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# Black, white and blue: racial politics of blues music in the 1960s

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*University of Iowa*

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BLACK, WHITE AND BLUE: RACIAL POLITICS OF BLUES MUSIC IN THE 1960S

by  
Ulrich Adelt

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in American Studies  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

December 2007

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Jane Desmond

## ABSTRACT

My dissertation is a foray into blues music's intricate web of racial taxonomies, an aspect that has been neglected by most existing studies of the genre. In particular, I am interested in significant changes that took place in the 1960s under which blues was reconfigured from "black" to "white" in its production and reception while simultaneously retaining a notion of authenticity that remained deeply connected with constructions of "blackness." In the larger context of the Civil Rights Movement and the burgeoning counterculture, audiences for blues music became increasingly "white" and European. In their romantic embrace of a poverty of choice, "white" audiences and performers engaged in discourses of authenticity and in the commodification, racialization and gendering of sounds and images as well as in the confluence of blues music's class origins. I argue that as "white" people started to listen to "black" blues, essentialist notions about "race" remained unchallenged and were even solidified in the process. By the end of the 1960s, moments of cross-racial communication and a more flexible approach to racialized sounds had been thwarted by nostalgia for and a reification of essentialist categories. This marked the emergence of a conservative blues culture that has continued into the present. Individual chapters focus on key figures, events and institutions that exemplify blues music's racial politics and transnational movements of the 1960s.

Abstract Approved:

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Thesis Supervisor

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Title and Department

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Date

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Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Jane Desmond

Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy  
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TM Scruggs

What is often called the black soul is a white man's artifact.

Frantz Fanon  
Black Skin, White Masks

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## INTRODUCTION

There has never been any doubt that the strength and power of blues music has ensured that its influence can cross all boundaries and cultures with relative ease. Blues music is here to enjoy, respect and celebrate, and the door is open to all. Open it wide!<sup>1</sup>

[White blues performers] can never be *bluespeople* [...] because the blues is not something they *live* but something they *do* — which makes all the difference in the world. What distinguishes the bluesperson from the blues performer is cultural-racial make-up, which can only be inherited by a descendent of an ex-American slave.<sup>2</sup>

The two positions presented here, different as they may be, demonstrate the somewhat limited degree to which blues scholarship has been involved in a discussion of the music's racial politics. Both the all-inclusive definition of blues represented in the former and the essentialist view of the genre as an exclusively "black" music represented in the latter quote tend to ignore the intricate web of racial taxonomies that have shaped blues in its over one hundred years of history and fifty years of scholarship. Paying closer attention to the changing racialization of sounds, images, and audiences associated with blues is a useful strategy to unveil how racialization functions as a pervasive and problematic cultural concept. In this dissertation, I address the racialization of blues by analyzing how, in the 1960s, the music was reconfigured from "black" to "white" in its production and reception while simultaneously retaining a notion of authenticity that remained deeply connected with constructions of blackness.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Brunning, *Blues: The British Connection* (Poole: Blandford Press, 1986), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Julio Finn, *The Bluesman* (London: Quartet Books, 1986), 229.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout my dissertation, I will be using the terms "black" and "white" in quotation marks. By doing this, I am acknowledging that these terms have meaning and attain a certain stability in the discourses of power and the processes of racialization I am discussing, yet I also continuously want to call into question the meaning and construction of racial classifications. "Blues" continually appears in the different chapters of my dissertation as a music racially marked "black" or having "black" origins despite the problematic and oftentimes arbitrary linkage of musical sound and ethnoracial identity or assignment. Although there is some general agreement that blues evolved in the late 19th or early 20th century and carries a twelve-bar

In the larger context of the burgeoning counterculture, audiences for blues music became increasingly "white" and European. In their romantic embrace of a poverty of choice, "white" audiences and performers engaged in discourses of authenticity and in the commodification, racialization and masculinization of sounds and images as well as in the obfuscation of blues music's class origins. I argue that as "white" people started to listen to "black" blues, essentialist notions about "race" remained unchallenged and were even solidified in the process. By the end of the 1960s, moments of cross-racial communication and a more flexible approach to racialized sounds had been thwarted by nostalgia for and a reification of essentialist categories. This marked the emergence of a conservative blues culture that has continued into the present.

Importantly, the reconfiguration and reemergence of blues in the 1960s took place at a time when debates over civil rights were heating up in the U.S. As they witnessed the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, the passing of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, the Watts riots and the founding of the Black Panther Party, young "white" audiences began claiming the right to play the blues or live the blues through consumption. I argue that attempts by young "white" audiences to reject "white" middle-class culture, racism, colonialism and fascism oftentimes took form in a nostalgic recreation of a "safe" blackness that predated the Civil Rights Movement. Listening to and playing the blues, then, was constructed as an anti-racist move but instead of challenging racial classifications or even grappling with contemporary "black" politics, "white" performers, audiences and cultural brokers created a depoliticized and commercially charged blues culture. Yet, as I will also show, "black" performers repeatedly resisted narrow constructions of the blues in various ways.

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structure with an AAB rhyme scheme and bent notes, blues (along with other musical genres discussed in my dissertation like "folk" and "rock") is no clearly defined and semantically static term for a specific musical genre. My usage of the term "blues," then, is ideological rather than musicological.

The major questions that guided my research were the following: What was at stake for whom in being able to claim a right to play the blues or live the blues through consumption? Why did the shift from "black" to "white" in the conceptualization of blues occur in the 1960s and how was it connected to larger political developments of the decade? How were discourses of authenticity linked to racial constructions? How was the performance and reception of blues music gendered? That is, what was the relationship between blues and masculinity? How did the reception and appropriation of blues differ among "white" fans, cultural brokers and musicians? What role did the commodification of blues play in its reconfiguration? Did "white" performers, brokers and audiences in Western Europe perceive blues differently than those in the U.S.? Which blues styles did "whites" prefer to authenticate and how did their conceptualizations of blackness differ from the self-representation of "blacks" in the 1960s? Did the sonic and visual aspects of the music change in the process? How did "black" blues musicians and audiences react to the "white" appropriation of blues?

My dissertation focuses on the 1960s as the key decade for changes in the ideological construction of blues music, the historical time frame of my dissertation being roughly 1955 to 1975.<sup>4</sup> By teasing out problematic aspects of the racial politics of young "white" men associated with subcultural or countercultural movements of the 1960s, I comment on the way most academics and popular historians have assessed the decade.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Although the period is commonly referred to as "the 1960s," most of the major ideological shifts I address in this dissertation appeared between 1967 and 1971. In addition, to understand these shifts, I deemed it important to incorporate events from before 1960 (and after 1971).

<sup>5</sup> For young "white" audiences in the U.S., listening to and playing the blues was a subcultural or countercultural consumptive practice. Although blues became quite popular towards the end of the 1960s, it never entered the "mainstream" of U.S. popular culture. A cursory look at Billboard charts from the 1960s reveals that they were dominated by Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, the Monkees and Motown, not by B.B. King or Eric Clapton. In 1969, "Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye" by Steam and "Sugar Sugar" by the Archies were number-one hits. B.B. King's highest chart position that year was "Why I Sing the Blues" at number 61.

In these accounts of the 1960s (which generally disregard historical developments that do not directly pertain to the United States of America), the narrative oftentimes centers on a sympathetic portrayal of countercultural artists, social movements, civil rights, and the New Left.<sup>6</sup> Other books on the 1960s prominently feature the strengthening of conservative forces, either presented as an unfortunate backlash to progressive strategies or as a much-needed corrective for radical ideas.<sup>7</sup> A few accounts also link the 1960s to the emergence of the "postmodern."<sup>8</sup> The general trend in both popular and academic accounts of the 1960s, it can be safely said, is a dichotomizing of "conservative" and "liberal" forces.<sup>9</sup> Although the overwhelming trend of 1960s discourses is to neatly

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<sup>6</sup> See Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995 [1969]); Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997 [1977]); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987); Edward P. Morgan, *The 60s Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991); Alexander Bloom, ed., *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). The editors of *Social Text* even go so far as to equate the decade with anti-capitalist politics *per se*: "The '60s' is merely a name we give to a disruption of late-capitalist ideological and political hegemony, to a disruption of the bourgeois dream of unproblematic production, of everyday life as the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, of the end of history." Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephenson, Stanley Aronowitz and Fredric Jameson, ed., *The 60s Without Apology* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 2.

<sup>7</sup> See David Faber, ed., *The Sixties: From Memory to History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); David Steigerwald, *The Sixties and the End of Modern America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Stephen Macedo, ed., *Reassessing the Sixties: Debating the Political and Cultural Legacy* (New York: Norton, 1997); Mark Hamilton Lytle, *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Marianne DeKoven, *The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Even a detailed and comparative (if still Eurocentric) history like Arthur Marwick's simply presents "the challenge to established authorities and hierarchies as one single, though multi-faceted, process, subverting the authority of the white, the upper and middle class, the husband, the father, and the male generally." Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c1958-c1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 18.

separate progressive or liberal from conservative or reactionary forces, some authors have started to dismantle some of the inconsistencies of the counterculture.<sup>10</sup> It is within these critiques of dominant discourses of the 1960s that I situate my own analysis of the racial politics of blues music.

Popular music plays an important part in scholarly discourses and public memory of the 1960s. By critically investigating blues music and "race," I am challenging dominant narratives in the academic and more general reception of popular music that posit blues-based music, in particular rock and roll, as generating massive social changes in the United States and elsewhere by embracing working-class culture, sexual liberation, and desegregation. As I am showing in my analysis of blues in the 1960s, popular music, even if embraced by the counterculture, does not necessarily defy structures of oppression — it can also serve to maintain them.<sup>11</sup>

The existing scholarship on blues music has provided little on the role racialization has played for the genre. From its beginnings in the early 1960s, blues scholarship has primarily focused on the first half of the twentieth century and reified the status of blues as an authentic black music form.<sup>12</sup> More recent studies have emphasized

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) and Manuel Luis Martinez, *Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Grossberg has described a similar process in the emergence of rock music and culture, which he situates within the context of the "liberal consensus" of the 1950s and post-war consumerism. Contrary to popular opinion, Grossberg describes rock and roll as perpetuating constructions of race, class and gender, which serves to explain rock music's alignment with conservatism in the 1980s and beyond. See Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Samuel Charters, *The Country Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975 [1959]); Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990 [1960]); Leroi Jones, *Blues People* (New York: William Morrow, 1963).

the role of electric blues<sup>13</sup>, female blues singers<sup>14</sup>, spirituality<sup>15</sup>, and of the connections between blues and social history.<sup>16</sup> There have also been valuable contributions about contemporary blues audiences in Chicago and in post-Soviet Russia.<sup>17</sup> Although the majority of blues studies have been written by "white" men, "black" authors and scholars like Albert Murray, August Wilson and Houston Baker have repeatedly attempted to reclaim blues as an expression of authentic blackness.<sup>18</sup>

My main contribution to existing studies of blues is to tease out the racial politics of the shift from "black" to "white" in the 1960s.<sup>19</sup> Since most blues scholarship focuses

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<sup>13</sup> See Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966) and Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues* (New York: Viking, 1981).

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, these studies, while celebrating the sexual politics of black women in the 1920s, do not explain why women largely disappeared from commercial blues after the 1920s. See Daphne Duval Harrison, *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (New York: Pantheon, 1998); Hazel V. Carby, *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999). A critique of the masculinization of blues can be found in Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> See Jon Michael Spencer, *Blues and Evil* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993) and Gerhard Kubik, *Africa and the Blues* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> See James Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso, 1998); Adam Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> See David Grazian, *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and Michael Urban, *Russia Gets the Blues: Music, Culture, and Community in Unsettled Times* (Ithaca, NJ: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976); August Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (New York: Plume, 1985); Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> I am fully aware that the interest of "white" people in blues music started in the 1930s with folk song collectors, in particular John and Alan Lomax, but the racial politics of their work has been sufficiently explored elsewhere. See Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory in American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).



on the first half of the 20th century, the appeal of blues music to "white" performers and audiences since the 1960s with the simultaneous decline in "black" blues audiences and the political implications of this shift have largely been ignored. While throughout my dissertation I emphasize the meaning of "race," I also pay attention to the intersections of "race" and other factors in the ideological construction of blues music such as gender, class, nation, age, and region. For instance, a study of blues in the 1960s needs to take into account the masculinization of blues (the inclusion of "white" men and the exclusion of "black" women), the valorization of an older and rurally based lower-class "black" culture by mostly young, urban, middle-class "white" people, and the transatlantic move of blues as consumptive practice that found its most striking manifestation in the British blues movement. Although I consider other aspects of identity formation, the focal point of my analysis of blues remains "race," since this is the arena where the fiercest ideological battles over the music took place in the 1960s.

