Ace Records (UK)

J.D. Miller’s Blues Unlimited label closes.

**1989:**

Lafayette weekly newspaper establishes The South Louisiana Hall of Fame, which will historically focus mostly on rockabilly, Cajun, and Creole musics

Katie Webster releases third and last Goldband album *My Sexy Red Negligee* (GR LP 7804)

Flyright’s *The Legendary Jay Miller Sessions Vol. 57* is the final installment of the series (FLY LP 622)

*Scratch My Back: The Best of Slim Harpo (The Original King Bee)* is the first canonizing Slim Harpo CD (Rhino 70169); Flyright releases similar *I’m a King Bee* (FLYCD 05)

*Blue Suede News* (US) founded

**1990:**


Simon Napier, *Blues Unlimited* and Flyright co-founder, 51, dies of heart attack

Ace Records (UK) begins systematically issuing vintage Cajun, swamp blues, and

392
swamp pop records on CDs intended for “serious enthusiasts”

Excello releases three retrospectives on CD with Rhino: *The Best of Slim Harpo*, *The Best of Excello Records, Volume 1: The sound of the Swamp*, *Volume 2: Southern Rhythm & Rock* (R2 70169, R2 70896, R2 70897)

A Louisiana Hall of Fame Entertainment Division is founded in Lafayette. Regular inductees include Cajun, zydeco, and swamp pop performers.

*Blues Access* (US) quarterly magazine founded

**1991:**

Floyd Soileau starts using his Jin label to release vintage swamp pop

Jay Miller and Eddie Shuler both interviewed on tape (separately) by Shane Bernard

*Blues Revue* (US) quarterly founded

Utrecht Blues Festival in the Netherlands features swamp poppers Johnnie Allan and Warren Storm

John Broven retires from banking and consummates his longtime contributions by officially joining the Ace Records (UK) staff

**1992:**

House of Blues is founded

Ace’s John Broven and managing director Roger Armstrong spend two weeks in South Louisiana digitally copying vault tapes and securing licensing deals with SWLA recordmen, including a thorough re-combing of Eddie Shuler vaults with Shuler’s brother-in-law, Goldband engineer Bert Frilot. By copying directly from the disintegrating masters, Ace was finally able to bypass the poorly overdubbed and unbalanced bass lines Shuler had superimposed in the 1970s

Shane Bernard tapes interview with John Broven

Ace begins reissue relationship with AVI and the Excello vaults

**1993:**

Elmore James: *Classic Early Recordings 1951-1956* (3-CD)

*USPS* issues stamps featuring Howlin’ Wolf, Robert Johnson, Ma Rainey, Jimmy Rushing, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, and Muddy Waters

Shane Bernard tapes phone interview with Eddie Shuler
Katie Webster suffers a stroke while on tour in Greece, losing partial eyesight and use of her left hand. She continues to perform. “I don’t feel too bad,” she said, speaking to Bill Dahl, “I have just a little slight paralysis in the left hand. But other than that, I’m walking without a stick and I’m talking without a slur.” She continues to perform

London’s Another Saturday Night concert features swamp poppers Johnnie Allan, Warren Storm, and Tommy McLain

John Broven begins programming systematic releases of the Excello r&b catalogue at Ace (UK). The Best of Slim Harpo is the first Slim Harpo anthology from the label; I’m a King Bee follows next year (Ace CDCHD 410, CDCHD 510)

1994:

January: Alligator Records’ The Alligator Records 20th Anniversary Tour live album, prominently featuring Katie Webster, is nominated for the 1993 Grammy for Best Traditional Blues Album

Silas Hogan, 83, dies in Scotlandville, LA of heart disease

March: B.B. King’s Blues Summit album wins the 1993 Grammy Award for Best Traditional Blues Album. It features a duet with Katie Webster

Rolling Stones guitarist Ron Wood states in an interview that he wrote songs like “Black Limousine” after Hop Wilson guitar licks

“Budget” Collectables label releases 3-CD box set of Goldband blues

1995:

Louisiana State Legislature proclaims Ville Platte the “Swamp Pop Capital of the World”; (thanks mostly to the campaigning of a Lafayette swamp pop deejay, Mark Layne) and Church Point the “official home of Cajun, zydeco, and swamp pop.” Establishes the Acadian Music Heritage Association in Church Point whose pursuit is to promote and preserve equally Cajun, zydeco, and swamp pop music—no mention of the swamp blues as having Acadian heritage

April: Lonesome Sundown, 66, dies in Gonzales, LA after suffering a debilitating stroke the year prior

Eddie Shuler donates/sells Goldband Papers to UNC’s SFC through introduction by Shane Bernard. In addition to 35 linear feat of paper files, the papers include 2,200 open reel tapes, 1,000 cassettes, 1,500 45 rpm records, 200 78 rpm records, 200 acetate discs, 200 LPs, 50 CDs, and 25 8-track tapes

Eddie Shuler sells the Goldband rights to Ace Records (UK)

Blues Records 1943-1970: The Bible of the Blues Vol. 2, L-Z, the second half of
Mike Leadbitter’s life’s work, is finally published in very limited quantity, thanks to the additional help of compilers Paul Pelletier and Les Fancourt

Excello, newly acquired by AVI, begins reissue campaigns of its swamp blues vaults starting with the 2-CD *Hip Shakin’: The Excello Collection* (Excello/AVI CD 2001); six more Excello swamp blues compilations also issued this year, plus one more in 1996 (Excello/AVI CD 3001, 3002, 3003, 3004, 3005, 3008, 3015)

Ace (UK) releases two more Slim Harpo albums

“Baby, Scratch My Back” opens a Booker T. & The M.G.s album (Ace UK) of previously unissued covers recorded in the 1960s

*Blues News: Das Deutsche Bluesmagazin* (DE) founded

1996:

March: J.D. Miller, 74, dies following quadruple bypass surgery

Shane Bernard publishes *Swamp Pop: Cajun and Creole Rhythm and Blues*

1997:

“Baby Scratch My Back” inducted as an individual Classic of Blues Recording into the Blues Hall of Fame

1998:

Fats Domino and Dave Bartholomew inducted into Songwriters Hall of Fame

January: Lee Lavergne, founder of Lanor Records of Church Point, LA, 65, dies; George Khoury, Lake Charles record pioneer, 89, dies in Lake Charles

1999:

Cosimo Matassa, legendary New Orleans producer and first independent recordman in Louisiana, posthumously granted New Orleans’ *Offbeat Magazine’s* first-ever Lifetime Achievement in Music Business award

BMI counts 787 songwriting credits to Eddie Shuler through Tek Publishing

September: Katie Webster, 60, dies of a heart attack

2000:

Lonesome Sundown posthumously inducted into an erroneous Louisiana Blues
Hall of Fame; records are not kept. The official LMHOF denies the induction

Floyd Soileau, Ville Platte record pioneer, awarded Offbeat Magazine’s second Lifetime Achievement in Music Business Award

2001:

Eddie Shuler awarded Offbeat Magazine’s third-ever Lifetime Achievement Award in Music Business

Guitar Junior inducted to the erroneous Louisiana Blues Hall of Fame; the official LMHOF denies the induction

May: Boozoo Chavis, Goldband artist and zydeco legend, 70, dies after suffering a stroke and heart attack on the road in Austin, TX

September: Arthur “Guitar” Kelley, 83, dies in Baton Rouge

Ace (UK) expands and repackages the classic Storyville SLP 177 Louisiana Blues album with notes by John Broven, released as Goin’ Down to Louisiana: The Goldband Downhome Blues Anthology, opening a whole new generation to the Goldband swamp blues (Ace CDCHD 821)

The Ponderosa Stomp Foundation forms
“to acknowledge, pay tribute to, and teach the cultural significance of the unsung heroes and heroines of rock-n-roll [sic], rhythm & blues and other forms of American roots music—while they are still alive. We provide both a voice and a stage to overlooked sidemen, session musicians and other influential pioneers whose contributions have shaped American culture for over 50 years.”

In other words, the 501(c)3 non-profit is formed to honor the legacy of the musicians of this dissertation.

2002:

Lionel Prevost, 66, dies in Port Arthur, TX

Stan Lewis, Shreveport record pioneer, receives Offbeat Magazine’s fourth Lifetime Achievement in Music Business Award

Rick Koster publishes Louisiana Music: A Journey from R&B to Zydeco, Jazz to Country, Blues to Gospel, Cajun Music to Swamp Pop to Carnival Music and Beyond. It does not discuss the swamp blues

Blues Access (US) folds

2003:
Bill Parker, former Goldband drummer and later leader of Bill Parker’s Showboat Band, 75, dies in Lake Charles, LA

Inaugural Slim Harpo Awards festival in Baton Rouge, honoring members of Slim Harpo’s live band The King Bees James Johnson and Rudy Richard

Ace (UK) anthologizes the Goldband blues in *Eddie’s House of Hits: The Story of Goldband Records* (Ace CDCHD 424)

2004:

April: Lazy Lester, Guitar Gable, Carol Fran, and King Karl, who together are the majority of remaining Miller-Excelfo musicians, each play a song at the third annual Ponderosa Stomp festival in New Orleans

Eddie and Elsie Shuler move to Snellville, GA, near their son

Carol Rachou, 71, founder of La Louisianne Recording Studio and record label dies in Lafayette, LA

November: Baton Rouge blues institution Tabby’s Blues Box and Heritage Hall, owned by Tabby Thomas, closes permanently

Slim Harpo album *Raining In My Heart* (Excelfo, 1961) inducted as a Classic of Blues Recording in the Blues Hall of Fame

2005:

July: Eddie Shuler, 92, dies in Atlanta, GA

2006:

The Blues Foundation is incorporated from the former W.C. Handy Awards and renames its awards the Blues Music Awards

Goldband Records and Eddie Shuler are the cover story of Louisiana’s *Independent Weekly*

Lazy Lester receives the “Legend” Slim Harpo Music Award

John Broven retires from consulting at Ace Records (UK) after 250 albums

Ed Komara’s watershed *Encyclopedia Of The Blues* is published by Taylor & Francis

2007:
Louisiana Music Hall of Fame re-starts under new 501(c)3 status under La Musique de Louisianne, [sic] Inc
Cosimo Matassa inducted into the Louisiana Music Hall of Fame
Robert Ford’s game-changing *A Blues Bibliography* is published by Routledge

**2008:**
Chicago Blues Festival celebrates 25th anniversary
“Baby, Scratch My Back” opens Taj Mahal’s twenty-sixth studio album *Maestro*
September: the new HBO series *True Blood* has Slim Harpo’s “Strange Love” in its first episode. The episode is also titled “Strange Love”
“I’m a King Bee” inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame
Silas Hogan posthumously receives the “Legend” Slim Harpo Music Award

**2009:**
B.B. King celebrates 60 years of recording
January: Ray Topping, longtime British discographer, Ace compiler, and collector of Louisiana music, dies after long illness
May: Ashton Savoy, 80, dies after prolonged ill health
Mike Leadbitter inducted as a non-performer into the Blues Hall of Fame
Stan Lewis inducted into the Louisiana Music Hall of Fame
Dr. John receives the “Legend” Slim Harpo Music Award
John Broven publishes *Record Makers and Breakers: Voices of the Independent Rock ‘n’ Roll Pioneers*, with one chapter devoted to the recordmen of Louisiana
December: a paired-down *True Blood* Season 1 soundtrack, still featuring Slim Harpo’s “Strange Love”, is Grammy nominated. The show’s musical director says of Harpo’s singing and J.D. Miller’s production, “you hear this spooky quality in their vocals...And with the great instrumentation and production around them, it’s a beautiful mix.”

**2010:**
March: Charles “Mad Dog” Sheffield dies, possibly in Spring, TX
Warren Storm inducted to the Louisana Music Hall of Fame
The University of Mississippi Blues Archive receives Percy Mayfield and Lowell
Fulson Papers
Tom Aswell publishes *Louisiana Rocks! The True Genesis of Rock & Roll*.