My analysis of the racial politics of blues music draws on scholarship of "whiteness," which, after exploding in the 1990s, has received considerable critique and become less pronounced in recent years.<sup>20</sup> "Whiteness studies" began as a critique of the pervasive effects of an unmarked "whiteness" as an instrument of power in U.S. society.<sup>21</sup> As scholars of "whiteness" argued, the disappearance of white ethnicities (Irish-American, Jewish-American, etc.) went hand in hand with the Othering of "blacks"

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, Robyn Wiegman argues that "whiteness studies," by paying close attention to injured white subjects, can serve to promote white supremacy in academic discourse. Robyn Wiegman, "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity" in *The Futures of American Studies*, ed. Donald A. Pease and Robyn Wiegman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> See David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998).

as a way for "whites" to gain power.<sup>22</sup> Over the course of the 1990s, "whiteness" became a catch-all phrase for a variety of analytical approaches from philosophy, legal studies, education, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and labor history.<sup>23</sup> A number of scholars investigated the intersections between "whiteness" and other signifiers of power, in particular heterosexual masculinity.<sup>24</sup> More recently, some scholars have begun to call into question some of the premises of the first wave of "whiteness studies" and have emphasized the continued significance of white ethnicities, "white trash" culture, and the

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<sup>22</sup> See Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume One: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York: Verso, 1994); Ruth Frankenberg, ed., *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Michelle Fine, Lois Weiss, Linda C. Powell, L. Mun Wong, ed., *Off White: Readings on Race, Power, and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Mike Hill, ed., *Whiteness: A Critical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, ed., *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1997); Joel L. Kincheloe, Shirley R. Steinberg, Nelson M. Rodriguez, Ronald E. Chennault, ed., *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); Chris J. Cuomo and Kim Q. Hall, ed., *Whiteness; Feminist Philosophical Reflections* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica and Matt Wray, ed., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Vron Ware and Les Black, ed., *Out of Whiteness: Color, Politics, and Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Cynthia Levine-Rasky, ed., *Working through Whiteness: International Perspectives* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> See Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Fred Pfeil, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (New York: Verso, 1995); Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel, ed., *Race and the Subject of Masculinities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Mason Stokes, *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); William F. Pinar, *The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America: Lynching, Prison Rape, and the Crisis of Masculinity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); Thomas DiPiero, *White Men Aren't* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

demise of unmarked subjectivity in the 21st century in which "whites" could become a minority.<sup>25</sup>

Despite recent trends to disengage unmarked whiteness as a subject of investigation and to focus on "non-white" subjects instead (as it is commonly done in comparative ethnic studies, Africana studies, border studies, etc.), I deem it necessary to continue a critical investigation of white male power structures in order to seriously challenge dominant hegemonic structures in the U.S. and elsewhere. In particular, an analysis of the ways in which white male power is deployed by seemingly counter-hegemonic movements like those associated with the 1960s has lost nothing of its urgency. Therefore, with my dissertation I hope to contribute to scholarship on the history of racial formations in the 1960s as much as I hope to contribute to scholarship on blues music. Interestingly, in my particular case, white male power was mostly expressed through the appropriation of black masculinity. This explains my strong emphasis on male performers, cultural brokers, and fans. Women are notoriously absent from blues discourses of the 1960s.<sup>26</sup>

My interpretation of processes of racialization in blues foregrounds cultural production, in particular visual and auditory presentations and representations of music,

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<sup>25</sup> See Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz, ed., *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997); John Hartigan, *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Mike Hill, *After Whiteness: Unmaking an American Majority* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> One notable example is Janis Joplin, whose gender performance has received a lot of scholarly attention. See, for instance, Gayle Wald, "One of the Boys? Whiteness, Gender, and Popular Music Studies" in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 151-167; Jana Evans Braziel, "'Bye Bye Baby': Race, Bisexuality and the Blues in the Music of Bessie Smith and Janis Joplin," *Popular Music and Society* 27, no. 1 (2004): 3-26; Alice Echols, "Little Girl Blue" in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, ed. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank and Jason Toynbee (London: Routledge, 2006), 57-63.

as well as the textuality of the written and spoken word.<sup>27</sup> Although I draw on some statistical evidence as well, my primary sources consist mostly of interviews (both printed and conducted myself), autobiographies, articles in newspapers and magazines, program books, recorded music, album covers, liner notes, and documentary films.<sup>28</sup> My dissertation is divided into five case studies that attempt to cover the different agents that contribute to making meaning of the blues, namely performers, audiences, and cultural brokers.<sup>29</sup> In addition, I look at different locations that had an impact on the conceptualization of blues in the 1960s (namely, the U.S., Great Britain, and Germany). Although my analysis of blues music's racial politics in the 1960s is far from exhaustive, I have sought to find representative examples that were major influences on blues formations even long after the decade was over.

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<sup>27</sup> For excellent models on how visuals and sound work to construct racial identity, see Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997); Arthur Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and American Musical Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> In my interpretation of blues' racial politics, I am engaging in essentialism to some degree since I am not primarily concerned with scientific and legal racial discourse (where, one could claim, racialization originates or at least appears in an earlier stage). The question is how an analysis that is not "merely" deconstructive is possible without acknowledging racial formations as they are enmeshed in cultural practices and form an integral part of social reality. A radical anti-essentialist stance would require giving up not just racial categories like "black" and "white" but even a term like "blues," which is inextricably linked to racial categories. I stick to some essentialist categories as they have been vital to claim what Gayatri Spivak calls "subaltern consciousness" (which can be linked to racialized consciousness). Spivak proposes a "strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" as the "attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and 'situate' the effect of the subject as subaltern." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 13. Since I address the problematic political implications of blues' racial politics, I need to assume that the significant changes for the blues along racial markers involve a change in "subaltern" consciousness as well.

<sup>29</sup> As the different chapters will reveal, there are no clear-cut boundaries between these different functions. For instance, Eric Clapton appears as both performer and fan, and Jim O'Neal, editor of *Living Blues* magazine, as cultural broker and member of the blues audience.

Chapter one focuses on the changing racial dynamics that accompanied "black" blues singer and guitarist B.B. King's rise to superstardom in the 1960s. This chapter works as an introduction to many important aspects of the solidification of a conservative blues culture in the 1960s: the shift of "black" audiences away from blues with a concurrent growing "white" audience in the U.S., the mobilization of "white" rock psychedelia in the marketing and consumption of blues, and the continued and even heightened authentication of blues through constructions of black masculinity. I argue that "white" audiences of blues were beginning to demand an older and "safer" conceptualization of blackness at the exact moment when calls for "black power" were becoming imminent. This process left "black" performers like B.B. King trapped in a place where they were economically rewarded for making music that catered to a nostalgic consumption of blackness.

I discuss "black" audiences of blues and connect B.B. King's fall from grace among "black" audiences with the heating up of the Civil Rights Movement and the emergence of soul music. I analyze B.B. King's appearance at the Fillmore West in San Francisco in 1968 as a key moment for the shift in audiences from an older "black" crowd to young middle-class "whites," and I look at different strategies King used on his studio albums and on his live albums between 1969 and 1971 in order to appeal to his new audience. These strategies included a "whitening" of sounds and images on the albums *Completely Well* (1969) and *Indianola Mississippi Seeds* (1970) as well as the reinscription of "black" sounds as a marker of authenticity on *Live at the Regal* (recorded in 1964 and re-released in 1971) and *Live at Cook County Jail* (1971). I argue that these albums worked to obliterate the racial ambiguity of the studio albums by reinscribing "black" sounds and audiences, thereby helping to reinforce essentialist constructions of blackness and authenticity that have informed blues music since the 1970s.

In chapter two, I seek to connect rock star Eric Clapton's music from the 1960s with the history of Norman Mailer's notion of the "white negro" in a particular British

context. I use Eric Clapton as an exemplary figure for the British blues movement of the 1960s and critically interrogate Clapton's constructions of blackness and authenticity as they appear in his interviews as well as the music itself. I argue that Clapton has repeatedly legitimized playing the blues by pointing to his working-class background and personal pain. In his search for an authenticated identity, Clapton (and many other British musicians) turned to a problematic construction of black masculinity which he was unable to fully identify with. Clapton employed a more fluid approach to the racialization of musical genres with the group Cream between 1966 and 1968, but Clapton's belief in purist notions of a romantic blues culture ultimately won over his artistic employment of *pastiche*.

In my analysis of Eric Clapton's career, I also pay attention to the connection between positive and negative racism by comparing Clapton's embrace of "black" sounds to his endorsement of British politician Enoch Powell's anti-immigration campaigns in the 1970s. I argue that the racial essentialism that informed Eric Clapton's support for a Conservative politician was directly linked to the racial essentialism that informed his appreciation of "black" sounds as a fan of blues music. The positive racism and economic exploitation of "black" culture I attribute to Clapton is a reoccurring theme in my dissertation as it characterizes "white" appropriations of blues by performers, cultural brokers, and audiences on a larger scale.

In chapter three, I look at blues performances at the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island between 1959 and 1969 with an emphasis on the festival's peak period from 1963 to 1965. At Newport, "black" blues performers played alongside "white" country and folk musicians for largely "white" audiences in an environment that was explicitly marked as supporting civil rights struggles. The performances at Newport need to be seen in the context of folk authenticity, a concept that has recently come under scrutiny by anthropologists and cultural theorists. I argue that the folk blues authenticated at Newport involved the performance of rural, acoustic "black" music for a young, urban and highly

educated "white" audience. By "rediscovering" (or, as I prefer to call it, "discovering") ostensibly pre-modern musicians from the 1920s and 1930s like Mississippi John Hurt, "white" blues fans managed to evade contemporary struggles for civil rights and declarations of "black power." I also discuss strategies of "rediscovered" artists to resist white conceptualizations of black authenticity.

The Newport Folk Festival was significant because, in addition to promoting folk purism, it also set the stage for the formation of the "white" counterculture in the U.S. that would embrace the music of B.B. King and Eric Clapton in the late 1960s. Therefore, in addition to the performances of elderly "black" blues musicians, I also look at the way public attention shifted from acoustic folk blues to electric blues in the mid-60s. For this purpose, I focus on Mike Bloomfield, the "white," Jewish electric guitar player who, with the Butterfield Blues Band, supported Bob Dylan's much-publicized "plugging in" at the 1965 festival and epitomized a younger generation of "white" blues aficionados. The generational differences apparent at Newport point to white conceptualizations of blues which only differ slightly in their nostalgic consumption of the music: whereas older folk enthusiasts like Alan Lomax only legitimized country blues from the 1920s and 1930s, younger blues connoisseurs like Mike Bloomfield preferred to authenticate (and replicate) the urban forms from the 1940s and 1950s.

Chapter four continues the focus on the international dimension of blues music of the chapter on Eric Clapton by analyzing the work of two German concert promoters, Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau. Lippmann and Rau organized the American Folk Blues Festival in both Germanys and other European countries beginning in 1962. The "festival" consisted of a number of well-established "black" American blues musicians performing in European symphony halls and a TV studio. Lippmann, a Jew persecuted by the Nazis, and Rau, a former member of the Hitler youth, situated their own engagement in "black" music within the history of World War II and its aftermath and sought to make "black" music respectable for an upper-middle-class audience as an anti-racist and anti-

fascist move. The history of jazz in the Third Reich provides the backdrop on which this discourse of liberation operates.

By invoking the history of "blacks" in Germany, I argue that in their conceptualization of the American Folk Blues Festival Lippmann, Rau and their stage designer Günther Kieser relied on a conservative or preservative approach to blues which in many ways resembled the way blues was presented at the Newport Folk Festival. Similarly to Newport, white conceptualizations of blues as simple, raw and uninhibited but ultimately non-threatening were occasionally challenged on and off stage by the participating musicians. Unlike the Newport Folk Festival, however, the organizers of the American Folk Blues Festival made no references to civil rights struggles in the U.S. until 1965, and then only did so from the safe distance of an ostentatiously liberated, anti-racist Germany. Although I emphasize the specific localized context for the American Folk Blues Festival (in which blues appears as a strategy of "denazification"), I argue that its authentication of blues worked strikingly similarly to other Eurocentric discourses in earlier chapters. By further documenting the transnational dimension of blues, I show that the ideological deployment of the music by "whites" was not limited to the U.S. and Great Britain.

Chapter five is concerned with the institutionalization of a conservative "white" blues culture which began in the late 1960s and has continued into the present. I concentrate on the first magazine devoted entirely to blues in the U.S., *Living Blues*, which was founded in 1970 in Chicago. Both editors and readership of the decidedly "non-commercial" magazine have been largely "white" middle-class males, while the editorial policies limit the coverage to "black" working-class musicians. Through a close analysis of the magazine's content, interviews with the founding editors and a comparison to the representation of blues in other magazines from the same time period, I am carving out the specific paradoxical racial politics *Living Blues* was (and is) promoting.



I argue that *Living Blues* can serve as an example for tendencies in blues discourses since the 1960s to maintain and justify a clear distinction between an authenticated "black" and a derivative "white" performance of the music. My analysis of *Living Blues*' cultural work in the early 1970s focuses on the way blackness functioned as a contested signifier of subcultural capital for the largely "white" producers and consumers of the magazine. I describe the way the authentication of blues in *Living Blues* and elsewhere is connected to a masculinization of the genre and the denial of blues music's interracial history, which in turn is linked to the segregation of sound by the recording industry in the 1920s. I argue that *Living Blues* made an attempt to resegregate the blues in response to the significant changes of the 1960s that had led to what the editors might have perceived as racially "impure" and "commercialized" music like the late-1960s work of B.B. King and Eric Clapton. Discussions about racial politics as they appeared in *Living Blues* set the stage for the historiography of blues music from the 1970s onward.

Taken together, the case studies of B.B. King, Eric Clapton, the Newport Folk Festival, the American Folk Blues Festival and *Living Blues* magazine provide a representative view of the fortification of a conservative "white" blues culture in the 1960s that involved performers, cultural brokers and audiences in the U.S. and Western Europe. Hopefully, these studies mark the beginning of an exploration of blues music's racial politics in the 1960s and open up inquiries on the way blues performers, brokers and audiences negotiated "race" and authenticity from the 1970s onward.

Since my dissertation is explicitly about identity politics, my own subject position has had a significant impact on the gestation of this project. I was born and raised in Hamburg, Germany and attended my first blues concert in 1986 at the tender age of fourteen. Incidentally, it was B.B. King playing at the *Fabrik*, a famous club in the trendy district Altona right by the Elbe River. In the years that followed, friends and I attended hundreds of blues shows by local and traveling blues acts in and around Hamburg. We

were usually the youngest people in attendance with the majority of blues fans being men in their late forties or early fifties. We also became avid collectors of blues records. In 1992 and 1993, I spent four months traveling with a friend through the United States, stopping at every blues club, record store and guitar shop on the way. Although my interest in blues became less pronounced in the late 1990s, I decided to write my Master's thesis in American Studies at the University of Hamburg about the music of the legendary Mississippi blues guitarist Robert Johnson.

When I moved to Iowa City in 2001 to become a graduate student at the University of Iowa, I became increasingly interested in questions of racialization and nationality. As an international student arriving only one month before September 11th, I was subjected to the surveillance by the Department of Homeland Security while still enjoying the privileges of being able to pass for white American male. As a German teaching classes on "black" literature with a high enrollment of "black" students in a predominantly "white" community and through moving to the poorest and "blackest" part of town due to the economic pressure of having to support my own growing family, I was exposed to some of the intricacies of "race" in the U.S. In my own work I became more interested in striving for social justice through my engagement with American Studies as practiced in the U.S. When I returned to blues as the topic for my dissertation, it had become impossible for me to view it as an art form largely independent of social structures — as I had done for my Master's thesis.

I began my dissertation with a relatively open agenda, not wanting to outright reject the aestheticism of "white" European and American blues musicians and fans but as I got further into my project it became harder to defend white blues politics. Because of my own subject position as a "white" German male who enjoys and studies "black" American music, my exploration of blues music's racial politics also became a personal quest of coming to terms with my own embeddedness and participation in racist practices. As I pondered the implications of my own subject position in relation to my

topic, I realized that my best contribution to social justice would be through exposing racist structures as an initial step in fighting racism. There is some irony in this, however. In a way, I am latching on to the history of "white" men making meaning of the blues — be they performers, fans, record producers, managers, record store owners, journalists, or historians. In writing about blues as a "white" man, I became part of the same processes I was criticizing.

CHAPTER I  
 LIKE BEING BLACK TWICE: CROSSOVER POLITICS  
 IN B.B. KING'S MUSIC OF THE LATE 1960S<sup>1</sup>

Introduction

On July 29, 1969, *Rolling Stone* magazine ran an ad for *Live and Well*, the latest recording of the blues singer and guitarist B.B. King, as well as for his appearance at the Fillmore West in San Francisco on six different dates. "Pop! goes the King," the ad proclaimed in big letters.<sup>2</sup> For many readers of the magazine, this might have been the first encounter with one of the authenticated "originators" of blues music, which had been transformed and popularized by musicians like Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, and Johnny Winter. But what exactly did "going pop" and playing at the Mecca of the growing "white" counterculture mean for a "black" blues performer like B.B. King, whose career had been on a downhill slide since his massive chart successes among "black" audiences in the 1950s and who was now about to "cross over"?

In this chapter, I focus on the changing racial dynamics that went along with B.B. King's "crossover" success, dynamics which, on a larger scale, represent various aspects of the fortification of a racialized blues culture in the 1960s: the shift of "black" audiences away from blues with a concurrent growing "white" audience in the U.S., the mobilization of "white" rock psychedelia in the marketing and consumption of blues, and the continued and even heightened authentication of blues through constructions of black masculinity. I argue that, despite tendencies in B.B. King's music to escape a narrow classification in terms of "race" and despite its cross-racial appeal, the formation of a

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this chapter is forthcoming in the *Journal of Popular Culture* under the title "Black, White and Blue: Racial Politics of B.B. King's Music from the 1960s."

<sup>2</sup> "Pop! Goes the King," *Rolling Stone* 37 (July 12, 1969), 5.

conservative blues culture in the 1960s demanded an unambiguous racialization. In the case of B.B. King (and many other "black" performers), this resulted in playing "black" music for "white" audiences. King's story can help to explain the astoundingly "clean" shift from "black" to "white" audiences of blues music over the course of the 1960s.

I begin by discussing B.B. King's early career and his success and subsequent fall from grace among predominantly "black" audiences. I then interpret King's appearance at the Fillmore West in 1968 as a key moment for the racially charged shift in audiences. I critically interrogate how biographical accounts of King oftentimes describe this shift in audiences from "black" to "white" as "progressive." Turning to the music and its visual representation on record covers, I analyze B.B. King's calculated rebirth as a rock star on the studio albums *Completely Well* (1969) and *Indianola Mississippi Seeds* (1970), two albums that offered a more fluid understanding of "race" and music by mixing "white" and "black" sounds and images. Finally, I use King's albums *Live at the Regal* (recorded in 1964 and re-released in 1971) and *Live at Cook County Jail* (1971) to illustrate how they worked to obliterate King's racial ambiguity by reinscribing "black" sounds and audiences. In that sense, they helped to reify essentialist constructions of blackness and authenticity that have informed blues music from the 1970s onward.

### The Shifting Audience

The scholarship on blues has largely failed to discuss the audiences for the music. Almost exclusively written by "white" men, blues studies oftentimes focus on an imagined time when blues was "purely" black and ignore its politics of racialization including the significant shift in terms of "race" that occurred in the 1960s. Although most blues studies take it for granted that "real" blues music is played by "black" performers for "black" audiences and because there are very few first-hand accounts of these audiences, they largely remain the vociferous but ultimately silent backdrop on a few blues live albums recorded before 1965 (one of them being B.B. King's *Live at the*

*Regal*, which I will discuss below). In order to get a notion of the shifting audiences which inform my analysis of B.B. King's music, it is necessary to situate King's early career within the context of "black" blues audiences. For this purpose, I examined the coverage of blues in the "black" newspaper *Chicago Defender* between 1955 and 1975. In addition, I conducted a number of interviews with older "black" blues audiences at the Coles Supportive Living nursing home on the South Side of Chicago on August 29, 2006.

It is important to note that in *actuality* neither B.B. King's audience nor his music had ever been purely "black" in the first place. Born as Riley King on September 16, 1925 in Itta Bena, Mississippi, he worked as a sharecropper and tractor driver before becoming a professional musician.<sup>3</sup> Here is how B.B. King describes the plethora of musical styles around which he grew up:

In the area in the Mississippi Delta where I was born, there was a lot of white people around that sang country music, so the blacks would sing gospel and blues. Not all of them sang blues, but I mean the majority would sing gospel. Some sang blues, and a few would sing country, and jazz was just starting to kind of come in a little bit. Well, all of the whites sang gospel, some would sing country, and a few would sing blues. So it was kind of like a balanced type of thing.<sup>4</sup>

The musical styles King outlines here are not closely tied to racial categories but rather informed by class as they were all predominantly associated with people suffering from poverty.<sup>5</sup> As early as 1970, Tony Russell demonstrated the fluidity between "black" blues

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<sup>3</sup> The "B.B." in King's name is an abbreviated form of "Beale Street Blues Boy," a nickname he earned himself while playing at clubs in Memphis. For details about B.B. King's life, I am drawing on Charles Sawyer, *The Arrival of B.B. King* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980); B.B. King with David Ritz, *Blues All Around Me: The Autobiography of B.B. King* (New York: Avon Books, 1996); Sebastian Danchin, *Blues Boy: The Life and Music of B.B. King* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998); David McGee, *B.B. King: There Is Always One More Time* (San Francisco, CA: Backbeat Books, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> B.B. King quoted in *The B.B. King Companion: Five Decades of Commentary*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 109.

<sup>5</sup> B.B. King further elaborates on this point by saying, "in the area where I lived, you could look at the houses and you didn't know who lived in them, white or black. That's just how

and "white" country music,<sup>6</sup> and B.B. King's early influences include not only "black" blues singers and guitarists like Lonnie Johnson and Blind Lemon Jefferson, but also French Romani guitarist Django Reinhardt, Hawaiian pedal steel guitar players, and country singers like Gene Autry and Jimmie Rodgers.<sup>7</sup> In addition to B.B. King's musical influences, there are other signs that complicate the racial crossover narrative. Before he started recording, King played for tips to mixed audiences on street corners in Indianola, Mississippi. In 1948, King moved to Memphis where he started a career as radio disc jockey for WDIA, one of the first radio stations in the U.S. aimed at a "black" market. This radio station, however, was, in King's own words, "a place where blacks and whites worked together,"<sup>8</sup> as was Beale Street with its Jewish merchants and "black" musicians.

In the 1950s, King became a recording star, topping the R&B charts with "Three O'Clock Blues" in 1952 and scoring an impressive nineteen top-ten hits for RPM and its successor Kent before switching to ABC Records in 1962.<sup>9</sup> However, in the 1960s, King's career was on a downward trend. He had failed to cross over to a "white" market in the 1950s as more teen-dance-friendly performers like Chuck Berry and Fats Domino had done, and he failed again in the 1960s when Motown was churning out pop hits by

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poor the area was." B.B. King quoted in Lawrence N. Redd, *Rock Is Rhythm and Blues: The Impact of Mass Media* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1974), 97.

<sup>6</sup> See Tony Russell, *Blacks, Whites and Blues* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> Just like "white" musicians influenced B.B. King, he would go on to influence a younger generation of "white" blues players like Eric Clapton and Mike Bloomfield. See chapters II and III.

<sup>8</sup> King, *Blues*, 115.

<sup>9</sup> The term "R&B" (short for "rhythm and blues") has been used indiscriminately by the recording industry for various forms of "black" music since 1947 when it replaced the term "race records." As a specific musical genre, a number of different blends of blues, jazz, spirituals, gospel and pop have been identified as "R&B." See Portia K. Maultsby, "Rhythm and Blues" in *African American Music: An Introduction*, ed. Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby (New York: Routledge, 2006), 245-269.

"black" artists while King's high-production LPs, aimed at an older and well-off audience, flopped. Neither *Mr. Blues* (1963) nor *Confessin' the Blues* (1965) made a dent in the Billboard Black Album or Pop Album charts. King kept playing more than 300 shows a year, mainly on the so-called "chitlin circuit,"<sup>10</sup> but his audiences were dwindling.

One difficulty in assessing the popularity of blues among "black" audiences is their much looser understanding of the term "blues." In 1956, the *Chicago Defender* described modern black music as "jazz, Rock 'N Roll, blues or whatever one chooses to call the style."<sup>11</sup> With the rising popularity of soul music, Aretha Franklin appeared as "Queen of the Blues" and Otis Redding as a "blues star" in the newspaper. When asked about blues performers, older "black" audiences I spoke with mentioned not only B.B. King and Muddy Waters, but also a number of singers and musicians that "white" histories of "black" music classify as big band jazz (Joe Williams), pop (Nat King Cole), and soul (Wilson Pickett).<sup>12</sup> Yet, regardless of classifications of musical styles, the Civil Rights Movement brought about a move towards more upbeat and polished sounds of gospel-fueled and "soulful" celebrations of black power.

I am suggesting that the move from blues to soul music among "black" audiences has an immediate connection to the heating up of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. A strengthened sense of black empowerment found its expression not just in the

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<sup>10</sup> The term "chitlin circuit" refers to predominantly "black" theaters and clubs and is derived from the word "chitterlings," a dish made from hogs' intestines. The term is still used today. See for instance the segment on Bobby Rush in *The Road to Memphis. The Road to Memphis*, DVD, directed by Richard Pearce and Robert Kenner (Seattle, WA: Vulcan Productions and Road Movies, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> "'Rock 'N Roll' Presents Odd Problem; How Cash Can Be Made Without It," *Chicago Defender* (March 31, 1956), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Netti Page, Sherman Kane, Norman Chapelle, personal communication (August 29, 2006).



generally faster-paced and less plaintive music of soul but also in direct lyrical references to black power. Examples include the work of Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions, who, in the 1967 hit "This Is My Country," had declared:

Some people think we don't have the right to say  
 This is my country  
 I paid 300 years or more of slave-driving sweat and welts  
 on my back  
 This is my country.<sup>13</sup>

Other examples of soul songs expressing notions of black power in the late 1960s are Otis Redding's "Respect" (turned into a "black" feminist anthem by Aretha Franklin), Sly & the Family Stone's "Don't Call Me Nigger, Whitey," and, most famously, James Brown's "Say It Loud I'm Black and I'm Proud."

While Curtis Mayfield, Aretha Franklin and James Brown were demanding black power, B.B. King was still singing mildly suggestive songs about a "sweet little angel, I love the way she spread her wings" and refrained from any notion of social commitment by exclaiming, "help the poor, won't you help poor me?"<sup>14</sup> In 1969, B.B. King had a top-twenty pop hit with "The Thrill Is Gone," which expressed a very different mood than James Brown's black power anthem released in the same year:

The thrill is gone  
 It's gone away from me  
 The thrill is gone, baby  
 The thrill is gone from me  
 Although I'll still live on

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<sup>13</sup> Curtis Mayfield, "This Is My Country," *People Get Ready: The Curtis Mayfield Story*, CD box set (Rhino, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> B.B. King, "Sweet Little Angel" and "Help the Poor," *Live at the Regal*, LP (ABC, 1971 [1965]).

But so lonely I'll be.<sup>15</sup>

With "The Thrill Is Gone," B.B. King had successfully crossed over to "white" audiences, who could latch on to his "universal" tales of lost love. Yet, when "white" hippies in their search for purity and authenticity were starting to listen to B.B. King, he had ceased to be a cultural expression authenticated by "black" people.

Sherman Kane, a contractor who grew up in Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s, remembers blues as "fading out" at the time.<sup>16</sup> Mary C. Browne, who was born in Alabama and moved to Chicago in 1940 to work as a nurse, recalls how "Caucasian people wanted to come to our places but we couldn't go to theirs. They wanted to take our dancing, our music."<sup>17</sup> This view was supported by a retrospective dismissal of "white" blues in the *Chicago Defender* in 1973: "What was taboo many years ago became acceptable and fashionable in the late fifties. Whites became intrigued by the blues and heralded it as something different and great. [...] Black musicians countered with soul."<sup>18</sup>

B.B. King himself has repeatedly voiced both his disappointment in and his understanding of "blacks" turning from blues to soul music in the 1960s. As King put it in his autobiography, "makes no difference that the blues is an expression of anger *against* shame or humiliation. In the minds of many young blacks, the blues stood for a time and place they'd outgrown."<sup>19</sup> For his "Uncle Tom" attitude, King was even repeatedly booed by young "black" audiences, an experience he has described as "like

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<sup>15</sup> B.B. King, "The Thrill Is Gone," *Completely Well*, LP (ABC, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> Sherman Kane, personal communication (August 29, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Mary C. Browne, personal communication (August 29, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Earl Calloway, "They Sing the Blues," *Chicago Defender* (March 3, 1973), 17. It should be noted that soul and blues remained connected in the work of many performers and that it would be an overstatement to say that "blacks'" engagement with soul was in active opposition to what they saw as the message of the blues.