**2011:**
Lonesome Sundown posthumously receives the “Legend” Slim Harpo Music Award
Slim Harpo posthumously inducted to the Louisiana Music Hall of Fame
John Broven’s *Walking to New Orleans* inducted as a Classic of Blues Literature to the Blues Hall of Fame
Preston Lauterbach publishes *The Chitlin’ Circuit and the Road to Rock ‘n’ Roll*. It does not discuss the swamp blues
Steve Miller Band covers Slim Harpo’s “I Got Love if You Want It”
*True Blood*’s selected Seasons 3 and 4 soundtrack, which counts Slim Harpo’s “Te Ni Nee Ni Nu”, is Grammy nominated

**2012:**
Etta James, Jimmy McCracklin die
Freddie King inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame
Lazy Lester inducted to the Blues Hall of Fame
J.D. Miller posthumously receives the “Legend” Slim Harpo Music Award
Ian Saddler, a British record collector specializing on Louisiana music, joins the Ace (UK) staff as compiler and begins issuing the *By the Bayou* series of Goldband and Excello materials
The Rolling Stones’ *Exile on Main St.* (1972), containing Slim Harpo’s “Shake Your Hips”, is inducted to the Grammy Hall of Fame

**2013:**
Carol Fran receives the National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts’ Folk Arts Program
May: Eddie Shuler posthumously inducted to the Louisiana Music Hall of Fame
September: the tenth annual Ponderosa Stomp music festival in New Orleans honors Excello and Cosimo Matassa; on opening night three of the few remaining swamp blues musicians, Lazy Lester, James Johnson (of Slim Harpo’s The King Bees), and Warren Storm, play an “Excello tribute jam” and bring down the
house

Cosimo Matassa inducted as a non-performer into the Blues Hall of Fame
Warren Storm receives the “Legend” Slim Harpo Music Award

2014:
A historical marker is placed by Slim Harpo’s gravesite in his hometown of Port Allen, LA.
September: Cosimo Matassa, 88, dies in New Orleans, LA
Steve Cushing publishes Pioneers of the Blues Revival with extensive interviews from historic swamp blues writers Paul Oliver, Sam Charters, Pete Whelan, John Broven, Mike Rowe, Jim O’Neal, Jacques Demêtre, Chris Barber, David Evans, and Chris Strachwitz. Broven names a handful of Crowley bluesmen at one point, David Evans names Lonesome Sundown and Excello once, and Jim O’Neal refers briefly to Slim Harpo; there is no mention of the swamp blues

2015:
May: B.B. King dies
Bear Family Records releases Buzzin’ The Blues: The Complete Slim Harpo Recordings, a 5-CD box set that wins the Blues Foundation’s Blues Music Award (formerly the W.C. Handy Award) for 2016 Historical Album of the Year
July: The Baton Rouge airport opens a double-sided, twenty-foot “Wall of Fame” collage of Louisiana Music Hall of Fame inductees, in the only such tangible marker honoring blues musicians in the state
Jimmie Vaughn’s acceptance speech upon receiving the Slim Harpo Music Award concludes, “Who needs a Grammy when you got a Slim Harpo Award?”
December: Louisiana Music Hall of Fame renames and reorganizes the corporation under The Louisiana Music Hall of Fame, Inc., and gains renewed 501(c)3 non-profit status

2016:
Slim Harpo documentary announced
September: Martin Hawkins publishes Slim Harpo: Blues King Bee of Baton Rouge, the first monograph devoted entirely to the swamp blues
Sources:


Shuler, Eddie. Personal interview by Larry Benicewicz. 1990, Parts I-VI. Lake Charles, La. Tape recordings in possession of the University of Louisiana
at Lafayette Center for Louisiana Studies. Accession numbers BE2.009, BE2.010, BE2.011, BE2.012, BE2.013, BE2.014, and BE2.015.


APPENDIX B
Record Labels

A

A-bet Subsidiary soul label of Excello’s parent Nashboro Records running from 1966-1976. Joe Johnson’s “Santa Bring My Baby Back”/“Dirty Woman Blues” single on A-Bet 9417 was one of the last pairings J.D. Miller leased to Nashboro Music Group in the latter 1960s. Katie Webster and Guitar Grady backed the session with possibly the Moore Brothers band. Guitar Gable’s popular “Congo Mombo” (recorded 1956) was re-released on A-Bet LP 401. Mankind was another sister soul label under Nashboro.

ABC-Paramount/BluesWay/Dot ABC-Paramount was the flagship popular music label of the ABC-Paramount film corporation, running 1956-1966. The music division of ABC, the AM-PAR recording company, controlled the label. The name changed to ABC Records in 1966, at the same time founding the blues subsidiary BluesWay and continuing to acquire labels like Dot (f. 1951, bought 1965) and Blue Thumb (f. 1968, bought 1974) in the sixties and seventies. In the UK the label’s material was released on Stateside and Probe. Jay Miller session drummer Warren Storm recorded relatively unsuccessful solo material for Dot around 1960. Houston record man Huey Meaux leased successful swamp pop recordings from Freddy Fender and Joe Barry to ABC/Dot in the mid-seventies.

Ace Records (Mississippi) Not to be confused with the prolific UK’s blues reissue label of the same name. Ace (US) was founded 1955 in Jackson, MS by Johnny Vincent, who recorded most of his releases in Cosimo Matassa’s New Orleans studio and shared professional circles with Eddie Shuler and Jay Miller. Ace (US) enjoyed success in the late 1950s with hits from Huey “Piano” Smith (“Rockin’ Pneumonia and the Boogie Woogie Flu” (1957), “Pop-Eye” (1962)) and Jimmy Clanton (“Just A Dream” (1958), “Go Jimmy Go” (1959)). By 1962 Vincent signed with Vee-Jay in an attempt to widen distribution and increase sales. When Vee-Jay collapsed in 1967, Ace briefly returned to being a small regional label, then closed. Ace reopened in 1971 to reissue records from its own vaults, ceased pressing in 1977, and in 1997 was finally sold to the UK’s Demon Music Group. Vincent died in 2000. Ace had the subsidiaries Teem and Vin. In 1959 Vincent briefly operated the Trey label with Eddie Shuler’s son Wayne Shuler.

Ace (United Kingdom) Subsidiary of Chiswick Records (f.1975) founded in 1978 to reissue its own catalogue. Ace (UK) began focusing on reissue and overseas licensing in 1984, and eventually outshined its parent label to become one of the most important sources of postwar blues releases in the
world. The “highly respected” and prolific reissue label produced CDs from classic postwar (“obscure”) blues labels like Modern, Specialty, Excello, Decca, Combo, Stax, Goldband, and more. LJMS series organizers John Broven and Ray Topping have been frequent Ace series consultants and programmers. Since Excello’s 1997 acquisition by MCA/Universal, Ace has made more than thirty reissue CDs of Excello material. For an example of the label’s tight focus on SWLA repertoire, from 2012-2016 alone it has issued a sixteen-volume “By the Bayou” compilation series of material from the J.D. Miller and Eddie Shuler vaults (CDCHD 1345, 1355, 1363, 1368, 1380, 1388, 1397, 1403, 1415, 1422, 1443, 1448, 1462, 1471, 1478, 1486), alternately prefixed with “Boppin”, “Swamp Pop”, “Rhythm n’ Bluesin'”, or “Bluesin'.” Some of the albums included songs from other Louisiana record men Floyd Soileau, Carol Rachou, Charles “Dago” Redlich, Jake Graffagnino, and Sam Montalbano.

**Action** (US) Short-lived Jay Miller label. Action 100 was a Katie Webster and misspelled Ashton Savoy (as “Conroy”) single (1961), which was also released on Miller’s Kry label. See Cry, Zynn.

Action (UK). British reissue label founded in 1968 not to be confused with Jay Miller’s subsidiary.

Aladdin Hollywood, CA-based label founded in 1945 as Philo Records by the three Mesner brothers, who changed the name to Aladdin the following year. The label pressed its first 45 rps in 1951, selling mostly rhythm & blues and early rock & roll that catered early on to the African-American record-buying market, including Clarence Garlow’s follow-up 1953 recordings “Hey Mr. Bon Ton” and “New Bon Ton Roulay” released on Ald 3179 and Ald 3225. While the majority of the company’s output was recorded in its L.A. studio, many were recorded in New Orleans by Cosimo Matassa. Aladdin owned the subsidiaries Score (1948), Intro (1950), 7-11 (1952), Ultra (1955), Jazz West (1955), and Lamp (1956). Aladdin was sold to Lew Chudd’s Imperial Records in 1961, and is owned today by Capitol.

Alligator Bruce Iglauer’s famous independent blues label founded in Chicago in 1971 with the famous slogan “Genuine House Rockin’ Music!” Alligator quickly began racking up Grammy nominations in the seventies and earned its first in 1982 from a Zydeco album from Clifton Chenier. Alligator is known as a vehicle for reviving the careers of retired or under-exposed blues musicians, including the release of Katie Webster LPs in the 1970s, and a contract with Lonnie Brooks (formerly Guitar Jr.) since 1978.

Anla Goldband subsidiary founded in1968 for soul music, but the name was also used by Eddie Shuler for graphic printing and other businesses into the nineties. Of its twenty-six singles, Anla’s best-known releases are from Chester Randle’s Soul Senders (A 102, 105, 118). Swamp blues session
men Bill Parker and Wild Bill each released a single on Anla in 1968, and in contrast to the label’s usual soul output, these releases kept to classic blues themes. Wild Bill and the Blue Washboard Boys released “Won’t Be Your Hound Dog Anymore”/“Washboard Choo Choo” (A 111) and Bill Parker, “Gonna Put My Foot Down”/“I Waited in the Rain” (A 125). Part of the Goldband/Folk Star/Jador/Trey/Tic Toc family. See Goldband.

Argo/Cadet Subsidiary of Chess that ran 1956-1965 to accommodate growing activity at Chess. Begun as Argo and best-known for its jazz catalogue, the label also offered pop, blues and calypso at its start. The label’s first hit was the New Orleans R&B number by Clarence “Frogman” Henry “Ain’t Got No Home” in 1956. In October 1956 Argo held sessions in an L.A. studio for Clifton Chenier and band that included Jay Miller’s session sax-man Lionel Prevost, and again in Chicago in 1957. Chenier’s releases from these dates came out in 1956 on Argo 5262, Argo LP 635, Argo LP 649, and in 1957 Argo 5289. In 1966 Argo changed its name to Cadet to avoid confusion with a UK label of the same name, and ran as Cadet until 1975.

Arhoolie A keystone in the ongoing promotion of roots music in the U.S., Arhoolie was founded in 1960 by Chris Strachwitz to release new recordings and archival material of “previously obscure” down-home blues music from Lightnin’ Hopkins, Snooks Eaglin, Bill Gaither, and others. In many instances, Strachwitz was putting blues artists already famous in Britain, but unknown (to white audiences) in the U.S., on the American map. Recorded Juke Boy Bonner in late 1967, 1968, and 1969, Baton Rouge bluesmen Silas Hogan, Arthur “Guitar” Kelley, Whispering Smith, and Henry Gray in April 1970, and Clifton Chenier across the 1970s, this last for whom Strachwitz created the Bayou subsidiary label in 1974 with Floyd Soileau exclusively. Attention turned heavily to Mexican and Mexican-American music in the 1980s. In the 1980s and 1990s, Strachwitz developed Arhoolie to distribute small indie label blues and to import European label-released jazz and blues. Discovered twenty-first century Louisiana artists Michael Doucet and Beausoleil. Has recorded Rebirth Brass Band. Today puts out blues, folk, Cajun, Zydeco, Tejano, regional Mexican (Tex Mex), polka, and bluegrass. See the 2014 documentary about Arhoolie This Ain’t No Mouse Music. See also Bayou Records. Arhoolie imports prewar blues and gospel from the Austrian Document label and the Dutch Pan World label. It is part of the Arhoolie/Blues Classics/Folk Lyric family.