<sup>19</sup> King, *Blues*, 213.

being black twice."<sup>20</sup> When they were not booing, "black" audiences simply stayed away. Bobby Schiffman, manager of the Apollo Theater in the 1960s, explains why a blues show with B.B. King, Bobby Bland, T-Bone Walker and others did not draw the crowd they had expected:

Blues represented, at that time, misery. Misery and blues were a throwback to slavery, to a time when the black man, intellectually, was at the lowest point of his history. And black folks from the street didn't want to hear that shit. They came to the theater to be uplifted, to see the glamour of four-hundred-dollar mohair suits. To see the glamour of the gorgeous gowns, and the hairdos, and the beautiful makeup, and the magnificent sets. The glamour of it all took them away from their own troubles. They didn't want to reminisce or reflect on the troubles that were proposed by the blues. For that reason the blues were never a significantly popular attraction at the Apollo.<sup>21</sup>

By 1969, blues had become so much of a subculture for "black" audiences that the *Chicago Defender* had to explain to its readers the significance of a blues festival in Grant Park with B.B. King and others, appropriately titled "Bringing the Blues Back Home": "There are still singers and instrumentalists who have preserved the blues and have been kept busy singing in small night clubs throughout the south and the nation."<sup>22</sup>

#### B.B. King at the Fillmore

In 1957, King had said in an interview: "We don't play for white people. Of course, a few whites come to hear us on one night stands but they are so few we never

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<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.*, 216-217. B.B. King remembers about the late 1950s that, "during this time we wasn't getting many records played. I went to Baltimore to play the Royal Theatre, and I remember that when I was introduced the kids booed me. And that hurt quite deeply." B.B. King with Dick Waterman, *The B.B. King Treasures* (London: Virgin Books, 2005), 72.

<sup>21</sup> Bobby Schiffman quoted in Ted Fox, *Showtime at the Apollo* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), 215-216.

<sup>22</sup> "Blues Come Back Home," *Chicago Defender* (August 28, 1969), 19. It should be noted that even after King's crossover to "white" audiences, he intermittently still played for largely "black" audiences, as can be witnessed on a TV special for Black Entertainment Television (BET) from 2000. See *BET on Jazz: The Jazz Channel Presents B.B. King*, DVD (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2001).

run into segregation problems. I'm not saying we won't play for whites, because I don't know what the future holds."<sup>23</sup> It would take another decade for King's prophecy to come true. In 1968, King hired Jewish manager Sidney Seidenberg, who set out to revive King's career by selling him to more affluent audiences. As Seidenberg told King biographer Sebastian Danchin, "Before I started working with B.B., he was basically an R&B artist, so the next move was to make him a big recording star."<sup>24</sup> After a promising start — King contributed to the soundtrack of *For Love of Ivy* starring Sidney Poitier, had an R&B top-ten hit with "Paying the Cost to Be the Boss" and released the moderately successful LP *Lucille* on which he compared himself to Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. — Seidenberg decided to move in a different direction: in June of 1968, he booked King to play at the Fillmore West in San Francisco, formerly a "black" club that under the direction of promoter Bill Graham had become one of the main attractions for the burgeoning hippie culture.

In his autobiography and many interviews, B.B. King has described his performance at the Fillmore in 1968 as a pivotal moment in his career. In the recent documentary film *The Road to Memphis*, King emphasizes the gratitude he felt for discovering a new audience for his music:

I used to play at the Fillmore when it was owned by another person. At that time it was about 90 percent black. This time we'd go out to the Fillmore West and I saw all these long-haired kids and all white kids. My road manager went inside and when he saw Bill Graham, he talked to him. Bill said, "No, this is the right place." So he came out to the bus and he said, "No, B., this is it, come on out." *He was talking to me like he has known me all the time and knew about me.* And [he gave me] the best entry I think I've had and the shortest. He said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I bring you the chairman of the board: B.B. King!" Everybody stood up, everybody. You could hear a pin [drop]. I ain't never had this happen to me before ever in life. They all stood up and then started

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<sup>23</sup> B.B. King quoted in *The B.B. King Companion*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Sidney Seidenberg quoted in Danchin, *Blues Boy*, 75.

to applaud. *But man, that got to me so much I just couldn't stand it. I just stood there and started crying. Do you know, out of my 45 minutes of playing I had about three or four standing ovations. And when I got ready to leave they stood up again. And that was the beginning of playing to a different crowd of people. In that night, instead of about 90 percent black we had about 95 percent white — first time. And that was a feeling I don't know how to describe but I wish I could.*<sup>25</sup>

Although King emphasizes the gratitude he undoubtedly felt for winning over a lucrative new market and seeing a significant historical change taking place (after all, King had begun playing in the South long before the Civil Rights era), he expresses both a sense of alienation about the way Graham treated him and an ambiguity about the feeling he fails to describe (except that he "couldn't stand it"). In his autobiography, King calls the same show "probably the best performance of my life," yet he also appears bewildered about the standing ovation *before* the actual concert: "These kids love me before I've hit a note. How can I repay them for this love?"<sup>26</sup> And in yet another account of the Fillmore show, King takes a stab at describing his feeling by saying, "it's almost like going to another country where people don't understand what you are trying to say. [...] Well, I felt lost. It is kind of like looking at a baby that's crying, and you want to help it but you don't know how to."<sup>27</sup>

B.B. King's initial sense of loss and helplessness in the face of the massive success among the hippie crowd is also exemplified in an episode he relates in his autobiography about his appearance at a rock festival in Macon, Georgia not long after the show at the Fillmore. Apparently, the concert promoters had arranged for an escort which turned out to be "a young white woman in her early twenties without a stitch of clothing."<sup>28</sup> King describes feeling nervous, especially since he was in the Deep South

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<sup>25</sup> B.B. King quoted in *The Road to Memphis*, my emphasis.

<sup>26</sup> King, *Blues*, 240.

<sup>27</sup> B.B. King quoted in *The B.B. King Companion*, x.

<sup>28</sup> King, *Blues*, 253.

and felt uncertain how he should act as a "gentleman." The scene he is describing resembles the famous "Battle Royal" chapter in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, in which a naked white woman is brought into the boxing ring where some young black boys are fighting for their lives, symbolizing the unattainable power of whiteness that is ultimately controlled by seemingly benevolent white men (in Ellison's story the influential white male spectators, in King's account the organizers of the festival who brought about the uncomfortable situation).<sup>29</sup>

As B.B. King's audiences were shifting and his "mainstream" success set in, he got more accustomed to "white" ways of dealing with his music, yet a sense of loss remained. The larger venues where King appeared were no longer "black" theaters like the Apollo in New York City, the Regal in Chicago and the Howard in Washington, D.C.; instead he played many blues/rock double bills at hippie enclaves like the Fillmore West and East (the latter in New York City), the Armadillo World Headquarters (Austin, Texas) and the Boston Tea Party. A ten-day tour supporting the Rolling Stones in 1970 exposed King to the largest audiences he had ever played for, yet in his autobiography he recounts: "I wasn't used to being around rock'n'roll stars. I wasn't comfortable. It was another new situation that had me worried about fitting in. I felt like I was being forced on the fans, like I was going to someone's house without being invited."<sup>30</sup> King remembers how in Baltimore a "white lady" with teenage children approached him after the show and inquired whether he had made any records — a full decade after King had started recording.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1995 [1952]), 18-21.

<sup>30</sup> King, *Blues*, 260.

<sup>31</sup> This episode is described in Alan Govenar, *Meeting the Blues: The Rise of the Texas Sound* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995 [1988]), 96.

After the hippies had discovered B.B. King, he moved on to much greater heights of commercial success. On his first national TV appearance in May of 1968, King had formulated his goal as: "Play the best that I can. Reach as many people as you can in as many countries. In other words, I'd like the whole world to be able to hear B.B. King singing and playing the blues."<sup>32</sup> In 1969, King appeared on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*, one year later 50 million viewers saw him play a medley of his greatest hits at the *Ed Sullivan Show*. In the same year, King had his only top-twenty pop hit to date with "The Thrill Is Gone," which was also awarded a Grammy. In 1971 and 1972, King toured Europe, Japan and Australia, among other places. Later in the decade, he would also play various gigs in Las Vegas, opening for Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley.

For B.B. King, to avoid becoming black twice meant to continue winning over "white" audiences. The shift in audiences and the sense of loss that accompanied it proved to be irreversible for King. In his autobiography, he bemoaned the fact that the French, the Australians and the Japanese had caught on to his music while his "own people" kept rejecting it. King stressed what he saw as the dignity of the blues, "the one form that's followed our path from slavery to freedom" and added: "I can't help but wish that, even today, I had a young black following."<sup>33</sup>

#### "Crossover" as Progressive Movement

B.B. King's feeling of loss in the face of his shifting audiences run counter to the way scholarly and popular accounts have described what one biography calls the "arrival of B.B. King" in "mainstream" (read, "white") American culture.<sup>34</sup> These narratives

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<sup>32</sup> B.B. King quoted in *B.B. King: King of the Blues (Ralph Gleason's Jazz Casual)*, VHS (Los Angeles, CA: Rhino Home Video, 2000 [1968]).

<sup>33</sup> King, *Blues*, 279.

<sup>34</sup> Sawyer, *The Arrival*.

generally portray the shift in King's audiences and his success among the "white" counterculture as King finally receiving the "mainstream" attention he deserved. An "all-black" audience represents obscurity and failure, whereas a crossover to "mainstream" or "white" audiences equals the ultimate success in America.

Ironically, this discourse began *before* B.B. King's actual crossover with Charles Keil's influential 1966 book *Urban Blues*, in which the author was defending King against the "moldy fig" mentality of fellow ethnomusicologists and fans who would only authenticate blues if it was acoustic and rural, and who considered King too "commercial." Keil assumed that King's audience was "large, adult, nationwide, and almost entirely Negro. If the adjectives 'unique,' 'pure,' and 'authentic' apply to any blues singer alive today, they certainly apply to B.B. King."<sup>35</sup> Yet, Keil foresaw that King "will in time win for him a substantial white as well as Negro audience."<sup>36</sup> In fact, Keil's book worked as an incentive for many "white" fans to seek out B.B. King. It remains unclear whether for Keil the shift in audiences worked to taint King's purity or question his authenticity.

Once King had achieved crossover success, his "black" past of playing the chitlin circuit changed from a marker of authenticity to a marker of incompleteness. This becomes most obvious in Charles Sawyer's biography of King, which was published in 1980. Sawyer calls King the "Horatio Alger of the modern South" and credits him with making blues "respectable." Musically, Sawyer sees in King "the evolution of a raw, unrefined talent into an artist of formidable skill and rare powers of expression."<sup>37</sup> In an afterword written for the German translation of his biography in 1995, Sawyer describes B.B. King's success among "white" audiences as the culmination of his career:

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<sup>35</sup> Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 102.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Sawyer, *The Arrival*, xiii, 132, 161.



By bringing the chit'lin' circuit to Middle America, B.B. King allows white America and the wider world to experience the musical culture of black America undiluted. The wider the exposure between the two cultures, the greater the interface between the races, and the deeper is the liberalizing influence on race relations. When B.B. King, an orphaned sharecropper, who witnessed the body of a black man on public display on the courthouse steps after electrocution, is hosted at the White House, our society has changed for the better. When he, who ran in fear from the white hoods of the Ku Klux Klan, bows his head to accept the crimson hood of Doctor of Arts from Yale University, our values are confirmed in a way that marks progress.<sup>38</sup>

Sawyer's logic of progress reads the acceptance of B.B. King by "white" people from the crowd at the Fillmore West over Yale University to the White House (no pun intended) as a sign of racial uplift, however, there are no indications for an eroding "white" power structure, on the contrary, "our" (read, "white") values are reaffirmed in the process.

After Charles Sawyer's biography about *The Arrival of B.B. King*, the positive evaluation of B.B. King's crossover success has become a staple and appears in virtually all accounts of King's life. Rarely does it become Sawyer's story of racial uplift,<sup>39</sup> but almost always does the move from the "black" past to the "white" future appear as a progressive move. This is true for the well-researched B.B. King biography by Sebastian Danchin — "within a few months [King] would break out of his musical ghetto and become a big name at the box office"<sup>40</sup> — as well as the general-interest *All Music Guide* — "across-the-board stardom finally arrived in 1969 for the deserving guitarist, when he crashed the mainstream consciousness in a big way"<sup>41</sup> — and even King's autobiography

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Sawyer, "The Legacy: Keep the Hammer Down" in *The B.B. King Companion*, 250-251.

<sup>39</sup> An example for this is when Adam Gussow describes the "healing theater of the Fillmore West auditorium." Adam Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 55.

<sup>40</sup> Danchin, *Blues Boy*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Bill Dahl, "B.B. King Biography," *All Music Guide*, <http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=11:o266mpb39fco~T1> (accessed January 30, 2007).

— "I didn't want the sixties to be like the fifties. I wanted something better and bigger. I needed to manage myself where I could make some progress."<sup>42</sup> Interestingly enough, in most of these accounts racial markers are only used indirectly, "ghetto" instead of "black," "mainstream" instead of "white," etc.

### The Studio Albums

By analyzing the racialization of sounds and images in B.B. King's records from the 1960s, I want to investigate how much of the mixed emotions King describes at seeing the crowd at the Fillmore West in 1968 was the result of a long-term strategy to secure a "white" audience and therefore possibly much less surprising than King admits in his account of the show. My analysis of B.B. King's recordings includes the liner notes, the cover art and the actual sound of King's records, all of which played a decisive factor in marketing the albums. I am arguing that King had made a conscious effort throughout the 1960s to win over sophisticated "white" audiences after "black" audiences had turned to other styles of music (namely, soul). Therefore, King's surprise at seeing the crowd at the Fillmore did not result from the audience being "white," but from the impression that it was the hippies that flocked to see him instead of an older generation of jazz aficionados. After King and his manager Sid Seidenberg had discovered their new audience, they employed different strategies on the studio and live albums that they released. While the studio albums were infused with "white" sounds and images taken mainly from hippie subculture, the live albums ironically reinscribed a black audience for white consumption.

B.B. King moved to ABC Records in 1962 after he had become dissatisfied with the way his old label Kent was not willing to invest big money into his declining career and was releasing his new records for the discount price of 99 cents a piece. King's first

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<sup>42</sup> King, *Blues*, 202-203.

album on ABC was *Mr. Blues*, which saw King crooning pop ballads in the style of Frank Sinatra. King had always played ballads (his second biggest hit of the 1950s was "You Know I Love You," a pop ballad), and the equation of "white" with pop and "black" with gritty blues is problematic. However, the virtual absence of straightforward 12-bar blues, the downplaying of the guitar and emphasis on smooth singing and orchestra accompaniment on *Mr. Blues* was clearly an attempt to break into a "white" market, much like Fats Domino and Ray Charles had done on ABC before. Jim Aylwards' liner notes further illustrate this point:

It's entirely possible that with the release of this album B.B. King will show up as a guest on The Ed Sullivan Show, sign to do a David Merrick musical, appear with the New York Philharmonic as Leonard Bernstein explains the blues, and confess on thousands of radio programs across the country that he takes Four Way Cold Tablets before every recording session. In other words... acceptance.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, *Mr. Blues* flopped and it would take another seven years for B.B. King to gain "mainstream" acceptance in the form of playing at the *Ed Sullivan Show*.

It wasn't until 1968, the year he played at the Fillmore West, that B.B. King finally started to break into the pop charts. *Lucille* made it to number 192, followed by *Live & Well* (1969, number 56) and the two records that I want to discuss more in depth, *Completely Well* (1969, number 38) and *Indianola Mississippi Seeds* (1970, number 26).<sup>44</sup> On the liner notes to *Blues on Top of Blues* (1968), Sheldon Harris of *Jazz & Pop* magazine had already hinted at King being "a direct link to rock-blues field now mushrooming all over the world,"<sup>45</sup> yet on all of the records before *Completely Well* King was still portrayed as a suit-wearing serious practitioner of blues (or even jazz) on

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<sup>43</sup> Jim Aylward, LP liner notes, B.B. King, *Mr. Blues* (ABC, 1962).

<sup>44</sup> All Billboard charts positions and Grammy awards of B.B. King are taken from [www.allmusic.com](http://www.allmusic.com).

<sup>45</sup> Sheldon Harris, LP liner notes, B.B. King, *Blues on Top of Blues* (ABC, 1968).

the cover, while the music did not stray much from the electric-blues-with-horn-section formula perfected by King in the 1950s. When Ritchie York predicted on the liner notes to *His Best: The Electric B.B. King* (1968) that King "is all set to carve a huge path through the pop field,"<sup>46</sup> King, his manager and his record company still seemed hesitant to fully embrace the hippie counterculture. However, this was bound to change.

*Completely Well* was B.B. King's second album with Bill Szymczyk as a producer, whose later credentials included classic rock acts like the Eagles, Bob Seger, and the Who. King's first collaboration with Szymczyk, *Live and Well*, had been a mixed bag: one side a live recording with King's tour band that didn't stray from earlier albums although it was recorded with King's "new" audience at the folk club Village Gate in New York's Greenwich Village, the other side consisting of some new songs recorded with younger musicians *sans* horn section, among them Al Kooper, who had played organ on Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone." For *Completely Well*, King worked with the same musicians and was now more consistently targeting a hippie audience. The cover of *Live and Well* had already showed King's face twice but blurred into one, resulting in a seemingly drug-induced image. On *Completely Well*, King's laughing face was squashed to the right edge, while two thirds of the cover consisted of psychedelic colors and lettering, echoing the album covers of psychedelic bands like Jefferson Airplane, Cream, and the Jimi Hendrix Experience.

Most songs on *Completely Well* followed the example of *Live and Well*'s nearly nine-minute closing song "Why I Sing the Blues," which in its looseness had been a radical departure from B.B. King's tighter sound on earlier albums. Predominant sound elements, despite King's electric guitar solos and soulful singing, were Gerald Jemmott's heavy bass riffs, Hugh McCracken's wah-wah guitar, Paul Harris' layers of organ, and

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<sup>46</sup> Ritchie York, LP liner notes, B.B. King, *His Best: The Electric B.B. King* (ABC, 1968).

Herbie Lovelle's economic drumming, all together resulting in a sonic experience comparable to the blues rock of "white" bands like the Allman Brothers. As the liner notes explain, the album was arranged by "everybody," which is particularly evident on a remake of B.B. King's "Cryin' Won't Help You Now," clocking in at 16.5 minutes and consisting mainly of an improvised jam reminiscent of then-popular blues rock groups like Cream or the Grateful Dead. For the standout track "The Thrill Is Gone," Bill Szymczyk added strings that created a tension with King's guitar soloing and also gave further emphasis to Paul Harris' electric piano, foreshadowing the rise of the bluesy piano-driven rock of the 1970s of "white" performers like Elton John and Billy Joel. "The Thrill Is Gone" climbed to number 15 on the pop singles charts and received a Grammy for Best Rhythm and Blues Vocal Performance, Male in 1970.

Jazz critic Ralph Gleason's liner notes to *Completely Well* followed the tradition of virtually all of B.B. King's records up to that point in introducing the singer and guitarist to a wider audience.<sup>47</sup> According to Gleason, "white" blues musicians like Mike Bloomfield (whom he quotes saying "I come from B.B. King, man") had finally brought the musician from the chitlin circuit "into the mainstream of American music, for which we should all be grateful" ("we" obviously referring to "white" people).<sup>48</sup> Although King was clearly mimicking "white" musicians on the album and although Gleason acknowledged that, "you can't walk into a rock concert, sit in a night club, dance at the Fillmore West [...] and not hear B.B. King,"<sup>49</sup> the critic still presented him as the authentic and undiluted black voice:

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<sup>47</sup> After the success of the album and in particular the song "The Thrill Is Gone," King would not get an introduction in the form of liner notes on the albums that followed.

<sup>48</sup> Ralph Gleason, LP liner notes, B.B. King, *Completely Well* (ABC, 1969). For the complex self-identification of "white" musicians as bearers of a "black" blues tradition, see chapter II.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

You'll hear it on this album. The same quality — and quality is the word to apply — that marks the difference between the original and the imitation, the real artist and the sham, B.B. King has it. When he touches the guitar, it is with a sound that no one else can get, just as when he throws his head back and sings, his voice is unforgettably unique.<sup>50</sup>

It is striking how little acknowledgment there is in "white" discourses on blues from the 1960s about the fissures between "black" performers and "white" audiences. Nowhere does Ralph Gleason wonder why it had become almost exclusively "white" people who were, in his own terms, "digging" the King of the Blues.

*Indianola Mississippi Seeds*, released in 1970, was the third album on which B.B. King collaborated with Bill Szymczyk, and of all King studio albums it reached the highest position on the Billboard pop charts (number 26). In multiple ways, *Indianola Mississippi Seeds* celebrated B.B. King's rebirth as a rock star, even featuring a birth certificate of King on the inner sleeve instead of liner notes. The packaging of the record, which won a Grammy for Best Album Cover, did not include a picture of B.B. King but a watermelon carved in the shape of a guitar, replete with pickups, strings and cable. The watermelon itself worked as a highly racialized symbol for Southern blacks. In addition, the guitar-as-fetish was seated before a worn-out amplifier, both signaling earthiness and authenticity to "white" audiences.<sup>51</sup> Clearly, the "black" audiences from the Apollo wearing mohair suits would not have approved of this setup. The back cover showed the same watermelon guitar, but this time it had been ravaged with seeds and pulp spilling on the floor. The rock music references here were not only to Jimi Hendrix's and Pete Townshend's smashing of their guitars at live shows but also to the cover art of the Rolling Stones' *Let It Bleed* (1969), which had featured a collage of a cake, a bicycle

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> The album cover was perpetuating stereotypes of Southern "blacks" that had been staples of U.S. popular culture since the 1820s. See *Ethnic Notions*, DVD, directed by Malcolm Riggs (Berkeley, CA: Signifyin' Works, 2004 (1987)).

wheel, a pizza, a record and other items on the front cover and the same collage ripped to pieces on the back cover.

Ironically, the music on the album was everything but a return to B.B. King's "roots" (or "seeds") in Indianola. It started out with the 1.5 minute long self-parody "Nobody Loves Me But My Mother" ("...and she could be jivin' too," as King added with a wink<sup>52</sup>), on which King's singing and piano playing was very likely improvised. Many songs on the album were long, loose blues rock pieces and featured extended guitar solos and guest appearances by "white" rock musicians like Leon Russell and Carole King.<sup>53</sup> Side two began with a false start that morphed into a drum solo. Studio chat was not cut, giving the album a live feel. The spontaneity was calculated, however, as Szymczyk and King were successfully trying to repeat what worked so well (financially and, arguably, artistically) on *Completely Well*. When King played some off-key notes on "Chains of Things," Szymczyk added some tension-laden string overdubs. Like "The Thrill Is Gone," the song was created as much in the studio control room as with the band. Szymczyk's employment of orchestra scores and multiple-track gimmickry was more reminiscent of George Martin's work with the Beatles than, for instance, the sounds James Brown was creating on stage and in the studio at the time. The closing song on *Indianola Mississippi Seeds* was the attempt to create another hit single like "The Thrill Is Gone." "Hummingbird," composed by rock legend Leon Russell, did not only feature a similar string arrangement, it even departed from 12-bar blues terrain and was organized by a traditional verse-chorus pop-song structure. "Hummingbird," however, wasn't as successful as "The Thrill Is Gone" and peaked at number 48 on the pop charts.

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<sup>52</sup> B.B. King, "Nobody Loves Me But My Mother," *Indianola Mississippi Seeds*, LP (ABC, 1970).

<sup>53</sup> The term "blues rock" is most commonly associated with "white" musicians, who, in the wake of the British blues movement, mainly relied on 12-bar, AAB structures and covers of "black" blues artists but put a stronger emphasis on lengthy guitar solos instead of vocal prowess. See chapter II.

B.B. King's visual and sonic "whitening" on the two albums *Completely Well* and *Indianola Mississippi Seeds* was of course everything but essential. King's move towards hippie psychedelia and blues rock, after all, had been a move towards a subculture deeply influenced by "blackness." Much like practitioners of "black rock,"<sup>54</sup> B.B. King was appropriating appropriations of "black" music for "white" and possibly even "black" consumption. B.B. King continued his blues rock experiments on the following two studio albums. *In London* (1971) saw King recording with prominent British blues and rock musicians like Alexis Korner, Peter Green, and Ringo Starr, and *L.A. Midnight* (1972) had B.B. King trading off solos with rock guitarists Joe Walsh and Jesse Davis. One could argue that with his subsequent releases, King was trying to win back some of his "black" audience while maintaining his "white" fan base, beginning with his collaboration with Stevie Wonder on *To Know You Is to Love You* (1973) and continuing with two live albums with Bobby "Blue" Bland, one of the few blues singers who was still playing for "black" audiences on the chitlin circuit. Yet, the music on these records was not a radical departure from previous albums. Overall, the "mainstream" or "crossover" success B.B. King had achieved with his hippie records has continued to this day, and "The Thrill Is Gone" is still his signature song.

#### The Live Albums

As I have argued, B.B. King's studio albums under the production of Bill Szymczyk were using "white" sounds and images to appeal to "white" fans and helped to establish King as a "mainstream" artist. Interestingly, the live albums King released between 1969 and 1971 operated differently and emphasized authenticated black sounds (and, to a lesser degree, images) to appeal to the same audiences who bought the studio

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<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of "black rock," see Maureen Mahon, *Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).



albums. The reinscription of blackness on these albums seemingly proved that, although B.B. King had been reborn as a hippie rock star, he was still deeply connected to "black" audiences. At the same time, the marketing of recorded "black" audiences to "white" audiences at home showed the contradictory nature of racial markers as signs of integrity and authenticity. By employing then-current "white" sounds, King's records became palpable for "whites," but as a performer for almost all-"white" audiences, B.B. King could have lost his credibility as a "blues man." The shift in audiences, then, had to be obscured by presenting King in front of genuinely "black" audiences on the live albums.

As discussed earlier, the live side from B.B. King's *Live and Well* (1969) was recorded at the Village Gate in New York City with King's touring band from the 1960s. In contrast to the studio side and its departure from King's musical traditions, the live side contained, as producer Bill Szymczyk put it in the liner notes, mainly "songs you've heard before, but the performances of these songs you haven't heard until now."<sup>55</sup> One can assume that the audience at the club in Greenwich Village where the live side was recorded was mostly "white," and although King is trying to build a rapport with the crowd, the call-and-response pattern he is trying to create seems staged as King "educates" the audience about the blues (as when he is telling the audience "now answer me" on the hippie-friendly "Just a Little Love").<sup>56</sup> Individual voices are distinguishable, but they are a far cry from the audience frenzy on older live albums by B.B. King like *Live at the Regal* and *Blues Is King*.

Whereas *Live and Well* failed to produce the "black" sounds B.B. King and Bill Szymczyk were apparently shooting for, the reissue of King's *Live at the Regal* in 1971

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<sup>55</sup> Bill Szymczyk, LP liner notes, B.B. King, *Live and Well* (ABC, 1969).

<sup>56</sup> B.B. King's role as "ambassador" of the blues becomes more prevalent in later years. See, for instance, his narration of the documentary *Good Morning Blues* (PBS Video, 1978) for public television or his spoken explanations before a college crowd on *Now Appearing at Ole Miss* (MCA, 1980).

surely did. The album had been recorded in 1964 at the Regal Theater in Chicago with a very responsive older, predominantly female "black" audience<sup>57</sup> and made it to number 6 on the Billboard Black Album charts in the following year. Repeatedly, King was telling the audience in his spoken interludes that he wanted to take them back and "pick up some of the real old blues."<sup>58</sup> Although *Live at the Regal* was recorded when B.B. King was struggling both artistically and commercially, the album managed to present King as a successful blues singer who was very much at ease with his vociferous audience: "If we should happen to play one that you remember, let us know by making some noise."<sup>59</sup>

*Live at the Regal* was reissued in 1971 with a different cover and additional production, made it to number 78 on the pop charts and has since become a blues "classic," regularly cited as one of the most important blues recordings ever made.<sup>60</sup> The revised album cover resembled a newspaper article with the headline "A Classic Revisited: B.B. King Live at the Regal." Both the original and the revised album cover featured a picture of King performing on stage but on the 1971 reissue he was hardly visible, only appearing in the two holes of the capital B in the title. On both the front and back cover, B.B. King's image was confined by the written word in the form of extensive liner notes by Leonard Feather. On the back cover, Feather's words literally covered a picture of King, playing his guitar with an open mouth but unable to speak. The liner

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<sup>57</sup> A good example is when the audience erupts into ear-shattering screams after B.B. King delivers the following lines from "How Blue Can You Get": "I bought you a brand new Ford, you said, 'I want a Cadillac./I bought you a ten dollar dinner, you said, 'Thanks for the snack./I let you live in my penthouse, you said it was just a shack/I gave you seven children and now you want to give them back!" B.B. King, "How Blue Can You Get," *Live at the Regal*.