B

Bally Hoo Goldband subsidiary label for Count Rockin’ Sidney singles that ran ca. 1976-1982. Twelve singles releases in all: ten by Count Rockin’ Sidney, one under his legal name Sidney Simien (BH 1018 (1982)), and BH 1019
Bayou Arhoolie subsidiary created in 1974 by Floyd Soileau and Chris Strachwitz for releasing Clifton Chenier music. Released nineteen of his singles, numbered B 701-719. Soon thereafter Soileau created his own Zydeco label Maison de Soul. Not to be confused with Californian Bayou label that put out Dave Bartholomew’s “Country Girl” in 1953 before being bought by Lew Chudd’s Imperial. See Arhoolie, Maison de Soul, Jin.


Bear Family Records (Germany) German label known as “Europe’s box set king,” founded in 1975 and with a prolific catalog centering on American vintage country, R&B, and blues. The imprint specializes in vintage releases of excelling sound quality, digitizing from first-generation masters in most cases, then ordered chronologically on CD. Detailed and comprehensive research presented in LP-sized (12”x12”) full-length hardbound books accompany these archival box sets, as well as documentary interviews with musicians or music executives who figure prominently in the music’s history alongside, last, a complete recording discography. Few other reissue labels provide such historical and contextual material, but the closest is the Hip-O-Select series, and some Charly or Revenant packages. Many Bear Family albums have included the swamp blues and other South Louisiana musics partly in an effort to make material attractive to the dedicated Ace (UK) audience (seeking relatively obscure R&B). Four box-sets relate directly to the swamp blues in their focus on Excello and Nashboro (BCD15864), Slim Harpo (5-CD, award-winning, BCD17339), Arhoolie 40th Anniversary (with swamp blues from Clifton Chenier, Juke Boy Bonner, and Katie Webster, CDARH491) and the complete French-language recordings from J.D. Miller’s studio (BCD17206).

Big Mamou. Short-lived Floyd Soileau imprint opened in 1957 for Cajun music, based in Ville Platte. See Swallow, Jin.

Big Town Historic West Coast blues record man Bob Geddins’ original Oakland, California-based label running 1945-1955. Swamp bluesmen Juke Boy Bonner and Jimmy Wilson both got their starts with Geddins, who also released their material on his Irma subsidiary. 4 Star Records owned Big Town by 1953 when the label reissued Jimmy Wilson sides, including the classic “Tin Pan Alley” (written by Geddins) which got national exposure thanks to the new parent company. Eddie Shuler re-recorded the song in 1958 with extra instruments. Not to be confused with
the unrelated eponymous 1970s label. Part of the Irma/Big Town/Down Town/Cava-Tone /Rhythm /Veltone/Geddinsons/Art-Tone family. See Cava-tone, Irma.

**Blue Horizon (United Kingdom)** British label founded by blues promoter Mike Vernon in 1966 and operated until its 1972 closure, then reopened in 1988. Once the UK’s “most influential blues label”, this label operated as mail-order for the first two years, with small-batch new recordings of U.S. blues artists that Vernon produced and recorded, like Eddie Boyd, Doctor Ross, and Southeastern Louisiana native Roosevelt Holts (recorded for example in Franklinton, LA 1965-6, N.O., LA 1966, and Bogalusa, LA 1966, 1969-1970). One of Vernon’s early projects (which helped to fund the rest) was the famous John Mayall and Eric Clapton collaboration *Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton* (1966). The label’s first big deal was a worldwide licensing and distribution contract with CBS, which launched the label’s most successful and productive years (1967-1970), followed by Polydor distribution from 1970 until the label’s discontinuation in 1972 (having already ceased record production the year prior). CBS/Blue Horizon pressings included British and U.S. blues artists Otis Spann, Champion Jack Dupree, Fleetwood Mac, and more. Most relevant here, Blue Horizon began a campaign in 1970 of releasing virtually every Excello swamp blues LP (9 of them) in the U.K., and as such, Mike Vernon and the B.H. name are strongly affiliated with the swamp blues. See, for instance, Lightnin’ Slim (Excello LP-8000 (US 1960) = BH 7-63863 (UK 1970)), Lazy Lester (Excello LPS-8006 (US 1967) = BH 2431-007 (UK 1971)), Lonesome Sundown (Excello LP 8012 (US 1970) = BH 7-63864 (UK 1970)), and Slim Harpo (Excello LPS-8013 (US 1970) = BH 7-63854 (UK 1970)), and the double-LP albums Swamp Blues (Excello LPS-8015/16 (US 1970) = BH 7-66263 (UK 1970)) and *The Excello Story* (Excello LPS-8025 (US 1972) = BH 2683 007 (UK 1972)).

In August 1970 Mike Vernon arranged the famous “Baton Rouge blues super session” where over the course of six days, veteran bluesmen Silas Hogan (with son Samuel Hogan drumming), Arthur “Guitar” Kelley, Whispering Smith, and Henry Gray recorded solo sets funded by, and to be released on, Excello. Through the early seventies Mike Vernon produced many swamp blues LPs in conjunction with Excello from the label’s back catalogue. In 1988 Vernon revived the label for new recordings of more veterans including Lazy Lester. In the past fifteen years (2000-2015) Mike Vernon has remastered some of the old Blue Horizon material for new release; in June 2012 BBC Radio 4 broadcasted a 30-minute documentary about the label.

Blues & Rhythm/Blues and Rhythm A Modern Records subsidiary belonging to the Bihari brothers in 1951-1952. Few releases; not related to the
influential British blues magazine of the same name founded in 1984. See Modern.

Blues Roots Not the name of a record label, as has been confused, but the name of two series from separate labels. The first was from German Teldec, which released 10 LPs and one double-LP of Storyville material in 1979, and ten issues of Chess material in 1982. The second “Blues Roots” series was the Storyville SLP 6.23700 series in 1979 (Vols. 1-8 of Leadbelly, Champion Jack Dupree, etc.), including much of the same content.

Blues Unlimited (US) Subsidiary of Master-Trak Enterprises founded in the transition between J.D. Miller and his son Mark Miller’s leadership in 1970. This singles label was named in honor of, but had no relation to, the British Blues Unlimited journal that had contributed to worldwide revived interest in South Louisiana music from its start in 1963 through the 1980s. Despite the magazine’s devotion to the blues, the label’s releases, which span 1970 to 1988, are mostly swamp pop and Zydeco, from artists like Rockin’ Dupsee/Dopsie (BU 1000 and BU 2000, recorded 1970), Fernest & The Thunders, and Buckwheat Zydeco. The handful of blues singles from the label includes Henry Gray’s BU 100, recorded March 1970 with the Moore Brothers band, Juke Boy Bonner’s BU 102 recorded 1969, one posthumous Slim Harpo single in 1979 (BU 2015), and two others from Tabby Thomas in 1980 (BU 2019 and BU 2022).

Bluesville This label was the blues subsidiary (1959-1966) of jazz-oriented Prestige Records (1949-1971) owned by Bob Weinstock and based in New York City. Bluesville was created to print new, in-house recordings of second-generation country bluesmen like Rev. Gary Davis, Lightnin' Hopkins, Blind Willie McTell, Little Brother Montgomery, Memphis Slim, Roosevelt Sykes, New Orleanian Snooks Eaglin in 1959-1960, Sonny Terry, and Big Joe Williams. Blues researcher and revival pioneer Sam Charters oversaw the Bluesville and Folklore series for Prestige from 1963. In 1966 blues releases that would have appeared on Bluesville began being issued by Milestone Records, a sibling subsidiary in the Prestige/Fantasy/Bluesville/Galaxy/ Milestone/Riverside family. See Prestige.


BOLD 1970s Goldband subsidiary for mostly Count Rockin’ Sidney records, run by Eddie Shuler. Of the label’s nine releases, four are from Count Rockin’ Sidney ca. 1971 (BOLD 1003, 1006, 1008, 1017). In 1976 Bally Hoo took over for BOLD. See Bally Hoo.

Bon Temps Floyd Soileau’s brief Swallow subsidiary that released two Rockin’ Dupsie singles in 1968. Also based in Ville Platte. See Swallow, Jin.
Cajun Classics Subsidiary of Master-Trak Enterprises for early Cajun releases from Nathan Abshire, Aldus Roger, and Harry Choates. The label released two-dozen singles, a 2-part Cajun comedy series (CC 2000 “Laughing with Tee-Nomme & Boudreaux Part 1/ Part 2”), and one cassette (Jay Randall CC 4501 “Cajun Boogie”). Album LP and CD releases were under MTE Records. Many Cajun Classics singles were reissued on the LJMS Series Vol. 45 as part of a compilation of early Cajun recordings from Jay Miller. See MTE.

Cajun Jamboree Another Master-Trak Enterprises subsidiary owned by Jay Miller but opened and operated by his son Mark. A total twenty-nine singles were released from Gene Thibodeaux, Joe Bonsai & the Orange Playboys, Blackie Fruge, and other new-age Cajun acts. See MTE.

Capitol Records Within four years of Johnny Mercer’s founding, Capital had sold 42 million records by 1946 and become one of that era’s “Big Six” labels. In 1955 Capital was acquired by British EMI to be EMI’s American arm. In 1962 Capitol leased swamp bluesman Elton Anderson recordings from Lee Laverne’s Lanor label that had been recorded in New Orleans. His “Life’s Problem” (Cap 4762) was a national hit. In 1963 Capitol had first right of refusal to release Beatles music as an EMI label and helped ignite the Beatlemania of 1964. In 1969 Capitol released Guitar Junior LP (Cap LP 403) despite his change of name to Lonnie Brooks a decade prior. In 1968 Eddie Shuler’s son Wayne Shuler was promoted from the Capitol representative in New Orleans to “A&R producer in charge of independent production” (purchasing or leasing external masters and re-producing them) at Capitol’s Hollywood headquarters. Among his early initiatives was to increase the label’s R&B output by signing independent R&B producers—such as his father, but not including him or Goldband—like New Orleanian Joe Banashak (Minit) and Mississippian Tommy Couch (Malaco).

Capri Huey Meaux’s early sixties rock and roll label out of Conroe, TX jointly owned with Foy Lee. The label’s biggest two hits were Gene Summers & The Tom Toms’ “Big Blue Diamonds” (1964) and their “rockabilly classic” cover of Red Perkins’ “Alabama Shake”. Part of the Crazy Cajun/Teardrop family. See Crazy Cajun.

Cava-Tone Short-lived 1948-1949 Bob Geddins label that released Jimmy Wilson sides before he returned to Louisiana to record for Goldband. Part of the Big Town/Down Town/Cava-Tone/Rhythm/Irma/Veltone/Geddinsons/Art-Tone family. See Big Town, Irma.

Chamo One of the Mark Miller subsidiaries organized under Master-Trak after

Charly (France/United Kingdom) Reissue label founded in France in 1974 by Jean-Luc Young, then moved to London in 1975, for American blues, R&B, and rockabilly. In the 1980s Charly released a series of twenty-five LPs of unedited, previously unissued Goldband material including two Katie Webster and one Guitar Junior album, and other labels’ output; a counterpart release to Flyright’s Legendary Jay Miller Sessions series released from 1976-1989.

Collectables Pennsylvania-based reissue company opened 1980 to feature lines of “budget” oldies compilations. Two Ace (UK) albums from 1993 included Goldband material as well as a Goldband Records three-box Goldband Blues Collection set in 1994 (COL-5087, 5088, 5089). Collectables is the largest independent reissue label in the U.S., releasing from a variety of vaults including Columbia, Atlantic, RCA, Capitol, Vee-Jay, and many independents. The audio quality of their releases was heavily criticized for many years but improved in the mid-nineties under the direction of Little Walter DeVenne; the in-house restoration and mastering services of the major labels the music is licensed by has likewise garnered praise.

Columbia The original distributor of Edison phonographs and phonograph cylinders in greater Washington, D.C., already having a ten-page catalogue of music recordings in 1891. The company’s English subsidiary, the Columbia Graphophone Co., bought out the father company in 1923, and in 1931 merged with the Gramophone Company to form EMI. In 1938 the U.S. Columbia label changed hands again, bought out by the broadcasting company it had cofounded eleven years prior, CBS. Columbia released its first single 45 rpm records in 1949. Columbia’s parent group CBS was bought by Sony in 1988.

Crazy Cajun Huey Meaux’s label for Cajun and Zydeco in Houston. One of the label’s early and biggest hits was from Lake Charles native and former Goldband backing singer Barbara Lynn, “You’ll Lose a Good Thing” (1962). (Eddie Shuler maintained he sent Lynn to Meaux after passing on her himself.) It was deactivated around 1970 and reactivated later that decade for Freddy Fender. The biggest hit of Meaux’s career was Fender’s 1974 bilingual cover of “Before The Next Teardrop Falls” which was leased to ABC-Dot (ABC-Dot 17540), and went platinum. Meaux bought SugarHill Recording Studios (formerly Gold Star) in Houston from Bill Quinn and the TNT Records pressing plant in San Antonio from Tanner. He arranged national distribution through Jay Gee Records (J/G), owned by Jamie Records of Philadelphia. Crazy Cajun Enterprises houses the labels Crazy Cajun, Teardrop/Tear Drop, Capri, Copyright, Tribe, Eric, Shane, Alamo, and Starflite.
Crown (6). Subsidiary of Modern Records running 1954-1972, used for low-budget releases from 1957 on. This mid-century California label is not to be confused with at least five other Crown Records companies: the early-20th-century Crown Records (UK); the 1930-1933 short-lived dime store label Crown Records (NYC); the 1960s Crown Records (Hong Kong) used for Cantonese opera and Cantopop; the early 2000s Crown Records (Virginia Beach, VA, USA) square dance label; and the contemporary Crown Records (Japan) also known as Nippon Crown.

Cry/Kry Inconstant J.D. Miller subsidiary/(ies) used first as Kry for Katie Webster and Ashton Savoy in 1958 (Kry 100, co-released as Action 100 in 1960) and as Cry for soul act Joe Johnson in 1966 and 1967. Guitar Grady and possibly Katie Webster organ, Sherman Webster bass, and unknown drum backed him on the Louisiana soul numbers “Santa Bring My Baby Back”/”Dirty Woman Blues” (A-Bet 9417) and the Otis Redding tribute “Otis is Gone” backed with ”Got My Oil Well Pumpin”” (Cry 1100). Like Webster’s Kry release, the former Johnson pairing was released on another label simultaneously; this one on Excello’s soul branch A-Bet. Later unissued Cry sessions appeared across LJMS albums such as FLY LP 517, with Joe Johnson’s “Alimonia Blues” with Lazy Lester on harmonica.

D

Decca J.D. Miller got his Cajun and hillbilly artists contracts with Decca like the label’s consistent hit-maker of the sixties Jimmy Newman (1961). In 1959 MCA bought the U.S. Decca branch and further “black music labels” including Excello, Dot, Duke/Peacock, Motown, and ABC-Paramount.

Delmark U.S. reissue label of postwar blues and R&B, plus jazz and 60s-70s blues recordings. Delmark has written histories of its entire blues and jazz catalogues.


E

EMI (UK) Gargantuan label (one of the “Big Six” before 2000, then “Big Four”) based in the U.K., formed originally in 1931 by the merger of Columbia Graphophone, Gramophone Co., and Parlophone. Before its 2012 mandated break up, EMI had 65 labels including Capitol (acquired 1955), Capitol-EMI, Atlantic, and Virgin. EMI’s rare masters were packaged and
marketed by partnership with Rhino. EMI was broken up 2012.

Eudora Short-lived Goldband subsidiary owned and operated by Eddie Shuler.

**Excello** Label founded in 1952 by Ernie Young, owner of Ernie’s Record Mart in Nashville, to be the secular counterpart to Young’s gospel-only Nashboro label. Excello initially released blues and “hillbilly”, but partly due to his experience selling appliances and recording sessions to a black customer base, founder Young believed the label was best-suited to selling blues records. Occasional country and pop releases appeared on Excello throughout the years, despite its focus on “obscure” rhythm & blues. Excello peaked 1954-1966 thanks to two major partnerships: one as a sponsor of “Ernie’s Record Parade” on Nashville’s WLAC and the other as the main exporter of J.D. Miller blues product also from 1954-1966. The “Excello sound” referred to in many cases is actually the “Jay Miller sound”, and what many consider the “swamp blues sound”. Young also operated the Excellorec publishing company, which co-published many Miller records along with his in-house Jamil company. Excello had decreasing success after Young’s retirement and the move to new studios in 1966.

The national hits that came from Excello began in 1955. In order, they were Arthur Gunter’s ”Baby Let’s Play House” featuring Skippy Brooks at piano, which allegedly inspired a young Elvis Presley, and hit #12 on the R&B chart. Louis Brooks & His Hi-Toppers made it to R&B’s #2 spot that summer with ”It’s Love Baby (24 Hours a Day)”, and The Marigolds made R&B’s #8 with ”Rollin’ Stone”. The Fontane Sisters covered ”Rollin’ Stone” and brought it over to Billboard’s Pop Top 100 at #13. 1957’s hits were big: The Gladiolas' ”Little Darlin'” (R&B #11 in May) crossed over to pop charts just shy of making the top 40 (at Pop #41). The Diamonds' cover of that song later was a #2 Pop hit. In July Lillian Offitt brought success with ”Miss You So” (#8 R&B/#66 Pop Top 100). The first Jay Miller swamp blues recording to make a dent for Excello was Lightnin' Slim's ”Rooster Blues” which made #23 on the R&B charts in December 1959. The biggest of all the hits were Slim Harpo's ”Rainin' in My Heart” (#17 R&B/#34 Pop Hot 100) in late May 1963 with Lightnin' Slim on guitar, and the supreme ”Baby, Scratch My Back” in 1966 holding #1 on the R&B charts for two weeks and peaking at #16 on the Hot 100. Other Slim Harpo hits at Excello were ”Tip On In Part 1” (#37 R&B/#127 Hot 100 "bubble under" July 1967) and ”Te-Ni-Nee-Ni-Nu” (#36 R&B April 1968). Iconic New Orlebeans musician Dr. John has said these were influential songs of his childhood.

In the 1970s Mike Vernon of Blue Horizon (UK) coproduced reissue LPs of Excello blues. In the 1990s Excello was bought first by AVI (1994) then MCA/Universal (1997), and its new sibling label Hip-O put
out a few Excello reissue CDs. Ace (UK) picked up the torch and is responsible for most of the label’s retail material of the last twenty years.

F

Fais-Do-Do Jay Miller’s first label, founded in 1946 for releases of 78 rpm records in Cajun French and English from the band Happy, Doc and the Boys, granting this label the honor of history’s first devoted to Cajun music. With the success of their sales, Jay Miller merged (and re-released) his Fais-Do-Do material with the country music of Feature, and Fais-Do-Do was phased out within the first year after just seven records. These historic firsts were “Setre Chandelle”/“Allons Danser Colinda” (no FDD number/Feat 10001), “La Cravat” / “My Sweetheart’s My Buddy’s Wife” (FDD 1000/Feat 1000), and four more pairs from Happy, Doc and the Boys. Lee Sonnier and His Acadian All Stars—Miller’s father-in-law—had two records in 1946, then the label was briefly revived in 1959 and 1965 for two 45 rpm singles from Robert Bertrand and band. LP & CD releases later listed under MTE Records. The fourteen Fais Do-Do recordings were reissued on LJMS Vol. 44, entitled Fais Do Do Breakdown - Volume One. Flyright considered that album to be their first of a series of early Cajun recordings from Jay Miller. Part of the Feature /Kajun/Rocko/Fais-Do-Do/Zynn/MTE Enterprises family.


Feature The original blues label owned by Jay Miller (formed within months of his first Fais-Do-Do label) founded in 1947 and in printing until 1954. The label released about 100 singles total, often as testers before moving artists to a specialty subsidiary. Feature 1000 was from Clarence Garlow & His Orchestra’s, “New Bon Ton Roola”/“Let Me Be Your Santa”, recorded in 1951 as an attempt to recreate the success of his 1949 hit “Bon Ton Roula”. Garlow recorded two more pairs in 1954 that became the Feature 3000 series. Re-releases from Happy, Doc, and The Boys and Lee Sonnier and his Acadian All Stars, originally from Fais-Do-Do, are together responsible for eight of Feature’s earliest records; Cajun/rockabilly Jimmy Newman made seven Feature records between 1949-1950 before Miller leased him to Dot then Decca, the same with Al Terry who was leased to Hickory then Crown. Bluesmen, starting with Lightning Slim in 1954, aspired to Excello. Feat 3006 “Rock Me, Mama”/“Bad Luck”; Feat 3008 “I Can’t Live Happy”/“New Orleans Bound”; and Feat 3012 “Bugger Bugger Boy”/“Ethel Mae” were Lightning Slim’s testers leased to Excello in 1955. The regional success of these records motivated Ernie Young to quickly contract with Jay Miller to lease,
and jointly publish, all his blues recordings thereafter through Excello. Part of the Feature/Fais Do-Do/Kajun/Rocko/Zynn/Action (US) /Rocket /Tribute /Cajun Classics/Cry/Rebel/MTE Enterprises family.

Flat Town Records Floyd Soileau imprint and corporation created to hold his other established labels including Swallow and Jin. See Jin, Swallow.

Flyright (United Kingdom) U.K. reissue label founded in 1969 from the former Jan & Dil label (founded 1966 by John Broven), and incorporated 1970 by blues revival pioneers Mike Leadbitter, Simon Napier, John Broven, Robin Gosden, and Bruce Bastin. The label’s Louisiana bias was clear from the beginning: Leadbitter wrote to Billboard in August 1969 stating the first releases “feature authentic Southern blues recorded in the South.” Juke Boy Bonner’s LP 3501 was first, followed by a two-album set titled Jambalaya on the Bayou “devoted to all aspects of Louisiana blues.” A Melody Maker review of Vol. 2 called the collection an “intriguing selection” and recognized its contents as part of a discrete and already recognized musical grouping, addressing potential buyers as “Those with a taste for Louisiana and Gulf Coast blues”. They did not, however, mark it “RECOMMENDED.” (Melody Maker 1969)

After Bruce Bastin became the managing director of Flyright’s parent company Interstate Music Limited, in 1978 he wrote that Flyright’s mission was “to rectify the imbalance shown by the undue concentration on Mississippi blues by previous writers and record reissuers. Flyright’s general focus became directed toward a conscious regionalism in an attempt to offer evidence of a broader pattern of blues evolution.” Starting in 1976 and going for thirteen years, Flyright began the fifty-seven volume The Legendary Jay Miller Sessions (LJMS) series project of previously unreleased contents of reels and acetate tapes from Jay Miller’s backroom storage. The series saw the world’s first releases of solo sessions from the unknown Richard King (the first black artist to record for Miller, sometime before 1951), Boogie Jake, (rec. 1957), Sylvester Buckley (rec. 1962–3), Rockin’ Dupsee (rec. 1968–9), and others. Under the Interstate Music aegis, Flyright is part of the genre-specific Flyright/ Krazy Kat (rockabilly) /Country Routes (country)/Magpie (piano blues)/Harlequin (jazz)/Heritage (“world”)/Texas Blues/Travelin’ Man (prewar field recordings and commercial blues)/ Red Pepper family of labels.

Folk-Lyric/Folk Lyric The historic label created by folklorist Harry Oster, Louisiana’s resident Alan Lomax, in 1960 after six successful releases with the Louisiana Folklore Society including the seminal Angola Louisiana prison recordings of Robert Pete Williams. The label only released albums, the first of which was Snooks Eaglin’s New Orleans Washboard Blues (FL 107, 1960), followed by other archival recordings from downhome and juke joint blues artists (FL 108–9, 111, 117–8, 126), American folksongs (FL
114, 120), Irish, Scottish, and English folksongs (FL 112-3, 116, and 121), and bluegrass (FL 122-3). In the late sixties the Folk-Lyric catalogue was sold to Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie who re-released and added to Oster’s field and prison recordings (as the “Folk Lyric” subsidiary). Folk-Lyric releases led many blues artists to later commercial recording sessions.