<sup>58</sup> B.B. King, *Live at the Regal*.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> For instance, in his review for the *All Music Guide*, David Gioffre wrote, "*Live at the Regal* is an absolutely necessary acquisition for fans of B.B. King or blues music in general." David Gioffre, "Live at the Regal," *All Music Guide*, <http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=10:41n20rjac48x> (accessed January 30, 2007).

notes were by now familiar terrain and retold the story of crossover as progressive movement: "During the past year or two, B.B. King has crossed the figurative railroad tracks that had managed, for almost 20 years, to separate him from the mass audience he had always deserved."<sup>61</sup> Feather described King as "the genuine article," for whom the 1970s meant "a new, brighter blues era, but with it came the same unadulterated sound and style."<sup>62</sup> Again, "whiteness" (or "brightness") did not seem to be at odds with genuine "blackness" in this construction of authenticity. Crossing over to "white" audiences (and losing "black" audiences in the process) did not make B.B. King and his music less genuine or less "black" — at least not for "white" audiences.

Although B.B. King was mostly playing for "white" audiences at venues ranging from the Fillmore West to Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, his next live album, also released in 1971 and his last collaboration with producer Bill Szymczyk, was recorded at a venue with an audience which was, according to B.B. King's estimation, 70 percent "black": the Cook County Correctional Institution in Chicago.<sup>63</sup> With number 25, *Live at Cook County Jail* reached the highest position on the Billboard pop charts of all B.B. King's records. King had been approached by Winston Moore, the first "black" to be appointed head of Cook County, and played on September 10, 1970 before 2,117 inmates. As a great boost for King's publicity, the Chicago Tribune devoted an article to the concert in which the author William Jones found it necessary to provide a definition for blues for the "mainstream" readership.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Leonard Feather, LP liner notes, B.B. King, *Live at the Regal*.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> King, *Blues*, 296.

<sup>64</sup> "Blues is black music with deep roots in the church and slavery and slum suffering." William Jones, "Jail Audience Proves 'Right' for B.B., 'King of the Blues,'" *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 11, 1970, sec. 1C. 13.

Like the *Live at the Regal* reissue, *Live at Cook County Jail* (1971) sold a raucous (and presumably "dangerous") "black" audience on the record to "white" consumers at home. After the subdued responses of the crowd on *Live and Well*, recording an album at a prison facility was a logical step, in particular in the wake of the tremendous success of country singer Johnny Cash's *At Folsom Prison* (1968) and *At San Quentin* (1969), the latter of which stayed 22 weeks at number one of the country charts and four weeks at number one on the pop charts.<sup>65</sup> Cash, whose commercial success had been suffering before his prison records, managed to cross over from the "white underground" to the "mainstream" while maintaining and even refueling his claim to be authentic, and B.B. King was busy doing the same, only with different racial connotations.<sup>66</sup> By recording at a prison facility, King was also continuing a tradition started by "white" folk song collectors like Alan Lomax, who, in their quest for preserving "authentic" and "undiluted" sounds, had also gone to jails.

Musically, *Live at Cook County Jail* was a rather conservative effort. All the songs on side one had appeared in similar versions on *Live at the Regal* and elicited similar crowd responses, only that this time men were more audible than women.<sup>67</sup> Side two began with some of King's hits from the 1950s and ended with two more recent compositions, one of them being "The Thrill Is Gone." B.B. King resurrected the horn section and engaged in the same conversations with his audience about love relationships

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<sup>65</sup> See Michael Streissguth, *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison: The Making of a Masterpiece* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 157.

<sup>66</sup> B.B. King renewed his association with prisons when he helped to set up the Foundation for the Advancement of Inmate Rehabilitation and Recreation (FAIRR) in 1972. He has also repeatedly played in prisons and recorded his own *Live at San Quentin* in 1989.

<sup>67</sup> One could argue that, by replacing the vociferous female audience from *Live at the Regal* with an all-male crowd of prisoners, the producers of *Live at Cook County Jail* affirmed the masculinization that went hand in hand with the "whitening" of the blues. For more on the masculinization of blues, see chapter V.

that had characterized his live performances in "black" theaters and clubs before his crossover success at the Fillmore. What King was drawing on was the nostalgia of the "black" inmates, who were supplying the "authentic" backdrop for the "white" audiences buying the record. The cover art further strove to authenticate the performance with its black-and-white picture of King intently playing a guitar lick with brick walls and barred windows in the background. The stenciled lettering used for the title looked like an official stamp of authenticity.

The reinscription of "black" sounds and images on B.B. King's live albums between 1969 and 1971 and the "whitening" of King's sounds and images on his studio albums from the same time period were two different strategies to achieve the same goal: to continue crossing over to "white" audiences. For these audiences, King's authenticity as an agent of black culture remained unquestioned and the disinterest of "black" audiences became a non-issue. King's move to "white" audiences had come to fruition with his appearance at the Fillmore West in 1968 and gradually shifted from the countercultural hippie crowd to truly "mainstream" audiences. In the 1980s and 1990s, King appeared on TV shows like *Baywatch*, *General Hospital*, *The Cosby Show*, and *Sesame Street*. He also played at the Live Aid festival in 1985, collaborated with rock group U2 on a single ("When Love Comes to Town," 1989), movie (*Rattle and Hum*) and tour, collected eleven more Grammys, opened blues clubs in Memphis, Tennessee and Universal City, California, and appeared in commercials for Wendy's, M&M's, and Budweiser, among others.

### Conclusion

As I have argued in this chapter, the racialization of B.B. King's music in image, sound, and audience changed significantly in the 1960s. B.B. King's music exemplifies a more general shift from "black" audiences towards "white" audiences of blues. This shift had serious economic and psychological consequences as "mainstream" success was

associated with racial crossover and while "white" audiences readily appropriated blues as an authentic expression of black culture, the loss of "black" audiences made performers like B.B. King raise questions about their own musical identity. Interestingly, as blues music was "crossing over," it allowed for racially ambiguous sounds and images, as was the case in B.B. King's mobilization of "white" psychedelic rock elements in the production and marketing of his music. However, this racial ambiguity was eventually thwarted by essentialist notions of black masculinity as the dominant agent of blues authenticity. In B.B. King's case, this resulted in the consumption of "black" performances ("black" music played by "black" performers for a "black" audience) on his live albums towards a predominantly "white" audience who purchased the albums.

On a larger scale, B.B. King's "crossover" success indicates the formation of a conservative blues culture in the 1960s. King's story serves well as an introduction to the major reconfiguration of blues in terms of "race" that occurred in the decade and that found other expressions in the folk blues craze at Newport, in the British blues movement and its offshoots, and in the arrival of largely "white"-operated blues festivals and publications like *Living Blues* in Western Europe and the U.S. At a time when the Civil Rights Movement was heating up and demands for "black power" were becoming more forceful, "white" audiences were beginning to demand a different "blackness" from an earlier and supposedly less threatening time. B.B. King described the feeling of being booed by his own people as "being black twice" — one can only speculate whether being admired by "white" audiences might not occasionally made him feel like "being black twice" too.

While this chapter gives a good introduction to some of the processes at work in the "white" U.S. counterculture's appreciation and appropriation of blues in the 1960s and the way "black" performers like B.B. King and "black" audiences were reacting to these processes, it is important to consider the transatlantic aspect of blues becoming more prominent around this time. The British blues movement is a case in point, with Eric

Clapton being one of its most popular representatives. Clapton's engagement in blues purism as well as his association with countercultural discourses in the form of psychedelic rock music will show some striking similarities but also some major differences to a "black" American performer like B.B. King.

CHAPTER II  
 TRYING TO FIND AN IDENTITY: ERIC CLAPTON'S  
 CHANGING CONCEPTION OF "BLACKNESS"<sup>1</sup>

You know, I'm not black, but there's a whole lot of times I wish I could say I'm not white. (Frank Zappa 1966)<sup>2</sup>

Introduction

When the world-famous blues guitarist Eric Clapton stumbled onstage in Birmingham, England on August 5th, 1976 and announced his support for the anti-immigration campaign of British politician Enoch Powell, many of his fans were outraged. How could a "white" musician who had been making his living playing "black" music for more than a decade endorse racist politics? Hadn't Clapton always shown his utmost respect for and deep understanding of "black" music, and hadn't he just had a number-one hit with a cover of Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff"?

In this chapter, I look at Eric Clapton as an exemplary figure of the British blues movement of the 1960s and critically interrogate constructions of blackness and blues authenticity as they appeared in his interviews and in his music. Like other British blues musicians from the 1960s (notably members of the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin), Clapton went on to become a major rock star. This personal transformation elucidates a major popular genre transformation from blues to rock, which for Clapton and others was linked to the hippie counterculture and translated into commercial success in the United States as well as Europe. By closely analyzing Eric Clapton's career in the 1960s in the context of the "white negro," I do not only emphasize the transnational flows of blues

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this chapter is forthcoming in *Popular Music and Society* under the same title.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Zappa, "Trouble Every Day," The Mothers of Invention, *Freak Out!*, LP (Verve, 1966).



music but I also offer a counter-narrative to histories of the 1960s, which tend to describe the decade as the (temporary) trumping of "conservative" forces by "liberal" forces. As I will show, the racial essentialism that informed Eric Clapton's support for a Conservative politician was inextricably linked with the racial essentialism that informed his appreciation of "black" sounds. Although Clapton moved away from racial essentialism when he played with the group Cream between 1966 and 1968, he would ultimately return to the purist perspective on "race" which had characterized his earlier career and which has become the dominant narrative of blues music since the 1970s.

### "White Negroes"

The complex identification of "white" people with "black" sounds has a long-standing tradition, as many scholars have traced in recent years.<sup>3</sup> A key text to understanding "white" appropriations of "blackness" is Norman Mailer's glowing description of the "white negro," a term which had been introduced by Paul Verlaine to describe fellow poet Arthur Rimbaud. In his 1957 essay, Mailer equates the appropriation of "black" culture (in particular jazz "spontaneity") with being a "hipster," a view also apparent in many writings of the 1950s Beat generation like those of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg.<sup>4</sup> A few years earlier, Frantz Fanon had vividly described what he saw as the alienation of black men in the face of white oppression.<sup>5</sup> In an astonishing role reversal, Mailer envisioned black men as something "real" to aspire to in the face of *white* alienation in his essay. "The White Negro" drew mixed reactions after its publication.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000); Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Norman Mailer, *The White Negro* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1957).

<sup>5</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967 [1952]).

While James Baldwin criticized Mailer's "sexual insecurity" and romanticism,<sup>6</sup> Eldridge Cleaver aligned Mailer's hedonistic fantasies of primitivized masculinity with his own and connected the "white negro" to student protests at the University of California at Berkeley.<sup>7</sup>

Recently, Manuel Luis Martinez has uncovered reactionary, imperialistic, misogynistic and racist tendencies in the writings of Beat Generation authors.<sup>8</sup> What Martinez calls "self-marginalization gained through appropriation of ethnic identity"<sup>9</sup> appears not only in Mailer's "White Negro" but also in Allen Ginsberg's jazz slumming on "Negro streets" and, famously, in the following passage from Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*:

At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night. [...] I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a "white man" disillusioned. [...] I was only myself, Sal Paradise, sad, strolling in this violet dark, this unbearably sweet night, wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Dial Press, 1961), 217.

<sup>7</sup> Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968). Cleaver was not alone in attempting to bridge the gap between the "white" counterculture and "black" politics as the formation of John Sinclair's "White Panther Party" and their rejection of "white honkie culture" and appropriation of the Black Panther Party's masculinist discourse shows. See Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 217-221.

<sup>8</sup> Manuel Luis Martinez, *Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>10</sup> Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1999 [1957]), 169-170.

Martinez does not stop there, however. He finds a continuation of the Beats' neoromantic and reactionary tendencies in the 1960s countercultural writings of Hunter S. Thompson and Ken Kesey. Martinez' approach of countering the counterculture paves the way for a more complex discussion of the racial politics of seemingly progressive artistic movements of the 1960s. To a certain degree, my assessment of Eric Clapton follows Martinez' indictment of the racialist narratives of the Beats. As I will show, like Sal Paradise in Kerouac's narrative, Clapton felt it legitimate to identify as a "white negro" and take everything but the burden from "black" culture.<sup>11</sup>

### The British Blues Movement<sup>12</sup>

When Eric Clapton started to play the London club circuit in 1963, he was stepping into a burgeoning R&B scene that had grown out of an earlier established jazz scene. During World War II, a swing craze had swept through Europe (including a strong demand for boogie woogie piano, which can be closely linked to blues music). In the 1950s, jazz clubs in London's West End served both "trad jazz" in the tradition of 1920s New Orleans styles as well as "modern jazz" aficionados, who preferred be bop of the 1940s and called trad jazz fans "moldy figs" despite the fact that they were equally purist in their tastes.<sup>13</sup> Memorable British bandleaders included Humphrey Lyttelton, Ken Colyer and Chris Barber. One of Barber's singers, Lonnie Donegan, helped to establish a

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<sup>11</sup> I borrow this term from Greg Tate, ed., *Everything but the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Not much research has been done on the British blues movement of the 1960s. In my description of the British jazz and R&B scene of the 1950s and 60s, I am drawing on the following: Bob Groom, *The Blues Revival* (London: Studio Vista, 1971); Bob Brunning, *Blues: The British Connection* (Poole: Blandford Press, 1986); *Red White and Blues*, DVD, directed by Mike Figgis (Seattle, WA: Vulcan Productions and Road Movies, 2003). The history of the British blues movement is deeply connected to the history of the American Folk Blues Festival in Germany, see chapter IV.