**Folk-Star/Folkstar** Singles subsidiary of Goldband ca. 1950 for roots musics that included rockabilly, country & western, and blues, but originally formed for Iry LeJeune’s first Cajun records. Eddie Shuler’s “folk” label released 37 singles on 45 rpm and 78 rpm records, the first in 1949/1950 (Iry LeJeune and his Lacassine Playboys (FS 100-101). Shuler’s first blues records also came from Folk Star, starting with James Freeman (FS 103) around 1950. Clarence Garlow started the 1100 series in 1954 (FS 1130, 1199) after three years of lackluster recording with Jay Miller; Charlie Morris also recorded for both record men, but at Folk-Star first, as “King Charles” and “Left-Handed Charlie” in 1954 (FS 1131). He recorded as “Blue Charlie” for Miller in 1956-7. Folk Star put out its last record around 1955, a re-release of James Freeman’s “Big Leg Mama” (FS 1296). Part of the Goldband/Folk-Star/Tic Toc/ANLA/Jador family.

Folkways/Smithsonian Folkways Moe Asch’s subsidiary begun in 1948 as one of the first to record and document music and sound from all over the world. In 1967, Asch and MGM Records collaborated on a diverse line first called Verve Folkways and later Verve Forecast, which included field recordings, poetry, nature sounds, traditional world music and contemporary music from around the world, and more. Like its parent, Verve came to be influential in the American folk music revival because of its archival 1920-1930s singer-songwriter catalogue including Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Lead Belly. Upon Asch’s death in 1986, Folkways had released 2168 albums. It has been the Smithsonian Folkways label since then.

FORE Funk-oriented Goldband subsidiary with 2 singles released by John Reed and Van Walker.

French “HITS” One of Mark Miller’s Master-Trak subsidiaries with one release from Austin Pete and the Louisiana Rhythmaires.

**G**

Gold Star/Goldstar Bill Quinn’s Houston record label founded in 1941, and registered as a recording studio nine years later, making it the oldest in the Southeastern U.S. Released blues, country (hillbilly), and Cajun. Known for inventive recording equipment and the studio reverb chamber room. Gold Star helped launch the careers of Lightnin’ Hopkins (1948 “T-Model Blues” “Tim Moore’s Farm” both entered the Top 10), Harry Choates (1946 “Jolie Blond”/“Jole Blon” the only Cajun single in history to break
Billboard’s Pop Singles Top 5), the Big Bopper’s “Chantilly Lace” of 1958, the Sir Douglas Quintet, and Tex-Mex-turned-South Louisiana artist Freddy Fender. Quinn’s famous Gold Star studios were renamed the SugarHill studios and eventually sold to Houston producer Huey Meaux of the Crazy Cajun family. See Crazy Cajun.

**Goldband** Eddie Shuler founded this flagship label in 1944 (he said to Billboard in 1981 and Chris Strachwitz in 1984), 1945 (in a 1993 interview with Shane Bernard), or 1947 in Lake Charles, LA. Goldband is best known for its Cajun releases of the late sixties and seventies, history’s first Zydeco recordings, and is important to swamp pop history but lesser known for its swamp blues records of the fifties and early sixties. At Shuler’s death in 2005 Goldband was reputed to be the oldest continually operating independent record label in the U.S. Shuler at one time operated fifteen labels, comprising Goldband (1944/46), Folk-Star (1949), Trey (1959), Tic Toc (1961), ANLA (1968), Lyric, FORE, BOLD (1971), Bally Hoo (1976), Jador (ca. 1980), Tek, Luñkin, and Eudora. By 1960 Shuler had settled into a publishing pattern through his three publishing companies KAMAR starting in 1957, then transitioned to Tek which he later devoted mostly to Cajun, and Longhorn for Texas artists.

At the start of the eighties, Goldband’s earliest recordings were still its best sellers including Iry LeJeune (recorded 1949-1955), Dolly Parton’s debut record (1960) and Al Ferrier. From the sixties’ renaissance on, Goldband held the corner on the Cajun music market, with primarily wholesales to retail outlets and “rackjobbers” throughout Louisiana and the Golden Triangle. (Similarly, fellow Louisiana roots producer Floyd Soileau told Billboard his sales were 95% wholesale at the time.) His best-selling blues through the end of the twentieth century were from Hop Wilson (recorded 1958), Jimmy Wilson (rec. 1959-60), Clarence Garlow (rec. 1954, 1957-8), and Guitar Junior (rec. 1957-8). These frontmen were backed by the pre-Katie Webster classic studio band of Clarence Garlow’s guitar, Danny George and Leroy James on saxes, Boogie Joe Joseph’s piano, Willie Chason on bass, Little Brother Griffin drumming, and Barbara Lynn and sisters, and possibly Katie Webster, on backing vocals.

Shuler focused less on recording as the century waned and more on reissuing from his back catalogue. Goldband’s last 45 rpm record was a reissue of Katie Webster’s “Love Is the Answer”/”Sea of Love” pairing around 1982 (GB 8259). In 1995 the director of UNC’s Southern Folklife Center visited Shuler and began the acquisition process of the (35 linear feet of) Goldband papers later that year. See Tek.

**H**

Hickory Records The record label owned by Nashville’s music-publishing fixture Acuff-Rose established in 1942. Founded by country musician Roy Acuff
and Nashville music scout Fred Rose, this publishing duo stood out in the industry for their fair treatment of country music writers. Nine years later in 1951, Fred Rose hired the head of Mercury’s country music division, Murray Nash, to promote Acuff-Rose records. As part of his promotion initiatives the next year, Nash staged the first annual country music Disc Jockey Convention—which J.D. Miller attended, and whereupon promoter Nash introduced him to Fred Rose. The Crowley-Excelfo connection began with a songwriting contract between Miller and Acuff-Rose in 1953. Acuff-Rose Music operated and distributed Hickory independently from 1954 until MGM took over distribution in 1973, followed a buyout by ABC in 1977 and later MCA in 1979, which discontinued the label and its catalogue. Hickory was revived under Sony/ATV in 2007.

Hip-O American reissue and compilations label under Universal Music Group founded in 1996. The name Hip-O is a pun on its rival reissue label Rhino records. Borne after Atlantic Records (Capitol/EMI) exec Doug Morris left Atlantic in 1995, familiar with (and after 1992, 50% stake in) their reissue label Rhino’s success. Hip-O and Hip-O Select (limited edition online-only reissue label available only by digital download.) releases from the vaults of any of its parent company Universal Music Group’s back catalogues, including Decca, Mercury, Polydor, Motown, and others. Among their swamp blues-related releases is House Rockin’ & Hip Shakin’ Vol 4: Bayou Blues Harp, which includes the single Lightnin’ Slim (guitar) and Schoolboy Cleve (harp, voice) number “I’m Him” (1955).

Home Cookin’/Home Cooking A label now infamous for a series of legal scandals involving owner Roy Ames. Founded in the mid-eighties initially for Houston-area blues musicians, the first releases included recordings of Juke Boy Bonner, T-Bone Walker, and Lightnin Hopkins. Many releases, whether of living or deceased musicians, have been criticized in print for raw demo-quality production, the apparent lack of creative input from the living musicians, and many instances of theft from the deceased and retired.

I

Imperial Lew Chudd’s historic R&B label founded in 1947. Because of a business relationship with New Orleans producer Dave Bartholomew, much New Orleans R&B of the fifties came through Imperial, an impression furthered by the 1963 acquisition of Joe Banashak’s New Orleans Minit label. Imperial leased both Boozoo Chavis’ Zydeco classic “Paper In My Shoe” and Jimmy Wilson’s successful version of “Please Accept My Love” from Goldband. In 1961 Imperial was at the center of a controversy between Slim Harpo and Jay Miller. Harpo was still under contract to Miller but unhappy, and tried to arrange a furtive recording session for
Imperial in New Orleans. Miller wrote to Lew Chudd threatening action and the session was canceled.

Instant Joe Banashak’s New Orleans label (1961-1972) that recorded Vincent Monroe, also known as Mr. Calhoun, under the name Polka Dot Slim after he recorded with Jay Miller. He would record as Polka Dot Slim for the next four decades and receive much greater renown under that pseudonym than under any of his others. Instant is famous for having been Ernie K-Doe’s home label.

**Interstate Music Ltd.** (UK) The U.K.-based overhead with genre-specific subsidiaries including Flyright for blues and R&B; Harlequin for jazz, Latin American, tango, and Spike Jones; Country Routes and Krazy Kat for country & western and western swing; Heritage for early twentieth-century recordings of world music; Magpie for piano blues; and Travelin’ Man for pre-war blues. Also now incorporating the Jazzband Records catalogue. Interstate Music is known for drawing obscurist collectors with attractive curation and packaging, and high sound quality transfers from old 78s, radio transcriptions, and more. LJMS contributor and pioneer blues researcher Bruce Bastin became the managing director of Interstate Music Ltd in 1978 and has helmed 850 album releases since vinyl. From 1983, Interstate Music produced all the LJMS albums (Vols. 30-57). As a company heralded for being at the forefront of bringing rare and niche musics to modern audiences, Interstate flagged in the last quarter of the century and while they established an online presence in 2001, the website has not been updated since then. They issue no catalogues for their labels, and to acquire Interstate Music products, the purchaser must either happen upon inventory already at a specialist music store, or write to City Hall Records (in the U.S.; Hasmick Promotions Ltd in GB) prescribing the album, artist, label and catalogue numbers.

Irina Jointly operated Bay Area label by Bob Geddins and Isaac Neal, Jr. running 1956-1958 and named for Geddins’ wife. Like most other Geddins labels, this one released swamp bluesmen Jimmy Wilson and Juke Boy “Barner” [Bonner]’s early records. See Big Town, Cava-Tone.

**J**

Jador Singles subsidiary Goldband founded ca. 1980. Its thirty-three singles were in varying genres including rockabilly, swamp pop, Tex-Mex, Zydeco, and blues. Johnny Jano, Robert Bertrand and Iry LeJeune, Jr. plus the Louisiana Ramblers, Bill Parker, Moise Robin, and several one-time only recording artists account for the singles and one Bill Parker LP. The Bill Parker LP also released as Anla 125. Part of the Goldband/Folk Star/Trey/Tic Toc/Anla family. See Goldband.

Jewel Shreveport legend **Stan Lewis’** flagship label founded in 1963. The record
store that started him in the business, Stan’s Record Shop, opened in 1948. Jewel’s other two divisions are Paula, which was briefly distributed by Chess, and Ronn. Lewis’ incredible success with his three labels received print attention as a powerhouse “Trifecta” in the 1980s. Among the three labels came blues releases from Lowell Fulson, John Lee Hooker, Lightnin’ Hopkins, Memphis Slim. Paula got a gold disc in January 1968 with the British Invasion-parody “Judy in Disguise (with Glasses)” from Baton Rouge act John Fred and his Playboy Band. Stan Lewis later purchased the catalogues of Cobra, Chief, USA, and J.O.B. Records.

**Jan & Dil (UK)** A short-lived reissue label created in 1966 by John Broven and his partner Robin Gosden. In 1968 after just a handful of releases, they added partners and changed the name to Flyright Records. The first two presses, JDL 450 in 1966 and JDL 451 in 1967 probably had runs of only about 99 copies. The latter was a 4-song EP that opened with an unissued Goldband recording of Juke Boy Bonner’s “Life Is A Dirty Deal.” The sleeve notes, written by John Broven, give credit to the infamous Storyville 177 LP that brought wide recognition to Goldband and Juke Boy Bonner both. They were reissued as FLY LP 3501. See Flyright.

**Jin** Longtime swamp pop label owned by Ville Platte recordman Floyd Soileau, opened in counterpart to his Cajun-oriented Swallow label. Founded in 1958, Jin was named in homage to his bride-to-be Jinver. Despite releasing some 300 singles and thirty LPs between 1958 and 1991, plus about seventy-five albums on CD by 2013, Soileau’s main business was not in recording but in the large wholesale and distribution outlet he ran out of Floyd’s Record Shop. He also owned Louisiana’s only pressing plant, which Shuler, Miller, and other local producers eventually used at least once.

Jin’s first LP was Johnnie Allan’s *South to Louisiana and Other Hits by Johnnie Allan* (J 4001) released in 1964. Jin had its strongest name recognition around 1981 mostly in the overseas markets of England and the Netherlands, and increasingly in Asia. (*Billboard* 3-28-81.) Although J.D. Miller and Eddie Shuler’s names were by far the best known of all the Louisiana record men West of the Mississippi, examples of Soileau’s fame can be found in the 1983 Swedish release of a Jin compilation album entitled *Jin Rock n’ Roll: Jin: Always in the Spotlight* (R&C 1016). Jin recorded other acts like Johnnie Allan, Rod Bernard, Tommy McLain, and Goldband artists Rockin’ Sidney and Shelton Dunaway (of Cookie & the Cupcakes). In 1975 Soileau established the Maison de Soul label for Zydeco music. See also Soileau’s joint venture with Arhoolie’s Chris Strachwitz, the short-lived Bayou Records.

Joliet Bruce Bromberg’s small Los Angeles-based label where he recorded a smattering of bluesmen between 1971 and 1977, most of which had
greatest distribution when leased to other labels. Before opening Joliet, Bromberg had written on Lonesome Sundown for Excello (Excello LPS-8012 (1969)) and Blues Unlimited magazine (1971). He himself recorded Lonesome Sundown (with Phillip Walker) in 1977, yielding the album Been Gone too Long (Joliet 6002), which had a prismatic release history across Europe, Japan, and the U.S. In Spain, Joliet-6002 became part of a 2-LP by Bluesmen-Alligator (BD-32217/32218), it was released in Japan the next year with P-Vine (Joliet-P-Vine LP MA-52), again in the U.S. in 1979 on Alligator (AL 4716), and on Sonet in the U.K. (SNTF 832).


K

Kajun Label owned by Jay Miller for Cajun releases of 1950s and 1960s recordings by Nathan Abshire and the Pine Grove Boys. Kajun released about 100 singles in the late 1970s and early 1980s. LP and CD releases from this label were put out under MTE Records. Kajun was part of the Fais Do-Do, Feature, Zynn et al family. See Fais Do-Do, Zynn, Master-Trak Enterprises..

Kajun Classics/ Kajun Klassics various conflated misspellings of Jay Miller’s Cajun Classics and Kajun labels.

Khoury George Khoury’s label founded in 1950/1951 for Cajun, swamp pop, and other genres based in Lake Charles. Although Khoury’s Record Shop was around the corner from competitor Eddie Shuler, Shuler maintained there was no animosity between them as rivals. The catalogues of Khoury’s two labels, this one and Lyric, overlap to such an extent that their disc numbers interweave, and for discographical purposes the two may be considered one. Of the 100 singles released between Khoury and Lyric, early releases came from Clarence “Bon Ton” Garlow, Nathan Abshire, and Lawrence Walker (1951-1954). Middle-era output (1958-1960) from Nathan Abshire, Jimmy Choates, and Pee Wee Broussard tended toward the modern Cajun style, plus one reissue from Eddie Shuler and his All Star Reveliers (1958).

Noteworthy swamp pop releases from this era count the indisputable swamp pop anthem, “Mathilda”, from Cookie and the Cupcakes (1958), and in 1959, Phil Phillips’ “Sea of Love” was the greatest success of Khoury’s career. Khoury managed (surreptitiously, according to Phillips) to secure cowriting credits for the crossover #2 hit song whose royalty payouts have accrued six figures. Phil Phillips, meanwhile, claimed he only ever earned some $6,800 from the song, made in one lump-sum
payment on an oversized cardboard check given to him by Eddie Shuler, who recorded and produced the song, in a publicity stunt for the newspaper. (Baptiste 1991.)

Later releases from Khoury and Lyric came mostly from Goldband artist Cookie & the Cupcakes, plus Little Alfred, and Carol Fran (ca. 1963-1965).

**KMAR** Eddie Shuler's publishing company first started jointly with veteran publisher Don Pierce as administrator, who Shuler said mentored him in its operation as he owned twenty-seven publishing companies at the time. Once Shuler “knew the business” he opened NTEK, later TEK, on his own. KMAR was established to handle Phil Phillips’ “Sea of Love” in 1959, and as of a 1991 Shuler interview, it had a catalogue of 276 “classic songs”. See Goldband, Tek.

Kom-A-Day Floyd Soileau's imprint for spoken-word (and at first, risqué) comedy albums founded in 1973. Six singles released over ten years, each from a different humorist save two releases from Zydeco giant Boozoo Chavis (KAD 304, 306). The releases feature the local Cajun accent, dialect, and subjects like “Cajun Honeymoon”, “Pass A Good Time”, “Texas vs. LSU”, “Cornbread vs. Pie”, and “Who You Fran Is” (LP KAD 5001 from Dave Petitjean), delivered by Cajun humorists, and therefore were generally not found to be offensive. Just under twenty LP comedy albums from Cajun humorists Dave Petitjean beginning in 1980 and Justin Wilson in 1986. See Swallow, Jin.

**Kry** Jay Miller’s subsidiary that only released one single, KRY 100 in 1961 by Katie Webster and Ashton Conroy “Baby, Baby”/“I Want You To Love Me.” It was also released on Action. See Action, Zynn.

**L**

**L+R/ L + R** (Germany) Imprint of the Lipmann/Rau staged European mega-festivals. An important release relevant to the **swamp blues** is the LP Küstner, Axel. *The Introduction to Living Country Blues USA*. (L+R LS 42.030, 1981.) L+R was joined by CBS for the AFBF Releases.

**La Louisianne/ La Louisiane** Carol Rachou’s Lafayette-based institution founded in 1959 mostly for traditional Cajun releases. The roughly two-hundred singles released between 1959 and 1990 came from the likes of Lawrence Walker, Alex Broussard, and Aldus Roger from 1959 to about 1963; swamp pop from acts like the Shondelles, Jewel & The Rubies, Bert Miller and the Swing Kings (1963); more Cajun releases in the late 1960s and 1970s (Gee Gee Shinn, Eddy Raven, Jimmy Newman, and many onetimers). Fifty LPs were mostly comedy albums from Louisiana humorist Bud Fletcher, and traditional Cajun music (LP 110 ‘Cajun Music At Home’, LP 115 Doc Guidry ‘Kind of the Cajun Fiddlers’, LP 119 Ambrose
Thibodeaux ‘More Authentic French Acadian Music’, LP 122 Aldus Roger ‘Plays the Cajun French Classics’). About two dozen CDs followed suit from 1990 to 2009. Rockabilly output compiled with, and therefore is comparable to, work from J.D. Miller and Eddie Shuler studios in Ace’s CDCHD 1345, 1355, and 1380 (2014) Boppin’ by The Bayou series.


Lanor Lee Lavergne’s hallmark Cajun label based in Church Point and founded in 1960. Early singles (1960-1966) were released by Cajun artist Shirley Bergeron and group, and a spate of recordings from the belting swamp blues man Elton Anderson. Cut in New Orleans in 1962-1963, of these five records—his last Louisiana recordings before leaving for California in 1963—three feature a twenty-two-year-old Dr. John on guitar and Katie Webster on piano (Lanor 507, 509, 514, 516, 518). The mid-70s saw a return to Cajun with an occasional swamp pop release. Approximately 150 singles were released between 1960-1988, seven Cajun LPs from 1970-1989, about a dozen Zydeco releases on K7 cassette from 1991-1994, and roughly 100 Cajun CD albums.

Lanor’s legacy as a Cajun imprint—and its relation to the swamp blues (which is none)—has been muddled by a few erroneous compilations released over the years. One source of confusion was a 1982 compilation album from the Red Pepper label of all of Lanor’s r&b titles—of which there were in fact few (RP 702 Louisiana R’nB from LANOR (1982)), followed by Crazy Kat’s misleading 1985 and 1988 compilations of KK791 Louisiana Southern Soul: Lanor Records 1966-1972 (KK791) and Lanor Records French Rocking Boogie (KK7447). In 1995, and reprinted in 2006, the English Zane label made a more representative commemorative album entitled The Lanor Record Story 1960-1992 that featured mostly Cajun and swamp pop acts.

Liberty (UK) This 1955-founded label released newly recorded material from “rediscovered” swamp bluesmen. In July 1967 Mike Leadbitter recorded Juke Boy Bonner in Houston for release on Liberty LBS 83319 (UK 1969). This record was the culmination of the famous Leadbitter-sourced fundraiser for Bonner. Leadbitter had raised $200 from his Blues Unlimited subscribers for Bonner’s session at ACA studios in Houston, which was to result in 1,000 pressed 45s that the subscribers would receive in the mail as compensation for their contributions. The effort was a success, and one of those singles made it to Chris Strachwitz who quickly set up a session for Bonner to do an album for Arhoolie (ARH F 1036 (US 1968), ARH ST 1045 (US 1970)), which he recorded December 21, 1967, before the ACA sessions had been pressed to LP for Liberty’s release. See
Storyville.

London-American (UK) Originally starting with revolutionary stereophonic classical recordings in 1947, this Decca-owned label soon went indie, focusing on American music. In this regard, it was posed as competition with Pye’s Pye International and EMI’s Stateside. London-American licensed mostly African-American rhythm & blues music from Imperial, Chess, Dot, Atlantic, Specialty, Motown, and others. John Broven recounted that it was these imported records that first introduced the grammar schoolboys Broven, Leadbitter, and Napier to rhythm & blues in the 1950s.

Louisiana Folklore Society A label organized in coordination with the Society in 1956 to put out Dr. Harry Oster’s Louisiana field recordings of Louisiana Acadian folksong and Angola prison field recordings, until he created his own label, Folk-Lyric, for the purpose in 1960. Total six album releases between 1957 and 1959.

Lufkin Brief Goldband subsidiary owned and operated by Eddie Shuler.

Lyric George Khoury’s second label alongside his flagship. Clarence Garlow with his Clarence Garlow Orchestra recorded for Lyric in 1951. Lyric’s output is similar in scope and content to the Khoury label. See Khoury.

M

Maison de Soul / Maison du Soul Zydeclo-focused subsidiary of Flat Town Records, owned by Floyd Soileau. Created in 1974 after the success of Soileau’s joint venture, Bayou Records, with Chris Strachwitz for Clifton Chenier releases. About 75 singles were released on 45 rpm records between 1974 and 1990. Consistent artists with singles from the late 70s include Clifton Chenier, Clarence ‘Frogman’ Henry, and Rockin’ Sidney. In the 80s the output ratio changed to fewer singles being released by more artists, including SWLA musicians Boozoo Chavis and Rockin’ Dopsie, and one-each by New Orleans musicians Eddie Bo, Professor Longhair (LP 1047 (1988)), and the Rebirth Brass Band (LP 1060 (1989)). 40 LPs were put out between 1977 and 1991, and about 75 albums and compilations on CD between 1988 and 2014, the compilations being exclusively Zydeco. See Jin, Swallow.

Mark Short-lived Master-Trak subsidiary run by J.D. Miller’s youngest son Mark Miller, which only released 4 singles on 45 rpm.