<sup>13</sup> *Red White and Blues*.

distinctly British musical genre called skiffle that became a major movement in 1956 and 1957 after Donegan had sold more than one million copies of the Leadbelly classic "Rock Island Line" worldwide.<sup>14</sup> Skiffle was simple acoustic music that invited amateurs to participate and consisted mainly of Anglicized versions of American spirituals, gospel, bluegrass, and pop tunes. Standard instruments were acoustic guitar, string bass, washboard, and kazoo.<sup>15</sup>

Two other sidemen of Chris Barber, Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies, opened the London Blues and Barrelhouse Club in 1957, but it took another five years until the British blues movement made an impact.<sup>16</sup> In the meantime, many major American blues performers had played in Britain, often with British backup bands.<sup>17</sup> Electric guitar playing was still considered inauthentic by the "moldy figs," which caused many people to boo Muddy Waters and Otis Spann at the Leeds Folk Festival in 1958, preceding Bob Dylan's tumultuous "going electric" at the Newport Folk Festival by seven years. When Waters returned in 1962 with an acoustic lineup to accommodate his audience, the British blues movement was already in full swing and the fans were once again disappointed, this time because Waters was *not* plugging in.<sup>18</sup> Overall however, the British market proved to be viable. Many American blues artists appeared on BBC's *Jazz Club* program. Lightnin' Hopkins recorded an album called *The Rooster Crowed in England* in 1961, which included the songs "Hello England" and "Blues for Queen Elizabeth," and John

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<sup>14</sup> Groom, *The Blues Revival*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues* (New York: Viking, 1981), 256.

<sup>16</sup> Brunning, *Blues*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Among the blues performers who played in Great Britain were Josh White (1950), Big Bill Broonzy (1951, 1952, 1955, 1957), Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee (1958), and Champion Jack Dupree (1959).

<sup>18</sup> Groom, *The Blues Revival*, 14-15.

Lee Hooker's "Dimples" and Howlin' Wolf's "Smokestack Lightnin'" almost made the British Top 20 in the mid-60s.<sup>19</sup> In addition to new recordings, British blues enthusiasts were able to access American blues music on reissues (one notable example are Robert Johnson's *King of the Delta Blues Singers* LP's on Columbia from 1961 and 1966), the radio (American Forties Network, Radio Luxembourg), and a few even traveled the U.S. for research and recording trips (among them, Paul Oliver, Albert McCarthy and Sam Charters).<sup>20</sup>

In 1962, Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies formed Blues Incorporated, the first resident band at the Marquee Club and the starting ground for musicians that would later join the seminal rock groups Cream (Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker) and the Rolling Stones (Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Brian Jones, Charlie Watts, Ron Wood). The Rolling Stones, named after a Muddy Waters song, were formed in the same year and became the resident band at the Craw Daddy club in the West London suburb Richmond in 1963. One year later, their version of Willie Dixon's "Little Red Rooster" was a number-one hit in the U.K.<sup>21</sup> The younger British bands like the Stones, the Pretty Things and the Yardbirds that began to attract larger audiences were equally influenced by the electric Chicago blues of Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker and 1950s rock and roll by Chuck Berry, Little Richard and Bo Diddley and highlighted electric guitar and harmonica playing.<sup>22</sup> Unlike "pop" groups like the Beatles, less emphasis was given to original compositions and a credible vocal performance, leading Muddy Waters to comment in the 1970s, "they got all these white kids now. Some of them can play *good*

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 98-100.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 25-38.

<sup>21</sup> Brunning, *Blues*, 14-20.

<sup>22</sup> Groom, *The Blues Revival*, 98.

blues. They play so much, run a ring around you playin' guitar, but they cannot vocal like the black man."<sup>23</sup>

What is important to note here is that the British blues bands of the 1960s were latching on to "black" music from *America*, eventually "returning" the music to the U.S. However, "black" music from the Caribbean, readily available in Britain at the time because of waves of immigration from the West Indies, was not an influence until Bob Marley's *Catch a Fire* album in 1973 and Eric Clapton's number-one hit with Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff" one year later. This might be even more surprising considering that the Flamingo Club, where many British R&B groups played, attracted Caribbean immigrants and featured ska and rock steady, and considering that Chris Blackwell moved Island Records from Jamaica to London in 1962. Pete Townshend, whose group the Who started recording in 1964, the same year Eric Clapton released his first records with the Yardbirds, explains that Caribbeans were "too close to influence us very deeply" and that they had a "self contained life-style; they were good people, suspicious of young Whites who saw something special in simply being black."<sup>24</sup> Townshend describes how he was fascinated by James Brown and Bo Diddley because they transported romantic notions of a mythic America: "America was still a distant and evocative IDEA to us, full of mystique. Remember we were all war babies, brought up on free chewing gum handed out by clean-cut grinning GI's."<sup>25</sup> The emphasis of nation over "race" is deceptive, though — after all, both Townshend and Clapton were exclusively seeking out "black" sounds in creating an authentic Other. This is revealed in a passage by Eric Clapton in which he equates "America" with racial marginalization:

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<sup>23</sup> Muddy Waters quoted in Palmer, *Deep Blues*, 260.

<sup>24</sup> Pete Townshend quoted in The Who, *Who's Missing*, LP liner notes (Polydor, 1988).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

The first books I ever bought were about America. The first records were American. I was just devoted to the American way of life without ever having been there. I was ready for it all. I wanted to learn about red Indians and the blues and everything. I was really an American [*sic*] fan.<sup>26</sup>

Clapton's admiration of "America" is closely linked with an imagined Otherness, which is why blues and "red Indians" offer similar colonial fantasies. These fantasies were not compatible with the post-colonial reality of the Caribbean immigrants who quite possibly even frequented the same clubs.

The British blues movement provided the environment in which Eric Clapton was able to flourish until he eventually became one of the best-known rock instrumentalists of all time. Clapton started out as a blues purist and, after engaging in more fluid racial (if not gender) categories in the latter half of the 1960s, returned to a racially essentialist and masculinist concept of blues in the 1970s. This development illustrates the solidification of a blues ideology in the 1960s that rested on essentialist notions of "race" and which Eric Clapton ultimately was not able to escape.

### Strictly Blues<sup>27</sup>

Eric Patrick Clapton was born on March 30th, 1945 in the town of Ripley, South of London in the county Surrey. He was abandoned by both his mother, who was only sixteen when he was born, and his father, a Canadian soldier, and grew up with his grandparents. Clapton has repeatedly cited his difficult childhood in which he felt like an

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<sup>26</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Bill Graham and Robert Greenfield, *Bill Graham Presents: My Life Inside Rock and Out* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 216.

<sup>27</sup> A number of Eric Clapton biographies have been published over the years: John Pidgeon, *Eric Clapton: A Biography* (London: Vermilion, 1985 [1976]); Ray Coleman, *Clapton! The Authorized Biography* (New York: Warner Books, 1986); Marc Roberty, *Slowhand: The Life and Music of Eric Clapton* (New York: Harmony Books, 1991); Harry Shapiro, *Eric Clapton: Lost in the Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992); Michael Schumacher, *Crossroads: The Life and Music of Eric Clapton* (New York: Hyperion, 1995); Christopher Sandford, *Clapton: Edge of Darkness* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999).

outcast and suffered from "emotional deprivation" as a legitimate reason to play the blues:

*Now I didn't feel I had any identity, and the first time I heard blues music, it was like a crying of the soul to me. I immediately identified with it. It was the first time I'd heard anything akin to how I was feeling, which was an inner poverty. It stirred me quite blindly. I wasn't sure just why I wanted to play it, but I felt completely in tune.*<sup>28</sup>

The "poverty" Clapton is referencing in this account is emotional rather than material — as his relatively comfortable British working-class upbringing could not match the material poverty of pre-civil-rights U.S. "blacks," he cites his emotional poverty in order to legitimize his involvement with the blues.<sup>29</sup> As I will argue later, what Clapton is ultimately describing with his "inner poverty" and his lack of identity was closely linked to racial classifications. For Clapton, "inner poverty" would then translate into a lack of being "white," a lack that could only be filled by "black" music.

Apart from his parents abandoning him as a child, Clapton has given other reasons to authenticate his claim to be a blues musician. They underline his narcissistic conception of the genre: what "gave" him the blues were his heroin and alcohol addictions and his difficulties with romantic relationships, most notably his highly publicized "secret" courtship of the former wife of Clapton's friend and colleague George Harrison, Pattie Boyd.<sup>30</sup> Clapton translated a complex music that is at least partly a community-based response to hegemonic dominance into a remedy for his personal emotional deprivation, a deprivation that can be linked to what he felt was his

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<sup>28</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Coleman, *Clapton!*, 28, my emphasis.

<sup>29</sup> Houston Baker has described material poverty as an integral part of blues consciousness. See Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>30</sup> Eric Clapton devoted two of his major hits from the 1970s, "Layla" and "Wonderful Tonight," to Pattie Boyd. They married in 1979 and divorced in 1988.



"whiteness" and lack of identity. When talking about his formative years, Clapton is presenting blues as a purely individualistic experience:

I felt through most of my youth that my back was against the wall and that the only way to survive was with dignity, pride and courage. I heard that in certain forms of music and I heard it most of all in the blues, because it was always an individual. It was one man and his guitar versus the world. It wasn't a company, or a band or a group. When it came down to it, it was one guy who was completely alone and had no options, no alternatives other than just to sing and play to ease his pains. And that echoed what I felt.<sup>31</sup>

It is a common misconception that blues were exclusively about pain and suffering. Even a cursory glance at blues records will reveal that they include a wide range of emotions including anger, joy and indifference. Furthermore, while it is partly true that blues, unlike work songs and spirituals, represented an individual and potentially even existentialist perspective, blues singers relied economically and psychologically on community support, which was expressed musically through call-and-response patterns.

Eric Clapton's early career as a musician and blues aficionado was shaped by his search for "authentic" sounds. He went to see Memphis Slim and Little Walter in London and developed an obsessive fascination with "black" musicians. In an interview in which he reminisced about the early 1960s, Clapton freely admits his racialized and sexualized fantasies:

I would picture what kind of car [the musician] drove, what it would smell like inside. Me and Jeff [Beck] had this idea of one day owning a black Cadillac or a black Stingray that smelled of sex inside and had tinted windows and a great sound system. That's how I visualized these guys living.<sup>32</sup>

Needless to say, as many blues musicians in the U.S. were struggling at this time because of diminished audiences, they were more concerned with paying the rent than having

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<sup>31</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Sandford, *Clapton*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Dan Forte, "The Eric Clapton Story," *Guitar Player* 19, no.7 (July 1985): 50-81, 149; 57.

smelly sex in expensive cars. Furthermore, Clapton's equation of "blackness" and uninhibited male sexuality is reminiscent of the colonialist fantasies of other "white negroes" like Norman Mailer and Jack Kerouac.

The artist who probably had the most impact on Eric Clapton was Robert Johnson, whom he has called "the most important blues musician who ever lived" and "the most powerful cry that I think you can find in the human voice."<sup>33</sup> In the course of his career, Clapton has recorded many of Johnson's songs, most notably "Rambling on My Mind" with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers (1966), "Crossroads" (original title "Cross Road Blues") with Cream (1968) and the fourteen selections on *Me and Mr. Johnson* (2004). Robert Johnson (1911-1938), a country blues singer from Mississippi, was not a huge success while he was alive but left his mark on urban blues singers like Muddy Waters and Elmore James and became a major influence for many rock groups of the 1960s. Reissues of his recordings in 1961 and 1966 were quite successful, but Johnson's final breakthrough came, rather unexpectedly, in 1990 when his CD box set *Complete Recordings*, aimed at 20,000 copies, ended up selling more than two million units.

Recent studies have discussed the problematic mythic status Robert Johnson has achieved among "white" people.<sup>34</sup> In the liner notes to *Complete Recordings*, Eric Clapton describes his discovery of Johnson's music as a "religious experience that started out by hearing Chuck Berry, then at each stage went further and deeper until I was ready for him."<sup>35</sup> Clapton mistakenly believed Johnson was not playing for an audience to

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<sup>33</sup> Eric Clapton, "Discovering Robert Johnson" in *Complete Recordings*, Robert Johnson, CD booklet (Columbia, 1990), 23.

<sup>34</sup> Barry Pearson and Bill McCulloch, *Robert Johnson: Lost and Found* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004); Patricia Schroeder, *Robert Johnson, Mythmaking, and Contemporary American Culture* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Clapton, "Discovering," 22.

support his romantic view of Johnson as a tormented loner producing non-commercial music, a view also held by many Johnson biographers.<sup>36</sup> Clapton admits to having had "all kinds of fantasies" about Johnson and picturing him as a "real lone wolf, who was just too good for anyone to hang out with."<sup>37</sup> Since Johnson had been dead for more than twenty years when Clapton encountered his music and little was known about his biography at the time, it was easier for Clapton to create a romanticized image of Johnson than of other "authentic" blues musicians he would collaborate with in the 1960s and 70s.

Eric Clapton had been in two short-lived bands when he joined the Yardbirds in 1963. When the Rolling Stones were becoming more and more popular, the Yardbirds took over their resident status at the Craw Daddy club. They played blues standards and original compositions and introduced "raveups," improvised segments in their songs that built up to a crescendo of block chords.<sup>38</sup> Although the music of the Yardbirds was steeped in the blues, they were trying to appeal to pop audiences. Eric Clapton, who saw himself as the "self-appointed ambassador of the blues"<sup>39</sup> to Great Britain, did not approve of the Yardbirds' pop aspirations: "In those days I was a complete purist. If it wasn't black music, it was rubbish."<sup>40</sup> The occasion to put his purism to the test came for Eric Clapton when the Yardbirds supported the American blues musician and singer

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<sup>36</sup> Samuel Charters, *The Country Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975 [1959]); Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock'n'Roll Music* (New York: Plume, 1997 [1975]); Peter Guralnick, *Searching for Robert Johnson* (New York: Dutton, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Roberty, *Slowhand*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> For a more in-depth look at the Yardbirds see Adam Clayton, *The Yardbirds: The Band That Launched Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page* (San Francisco, CA: Backbeat Books, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in *Red White and Blues*.

<sup>40</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Coleman, *Clapton!*, 17.

Sonny Boy Williamson on a tour in England in 1963.<sup>41</sup> Williamson had come to Europe with the American Folk Blues Festival and was a far cry from Clapton's fantasy of the introverted, depressed blues singer. Mocking his British fans, he dressed up in a gray and black striped suit, a bowler hat and kid gloves. In addition, Williamson carried a leather attaché's case for his harmonicas and spoke with a fake British accent. Despite these campy styles and his authoritarian regime over his adopted musicians, Williamson made Clapton realize that the Yardbirds were not being "true to the music," because "this man was real and we weren't."<sup>42</sup> Williamson seemed to agree. He noted, "these Englishmen want to play the blues so bad... and they play it so bad."<sup>43</sup>

After the Yardbirds recorded "For Your Love," a pop song that went up to number two on the British charts and number six in the U.S. in 1965, Eric Clapton decided to leave the band. *Melody Maker* quoted him saying the Yardbirds were "going too commercial" and singer Keith Relf quipped, "[Clapton] loves the blues so much I suppose he did not like it being played by a white shower like us."<sup>44</sup> He was replaced by Jeff Beck and later Jimmy Page, two guitarists who had a tremendous impact on rock guitar playing and who were willing to experiment with pop sounds in a way Clapton at this time was not.

The collaboration of the Yardbirds and Sonny Boy Williamson was not the last time Clapton would authenticate his own music through an association with American blues musicians. In the 1960s and 70s, he recorded and jammed with, among others, Freddie King, B.B. King, Champion Jack Dupree, Howlin' Wolf, and Buddy Guy. He

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<sup>41</sup> One show was recorded by Horst Lippmann and released on record in 1966, see chapter IV.

<sup>42</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Palmer, *Deep Blues*, 172.

<sup>43</sup> Sonny Boy Williamson quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Keith Relf quoted in Sandford, *Clapton*, 46.

repeatedly cited Waters as a surrogate father figure and "guru," employed him as an opening act on a European tour in 1978 but raised a few eyebrows when, despite the fact that the 63-year-old singer was suffering from bronchitis, Clapton made Waters travel on the crowded tour bus instead of the luxury train he was using with his band.<sup>45</sup>

Shortly after he left the Yardbirds, Eric Clapton joined John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. Mayall, who shared Clapton's blues purism and had started playing the London R&B circuit in 1962, was a bandleader, singer, keyboard and harmonica player and an avid blues record collector.<sup>46</sup> In November of 1965, Mayall and Clapton released their first collective effort, a single containing the songs "Lonely Years" and "Bernard Jenkins." In their efforts to create an "authentic" Chicago blues sound, they used a single microphone, which they suspended from the ceiling. The album recorded the following year by John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton (as they were now billed) helped to put the electric guitar in the forefront of popular music. The liner notes boasted, "they are the only group in Britain today whose music closely parallels that being produced by the blues bands in Chicago."<sup>47</sup> Clapton added that during this time nobody in Britain was "playing the blues as straight as me. I was trying to do it absolutely according to its rules."<sup>48</sup> Yet, in actuality Clapton was doing more than merely imitating Chicago blues guitarists like Buddy Guy and Hubert Sumlin. He achieved an innovative use of controlled feedback and rich sustain by playing with an unheard-of volume in the

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<sup>45</sup> See Schumacher, *Crossroads*, 220.

<sup>46</sup> Eric Clapton was only one among the many musicians passing through the Bluesbreakers and becoming famous in their own right; others included Mick Fleetwood, John McVie and Peter Green of Fleetwood Mac, Mick Taylor of the Rolling Stones and Jack Bruce of Cream.

<sup>47</sup> John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers, *John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton*, LP liner notes (Immediate, 1966).

<sup>48</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Coleman, *Clapton!*, 25.

studio, creating the same "natural" distortion and fuzz he did when playing the London clubs. Clapton upstaged the musically rather conservative Mayall with memorable solos on "Double Crossin' Time" and "Have You Heard" and two guitar-based instrumentals, Freddie King's "Hideaway" and Memphis Slim's "Steppin' Out." He even seemed to poke fun at his own purism by incorporating the riff from the Beatles' "Day Tripper" into Ray Charles' "What'd I Say." On these tracks, he was not merely imitating "black" music but beginning to create his own distinctive guitar sound, a sound that earned him the nickname "God" (it was reported that fans sprayed "Clapton is God" on walls and shouted "give God a solo" at Bluesbreakers concerts). Ironically, although Clapton had joined Mayall's group to avoid commercialization, the Bluesbreakers album went to number six on the British charts.<sup>49</sup>

Eric Clapton recorded only one album with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. Musically, Clapton had started to supersede his merely imitative guitar playing, but he found Mayall's group not to be challenging enough. With John Mayall, Clapton was able to work within the purism which characterized the British blues movement of the 1960s on a larger scale, but his innovative guitar playing was betraying any attempt to stay "true" to blues music's "roots." Other British blues guitarists like Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page were facing the same dilemma in playing too creatively for a purely nostalgic and imitative approach to blues. In the highly racialized conceptualizations of blues that these musicians shared, their explorations of guitar techniques inevitably became "white" and "inauthentic." It was with his next group, aptly named Cream, that Eric Clapton was going to produce his least "authentic" but most innovative and influential music to date.

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<sup>49</sup> Roberty, *Slowhand*, 25.

### A Strange Brew: The Music of Cream

In the 1960s, British pop music created a stir in American culture that had been unheard of a decade earlier. The overwhelming crossover success of groups like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, whose careers ironically had begun by imitating American blues and rock and roll artists, led American commentators to speak of a "British invasion." Songs by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were covered by American artists from Otis Redding to the Supremes. The cross-pollination of British and American pop music has been an ongoing phenomenon ever since the 1960s.<sup>50</sup>

The "British invasion" was the context for Eric Clapton's successful "reimporting" of the blues to the U.S. With John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, Clapton had already developed a distinctive sound that turned him into a household name in Great Britain, but it was with Cream that Clapton became a superstar on both sides of the Atlantic. Interestingly, during Cream's existence from July 1966 to November 1968, Clapton, like other members of the British blues movement, was turning away from blues purism. Cream's hybrid compositions incorporated "black" jazz and blues as well as "white" European classical music and British humor. Visually and aurally, Cream embraced 1960s psychedelia.<sup>51</sup> However, it did not take long for Clapton to feel as if he was betraying his "black" roots, and after leaving Cream behind in 1968, his search for an identity continued with the imitation of other "black" musical forms, most notably reggae.

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<sup>50</sup> See Adam Clayton, *Beat Merchants: The Origins, History, Impact and Rock Legacy of the 1960's British Pop Groups* (Poole: Blandford Press, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> The term "psychedelic" was initially coined to describe the sensorial effects of LSD-25 but it has been widely used to describe music and art related to these effects. Musical characteristics of psychedelia include the slowing down and lengthening of songs, non-directional or contrapuntal solos, and electronic reverberation. See Michael Hicks, *Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic, and Other Satisfactions* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 58-59 and 64-65.

Cream consisted of three musicians: Eric Clapton on electric guitar, Jack Bruce on bass guitar, and Peter "Ginger" Baker on drums. Although each of them took over vocal duties occasionally, Bruce emerged as the lead singer of the group. Initially, Clapton might have envisioned a blues outfit, but his band mates were far from John Mayall's purism. Ginger Baker's polyrhythmic playing was influenced by jazz drummers like Max Roach and Elvin Jones, and Baker had been the member of various trad jazz bands in London. Jack Bruce attended the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and played melodic bass lines that rivaled Clapton's guitar for leading instrument. Like the Yardbirds' Keith Relf, Bruce's singing was not an attempt at sounding explicitly "bluesy." Jack Bruce hit mostly the "right" notes, employed vibrato to achieve an operatic effect and refrained from bending or flattening notes. Bruce noted, "I thought that although the blues was great, there was more than that. [The blues] was the beginning rather than the end."<sup>52</sup> In Clapton's thinking, moving away from the blues was directly linked to racial categories. In a revealing statement from 1966, he commented: "I'm no longer trying to play anything but like a white man. The time is overdue when people should play like they are and what colour they are."<sup>53</sup> Musically, Clapton was beginning to move away from easily recognizable racial categories, but in his thinking, he continued to dichotomize sounds as either "white" or "black." This is why later he would feel like he was "betraying" his newly found "black" identity by playing with Cream.

Cream's first album *Fresh Cream* (1966) was marred by its lackluster production but did showcase the musicians' virtuosic skills. It reached number six on the British charts but did not make an impact in the U.S. *Fresh Cream* contained a mix of cover versions of Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters and Skip James and original compositions

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<sup>52</sup> Jack Bruce quoted in John A. Platt, *Disraeli Gears: Cream* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), 15.

<sup>53</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Pidgeon, *Eric Clapton*, 43.



which stayed close to blues changes, and the liner notes suggested that, "Eric Clapton [...] epitomises all that is 'blues.'"<sup>54</sup> Yet, Ginger Baker's drum solo on "Toad" and Jack Bruce's pop singing on "I'm So Glad" pointed the way to the psychedelia the band was to fully embrace on their later albums. Eric Clapton continued to develop the rock guitar sound he had begun to sketch out with the Bluesbreakers, popularizing playing a Gibson Les Paul guitar through a Marshall amplifier and experimenting with sustain, feedback and vibrato. On "I Feel Free," released as a single and included in the American version of *Fresh Cream*, Clapton created a psychedelic effect by playing his solo with different harmonies than the rest of the band and turning down the treble to create what he later called "woman tone."<sup>55</sup> The innovative sounds Clapton began to create here were a departure from his imitation of blues guitarists like Freddie King and B.B. King.

Eric Clapton's embrace of psychedelia while he was with Cream needs to be seen in the context of his art school background. Clapton went to the Kingston College of Art and was expelled in 1962 for neglecting his studies. British art schools were a breeding ground for rock musicians in the 1960s; their students included Syd Barrett (of Pink Floyd), Ray Davies (of the Kinks), Eric Burdon (of the Animals), Cat Stevens, and a number of musicians Eric Clapton was to collaborate with at some point in his career: John Lennon, Pete Townshend, Keith Richards, Charlie Watts, Ron Wood, John Mayall, Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck, and Yardbirds members Keith Relf and Chris Dreya. Simon Frith and Will Horne have analyzed the connections between British pop music and art schools and argue that British musicians took "Afro-American" sounds and added "postmodern" qualities like "style, image, self-consciousness — an attitude to what commercial music

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<sup>54</sup> Cream, *Fresh Cream*, LP liner notes (RSO, 1966). Typically, blues involves I-IV-V chord changes.

<sup>55</sup> The gender politics of the term "woman tone" can be read in various ways. Eric Clapton is expressing his "feminine" side by creating plaintive sounds, yet he is also animating and ultimately controlling the feminized guitar-as-fetish.

could and should be."<sup>56</sup> Although this argument is not very convincing — "black" musicians like Screamin' Jay Hawkins and even Muddy Waters were extremely style-conscious and very much aware of their commercial potential — Frith and Horne accurately describe the art-school-inspired "bohemian dreams and Romantic fantasies" which made up the "ideology of rock."<sup>57</sup> This ideology posited masculinized blues "realism" against feminized "sappy teeny pop," an argument that Susan McClary has taken even further to suggest that by purging "commercial" tendencies from their music, bands like Cream were attempting to reverse the cross-racial politics of 1950s rock and roll: "The British had received access to their bodies by means of their alignment with African American music; but after a point, they felt they had to rescue that music from the body."<sup>58</sup> While dancing had played a major role in the emulation of "black" sounds through rock and roll in the 1950s, many British bands in the 1960s embraced a notion of music as a work of art that did not require bodily movement.<sup>59</sup>

The historical context for the prominence of art schools among British pop musicians was what Mark Donnelly has called the "increasingly influential interface between art and commerce"<sup>60</sup> of "swinging London" and its aftermath, which is visible in films like Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966, featuring a performance by the Yardbirds *sans* Clapton) and Donald Cammell's *Performance* (1970, featuring Mick Jagger in the leading role), in magazines like *Oz* and *IT*, and in Pop Art pieces of the

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<sup>56</sup> Frith and Horne, *Art into Pop*, 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>58</sup> Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 59.

<sup>59</sup> I talk about the demise of dancing among both folk and rock crowds in the U.S. in the 1960s in chapter III.

<sup>60</sup> Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), 98.

time. It is also visible in Eric Clapton's changes in clothing and hairstyles while he was with Cream, going from Ivy-League suits and a crew cut to brightly color ruffled shirts and permed hair. Clapton's emphasis on looks reflects the rise of a hedonistic modern consumer economy more than the sociopolitical issues of the 1960s. Like Clapton's imitation of "black" sounds, it also signifies his search for an identity. As Yardbirds band mate Chris Dreja said about Clapton:

I think he used to create fantasies about his life and relationships, and in some way this was reflected in the way he dressed, completely changing his image about every six months. His favorite creature at the time was a chameleon.<sup>61</sup>

Although Eric Clapton began to identify with what he considered a "white" sound while he was with Cream, his search for an identity in psychedelia and "blackness" coincided with his pseudo-Afro hairstyle, an imitation of either Jimi Hendrix or Bob Dylan, whose "Jew-fro" did not need artificial enhancement, whereas Clapton had to revert to perms.

Jimi Hendrix's hairstyle had already been copied by his two British side musicians Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell and can be interpreted as the visual equivalent of the appropriation of "black" sounds by "white" musicians. Jimi Hendrix, who was born in Seattle of African, European, Cherokee