Master-Trak Enterprises After Jay Miller turned majority control of his business operations over to his son Mark in the late 1960s, Mark gave the company the MTE umbrella name, after their newly opened MTE studios. Mark also started the Blues Unlimited label (1970) and in the 1980s focused mostly on recording third-generation Cajun/Zydeco artists like Buckwheat Zydeco and Wayne Toups & ZydeCajun. Many subsidiary
labels were organized under this company, which eventually released mostly singles in its own right as “MTE Records” after 1980. MTE is over the Fais Do-Do (1946), Feature (1947), Zynn (1949/50), Rocko/Rocket (1957), Action (US) (1961), Swade, Kay, Tribute, Cry (1961), Rebel (m-1960s), Kajun, Par-T, Savior, Cajun Classics (1980s), Showtime (1980s) family. See MTE Records.

mom Productions. Short-lived soul subsidiary owned by Mike Miller (Jay Miller’s eldest son) in Crowley. It released 3 soul singles in 1968.

MCA Founded in 1924 as a talent agency, MCA began publishing after it acquired Universal Studios in 1959. Between 1959 and 1962 MCA bought out more “black” American record labels including Dot, Decca, Coral, Duke/Peacock, and Motown. In 1979, MCA acquired Hickory Records (who contracted Jay Miller for songwriting) and discontinued its production. After the independent record labels industry died out near 1970, power was consolidated to six major labels known as the “Big Six”, which ruled the industry until the 1990s. MCA was one of the “Big Six” alongside Sony, Warner, BMG, EMI, and PolyGram. In 1990, MCA was bought by Matsushita, then 80% of this latter was bought by the Canadian Seagram Co. in 1995.

Mercury Formed in 1945, Mercury was quickly one of the biggest record labels of the 1940s and 1950s alongside RCA Victor, Columbia, Decca, and Capitol. In 1959, Eddie Shuler facilitated a recording contract between Mercury and Guitar Junior (after 1959 known as Lonnie Brooks), who wanted a contract with one of the majors. The swamp bluesman and the producer together went to Chicago to record four sides, two of which Mercury released later that year (Merc 71602). By 1960 Guitar Junior had moved to Chicago, changed his stage name to Lonnie Brooks, and recorded for his new label (Merc 71681), although the songs would never sell well.

For many years, Eddie Shuler would use Guitar Junior’s failure to succeed at Mercury as an illustration supporting first, his contempt for artists whose sights lay beyond Goldband records. Second, Shuler believed independent labels like his succeeded in the 1950s and 1960s partly because major labels misgauged how to record and market roots music, including the downhome blues. In a 1993 interview with Shane Bernard, he said, “the major labels didn’t know what to do with the blues artists...after they got ‘em they didn’t understand how to merchandize ‘em...the problem that they had was the stuff was all too slick. Too studio perfect and it didn’t have that gut feeling...” (Shuler 1993) In 1959 and 1960, Goldband leased swamp bluesman Elton Anderson recordings to Mercury (Merc 71542, Merc 71643, Merc 71778).

Minit Joe Banashak’s label in New Orleans that recorded swamp bluesman **Boogie Jake** after he recorded with Jay Miller. The heart of this label’s hit catalogue was Allen Toussaint-written, -arranged, -played, and -produced music until Toussaint left Minit in 1963. The label was sold to Imperial, then to Liberty Records, who revived it under its original name in 1966.

**Montel** Sam J. Montalbano’s flagship label out of Baton Rouge founded in 1959. John Fred and the Playboys, of “Judy in Disguise (with Glasses)” fame (released by Shreveport-based Paula Records in Dec 1967), started with Montel, issuing the regionally successful, swamp pop-influenced “Shirley” (Montel 1002) in the label’s first year.

**MSL** Joint effort by Houston’s Huey P. Meaux, Ville Platte’s Floyd Soileau, and Philadelphia’s Harold Lipsius (owner of Jamie Records) in 1966 to distribute Tommy McLain discs nationally. These singles’ reference numbers coincide with the Jin catalogue and may also be found there. See Jin.

**MTE Records** A Jay Miller-owned, but Mark Miller-operated label and umbrella under which LPs and CDs from Miller’s many labels and subsidiaries were published with matching reference numbers, starting in 1980. A total of 63 singles were released between 1980 and 1988, including reissues from its own back catalogue of Cajun and swamp pop acts like Sonny Landreth, Tammy Kershaw, Gene La Vern, Al Ferrier, Warren Storm, etc. 1 “Maxi 33t” was catalogued in 1986. Album LPs and CDs of former, short-term Miller labels like Cry, Action, Spot, Swade, Kay, Ringo, Premier, Par-T, or Savior got catalogued under MTE Records for a time, in addition to the longer fixtures Feature (1947), Zynn (1950), Rocko (1958), Kajun, Blues Unlimited (1970), Showtime (1980s), and Cajun Classics (ca.1980).

**N**

Nasco Ernie Young’s teen-oriented label launched in 1957 as a subsidiary of Nashboro. Swamp bluesman Blue Charlie Morris’ first recording, made in Crowley with Jay Miller in 1956, was released on Nasco 6002 “Don’t Have No Friends”.

**Nashboro** Ernie Young’s original gospel-oriented, Nashville-based label founded in 1951 with eventual subsidiaries for rhythm & blues (Excello), teen pop (Nasco), and soul (A-BET).

**O**

Old Timey Chris Strachwitz’s now-defunct label, founded in 1962, for old country and western releases as a sister to the blues-focused Arhoolie (1960). See Arhoolie.
P

P-Vine Tokyo, Japan’s resident blues label, which released much Charly and Storyville material in the late 1970s and 1980s including LPs of previously unissued Goldband recordings.

Prestige Bob Weinstock’s jazz-oriented label founded in New York City in 1949. Weinstock’s modus operandi was not unlike Eddie Shuler’s “three take” rule, in that Weinstock believed first takes tended to be the most authentic ones. As such, the Prestige label became known for its refusal to pay musicians for session rehearsals. Rudy Van Gelder was the primary recording engineer for both Prestige and Blue Note for a while, giving rise to comparisons between the two labels that highlight Blue Note’s reputation for treating its musicians comparatively well, while emphasizing Prestige’s lesser musician-friendly policies. Many classic jazz recordings of the 1950s came from Prestige, which had a habit of picking up famous musicians at career low points. Their catalogue includes work from Thelonious Monk (whose infamous “the junkie label” epithet for Prestige remained current for a while among musicians), Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Sonny Rollins. Prestige opened a handful of short-lived jazz-focused subsidiary labels including New Jazz, Swingsville, and Moodsville, around 1958. The label’s blues and folk subsidiaries were Bluesville and Folklore, overseen by blues writing pioneer Sam Charters from 1963 on. Prestige was sold to Fantasy Records in 1971 (whereupon Sam Charters moved to Sweden to work for Sonet) and was later absorbed by Concord Music Group in 2005.

PYE International (UK) The British blues-rock mega-label founded in 1958 to distribute American music from Chess, Checker, King, and more. Its heyday was 1961-1964. PYE International was in competition for British blues fan buyers with Decca’s London-American and EMI’s Stateside.

R

Reb /Reb Rebel J.D. Miller’s “underground” white supremacist record label begun in 1966. Releases focused on anti-civil rights issues and purchasers had to be request the records by name, since they were not kept on display, played on the radio, or available in other stores. In fact, Miller said his main buyers were jukebox operators who bought extra singles to keep on hand to sell, since they were generally unavailable elsewhere. The first releases were from Leroy “Happy Fats” LeBlanc (Reb 501 “Dear Mr. President” allegedly sold over 200,000 copies) and a skit by Billy Joe “Son of Mississippi” Norris (Reb 500 “Flight NAACP 105” also reportedly selling over 200,000 copies), but the label’s main “artist” was C.J. “Johnny Rebel” Trahan. Jay Miller maintained African Americans both played in sessions for, and bought, a large percentage of his Reb Rebel records, although Trahan himself recalls only recording with all-white bands.

Rhino Richard Foos established this label in 1978 to reissue compilation albums of 1950s-1980s pop, rock & roll, and rhythm & blues, in addition to novelty song and comedy retrospectives. Rhino started out as a record shop in L.A. in 1973 run by Foos, then became involved in distribution in 1978 because of store manager Harold Bronson’s efforts. The store, label, and distributor transitioned in the late 80s to a “complete” entertainment company adding home video reissues of current TV shows and CDs of movie soundtracks. The label’s hallmark superior audio quality, with their re-mastering operations headed by Bill Inglot, resulted in great industry respect. Rhino entered into a distribution agreement with Capitol from 1985-1992, Atlantic in 1992, then Warner purchased 50% of Rhino stake, followed by the second 50% in 1998. Founders Foos and Bronson left in 2003, and Rhino reorganized under Warner Music Group in 2004. In 2006 Rhino Records (UK) formed, half for TV-advertised compilations and half for vaults catalogue material. Today the label’s catalogue counts material from Buddy Guy & Junior Wells, John Lee Hooker & Heat, some Alfred, Freddy, and B.B. Kings, and many high-quality compilations. See EMI, Hip-O (Universal), and Legacy (Sony) for Rhino’s influential role as an ideal reissue label model.

**Rocko** Jay Miller’s house label for “rock n roll” as he defined it in the 1960s. In its first year, the name was changed to Rocket and back to Rocko again. Rocko, like Feature, was also used as a tester label to experiment with blues recordings before leasing them to Excello, e.g., Rocko 516 Jimmy Dotson’s “I Need Your Love” (1960) which is a contrastingly upbeat number compared to the established “moody” or “broody”-sounding blues Jay Miller usually leased to Excello, and for which Excello was known.

**S**

Showtime. Short-lived Jay Miller label formed in the mid-seventies.

Smithsonian Folkways This label produced high-quality audio recordings of folk, blues, and world music from the Smithsonian Institution. It was formed when Smithsonian acquired Moe Asch’s Folkways Records after his death in 1986. See Folkways.

**Sonet (Sweden/Denmark)** Swedish, then Danish label founded in 1955, with roots both in a joint venture between Anders Dyrup and Karl Emil Knudsen (Storyville) going back to 1951, and in a joint venture between
Sven Lindholm and Gunnar Bergström begun in 1955. Sonet (and all its independent branches across Europe) and Storyville have intertwined histories whose operations moved between Denmark and Sweden until their permanent separation in 1991, when PolyGram acquired Sonet. Both labels began in the fifties with an interest in, and catalogue of, traditional jazz, which grew to include American blues as more acts began to appear in Scandinavia after 1956. The label hired the American blues historian Samuel Charters in 1970 when he left Prestige just ahead of its 1971 sale, after which Sonet gained its reputation as a high quality blues label in addition to its jazz holdings.

Sonet’s reputation in the blues field is based largely on a few extended series: the twelve-volume Legacy of the Blues series included an album devoted to Juke Boy Bonner (Vol. 5: Juke Boy Bonner SNTF 634 (UK 1972); released in U.S. by GNP Crescendo on GNPS 10015 (US 1976)). In 2005 this album was expanded into Juke Boy Bonner: The Sonet Blues Story (Sonet 986 925-1 (UK 2005)). By 1976, Sonet was a recognized figure in film and record distribution, music publishing, discography, and record retail, and according to Billboard in 1983, Sonet’s success was thanks in part to Storyville’s parallel success (the two had nominally split in 1978). In 1971 Sonet put out the first full-LP Lightnin’ Slim release in the UK (High & Low Down SNTF 770), an edition of Excello’s LPS-8018 (US 1971), followed six years later by the mediociously-received London Gumbo (SNTF 757 (UK 1977)). Sonet also released one album each from Slim Harpo (SNTF 769) and Lonesome Sundown (SNTF 832), in addition to the 2-volume somewhat misleadingly titled Swamp Blues — misleading because it features none of the usual “Big 4” definitive swamp bluesmen—featuring Moses “Whispering” Smith, Arthur “Guitar” Kelley, Silas Hogan, Clarence Edwards, and Henry Gray (Sonet 773-774). By 1985 Sonet was on par with Flyright as the most active reissue label for Louisiana music (Tucker 1985). Sonet markets itself today as a “Foreign manufacturer of Cajun-styled product.” See Storyville.

Stateside (UK) British blues record label founded in 1962 by EMI and closed in 1973, to release licensed American blues music in competition for Decca’s “London American” and Pye’s “Pye International” audiences. Stateside issued anthologies from the Excello vaults that opened up the audience for the swamp blues, and where the Excello swamp blues would have its largest and most “unpredictable” impact. Important, and now collectors item, albums from this period are the Excello compilations Authentic R&B (Stateside 10068 (UK 1963)) and Real R&B (Stateside 10112 (UK 1964)), of Slim Harpo, Lightnin’ Slim, Silas Hogan, Lazy Lester, Jimmy Anderson, Lonesome Sundown, Whispering Smith, and Leroy Washington material. (The latter album also included one track from non-swamp bluesmen Leon Austin and one from Earl Gaines.) Both of those LPs were released on CD by Ace (UK) in 1994.
and 1995, respectively. Stateside was revived in the 1980s as a reissue label for American music. See London-American.

**Storyville (Denmark)** Danish label founded by Karl Emil Knudsen in 1952 to import American records. Most of Storyville’s recordings were released by Sonet from 1956 until 1978, which has led to some confusion about Storyville’s role in blues history. This prolific reissue label was initially founded for Dixieland jazz recordings, and then began recording American bluesmen touring through Scandinavia after 1956. Storyville’s reputation as a high quality reissue label for jazz and early blues came from its late 1980s and early 1990s series “The Masters of Jazz” (12 LP), “The Blues Masters” (12 CDs), and “The Sounds of New Orleans” (10 CDs).

By no coincidence, given its namesake New Orleans district, the bulk of Storyville’s material over the years has remained decidedly Louisiana-centric. Storyville does not usually appear in blues references or short lists, but its sometime kin label Sonet commonly does. Storyville’s relevance to the swamp blues is derivative of a single compilation: First, Storyville was the first to introduce the Goldband blues to an international audience, through *The Louisiana Blues*, an LP compiled by Mike Leadbitter for Storyville’s Bluesscene USA series. SLP 177 (DK 1965) is now highly sought after in blues circles, and its call number is recognizable shorthand. Sonet released it again in 1972 as Sonet 634 (Sweden) and reissued it three more times as SNTX 1 (UK 1974; US/Poland 1976; UK 1988) to accompany Sam Charters’ eponymous book. Storyville Portugal and France printed it with the original SLP 177 sleeves in 1982 (PSLP-841 Portugal 1982; ST 21010 France 1982). The album had cuts from Juke Boy Bonner (8 unissued titles—the whole first side), Ashton Savoy, Lazy Lester, Katie Webster (1 title each), Big Chenier (2 titles), Hop Wilson (2 titles), Jay Stutes, and Shorty LeBlanc (1 each), with sleeve notes by Paul Oliver.

This single SLP 177 album spun out into other projects under Storyville itself, too. On the Storyville Special series in 1969 it ran under Juke Boy Bonner’s name, with notes by Mike Leadbitter and produced by Eddie Shuler, as *In Person: The Louisiana Blues with the Fabulous Weldon “Juke Boy” Bonner*. This call number, SLP 616005, is equally renowned. SLP/Polydor 616005 was released in December 1969, so many references date it to 1970 (UK 1969, second printing UK 1971). Curiously, the 1969 sleeve is dated 1962, which is neither the recording date for the Bonner material (1960), nor the original release dates of the 45 r.p.m.s stateside (1960) or abroad (1965). **Ace (UK)** then extended this album and released it as the successful CDCHD 821 *Goin’ Down to Louisiana: The Goldband Downhome Blues Anthology* in 2001, with notes by John Broven. This album has become a definitive anthology in its own right, despite the fact that it is actually the third incarnation of a fifty-year-old album (the original SLP 177), a fact unknown to much of its CD audience.
Due to all these reprintings and renumberings with the same album art and notes, this single album is frequently erroneously dated, even in blues scholarship, to 1962, 1965, 1970, or 1975. The album is attached to the names of three different experts and three sets of sleeve notes, from Paul Oliver (SLP 177), Mike Leadbitter (SLP 616 005), and Sam Charters (SNTX 1). It is frequently referred to by the *Louisiana Blues* title but listed with the Juke Boy album catalogue numbers, or any of the other 7 numbers across Denmark, Sweden, the U.K., Poland, Portugal, and France—and notably, was never released in the U.S.

The above demonstrates just one example of the kind of confusion, and lost Urtexts, first-person accounts, and specifics of personnel and dating in the swamp blues’ discographical history. Even in cases of chronological revisions, where for instance Mike Leadbitter’s 1969 work corrected errors from the 1965 Paul Oliver listings, because the Leadbitter sleeve was printed with the 1962 date, it is presumed that Paul Oliver’s work was more recent and therefore its facts more accurate. Without a definitive discographical reference for the postwar blues, these details were impossible to settle for amateur collectors who did not have access to Eddie Shuler’s records or Juke Boy Bonner and Katie Webster’s correspondence. This gaping absence underlines the enormity of the intervention made by Leadbitter and Slaven’s *Blues Records 1943-1970: A Selected Discography* publication in 1970, 1987, and 1995.

**Swallow** Floyd Soileau’s flagship label for Cajun music founded in 1957 in Ville Platte. This other SWLA record man had the other labels *Jin* (1958) for swamp pop and named for his wife Jinver, *Kom-A-Day* (1973) for Cajun humor, *Maison du Soul* (1975) for Creole and Zydeco, and *Bon Temps*. Soileau ran the Swallow Recording studios 1960-1975, and then opened Louisiana’s only vinyl record pressing plant, which he closed in 1994. His Flat Town Music publishing company catalogue counts some 2800 songs, mostly Cajun. The landmark Floyd’s Record Shop that started it all closed its retail operations in 2012 but continues its mail- and online-order business.

**T**

Tear Drop/Teardrop Label owned by Huey Meaux of Houston. Teardrop’s biggest hit was “Talk to Me” by Sunny & The Sunglows from San Antonio, which broke the Billboard Top 100. In the mid-sixties, Teardrop and Sincere, another Meaux imprint, released swamp pop music from Warren Storm, Johnnie Allan, and others. Teardrop is part of the Crazy Cajun family, under Crazy Cajun Enterprises. See Crazy Cajun.

**TEK** A multipurpose subsidiary of Goldband and the name of Eddie Shuler’s publishing company under Goldband Enterprizes [sic], Inc. Shuler opened TEK, his second publishing company, on his own after first
learning the business from partner Don Pierce, who had guided him in the
publishing business through their jointly operated KMAR (founded 1959).
Records from Goldband, Tic Toc, and Tek were published through TEK.
See Goldband, KMAR.

**Tic-Toc/Tic Toc** Singles subsidiary of **Goldband** with sixteen swamp blues,
swamp pop, and Cajun singles released in 1961-2. Swamp blues recordings
include **Sticks Herman**’s “Give Me Your Love”/“Lonely Feeling” (Tic Toc
105). Part of the Goldband/Folk Star/Trey/Jador/Anla family. See
Goldband.

**Trey** Short-lived collaboration label between Ace Records (US) owner Johnny
Vincent and Wayne Shuler (son of **Eddie Shuler**), originally organized
for records from swamp bluesman **Elton Anderson**. A **Goldband**
subsidiary, Trey was based out of New Orleans and released five singles in
1959-60. Wayne Shuler eventually became A&R man and managing
producer at **Capitol** Records. Part of the Goldband/Folk Star/Tic
Toc/Jador/Anla family. See Goldband.

**Tribute** Short-lived **J.D. Miller** imprint.

**V**

**Valiant** A subsidiary of Joe Banashak’s **Instant** label in New Orleans.

**Verve** Collaboration borne of MGM and Moe Asch’s Folkways label in 1967.
Verve was an early influential label in the American folk revival. See
Folkways Records. See also “Verve/Folkways: Marriage of Folk and Pop”
in *Billboard* (Jan 21, 1967).

**Viking** Shreveport, LA record label owned by Charles “Dago” Redlich and an
important releaser of swamp pop music in the 1950s and 1960s. Redlich
shared professional circles with **Eddie Shuler** and other SWLA issuers of
swamp pop like Lee Lavergne, Carol Rachou, and Floyd Soileau.

**Vin** Subsidiary of Ace Records (US) named for founder Johnny Vincent. Vin 1001
was a reissue of an **Elton Anderson** Goldband recording from 1958.

**W**

**Wolf**/Best of Blues (B.O.B.) (Austria) Austrian blues label founded in 1982 from
the efforts of the Vienna Blues Fan Club to release prewar blues. Wolf has
a prolific catalogue of reissues and while its main focus has been Chicago
blues (evidenced by the 57-, or, by some counts 65-, volume “Chicago
Blues Session”s), between 1995 and 1999 it issued a 6-volume **“Louisiana
Swamp Blues”** series. One volume is devoted to the then 85-year-old
**Silas Hogan**, but the series features mostly second-generation swamp
bluesmen and peripheral figures of the first, like Rudi Richard, who was
**Slim Harpo**’s guitarist, the New Orleans pianist Henry Gray, Baton
Rouge fixture Tabby Thomas, and Clarence Edwards (Wolf 120.922-120.928).

Y

Yazoo Mail-order label issuing its first LP in 1968 as Belzona Records, founded by Nick Perls for reissues of 1920s classic blues from his personal collection of 78s that included Charlie Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Gary Davis. After the first five releases he changed the name to Yazoo to avoid confusion with the British Beltona label. For early blues recordings from Louisiana, see *Tex-Arkana-Louisiana Country [1927-1932]* on Belzona L-1004 (c1968), Yazoo L-1004 (c1968), and its reissue on CD *Don’t Leave Me Here: The Blues of Texas, Arkansas, & Louisiana, 1927-1932* on Yazoo L-1004 (1992). Perls founded the sister label Blue Goose in 1970 to record and release “rediscovered” blues artists and contemporary blues and jazz. Shanachie acquired Yazoo shortly after Perls’ death, in 1989.

Z

Zynn If J.D. Miller could be said to have had a flagship label in his recording heyday, it was Zynn. Although Zynn only issued 45 rpm singles between 1958 and 1963, it was the only label name that ever graced the Modern Music storefront sign. Miller said he chose the name Zynn because he knew he could not get the first listing in the phonebook, so he opted instead to be the last. John Broven has said that the name Zynn came from the title of a “sleazy paperback novel” chapter. (Broven (1983) 251)

Though it was not his earliest label (those were Fais Do-Do and Feature in 1946 and 1947), the Zynn aegis at one point housed Feature, Rocko, Cry, Spot, Action, Kajun, and Rebel before Miller handed the reins over to his son, who christened the newly updated recording arm Master- Trak Studios, reorganized everything under the Master-Trak Enterprises overhead, and started creating a new spate of labels in 1970. The most confusing among these is the *Blues Unlimited* label, which had no relation to the blues magazine of the same name.

Zynn’s 500 series released fourteen singles starting in 1958, including some that would come to be viewed among Miller’s best blues recordings. In 1959 was *Katie Webster* (Z 505) “I Need You Baby, I Need You” and the original ”Hoo- wee Sweet Daddy”; *Mr. Calhoun’s* (Z 508) original “On The Sunny Side of Love” and his signature “Hello Friends, Hello Pals”; and *Silas Hogan’s* band drummer *Jimmy Dotson*, who stepped in to sing for Hogan in their first session with Miller in 1959 (Z 511). Instead of crediting the band under its usual name The Rhythm Ramblers, the Z 511 release was credited to Jimmy Dotson and the made-up band name “the Blue Boys”, and later re-released as ”the Blue Dots”.

The 1000 series had twenty-four singles, starting in the blues vein in 1962 with *Jimmy Anderson* (Z 1014), and *Leroy Washington* (Z
1016). Both the Dotson and Anderson recordings feature the same Rhythm Ramblers backing band as Jimmy Dotson above, except Dotson did his own drumming, where Oscar Hogan drummed for Anderson. Zynn’s last 45 rpm release was from Warren Storm (Z 1024) in 1963.
Sources:


“Capitol Drive on Producers.” *Billboard Magazine* 80.16 (20 April 1968): 34.


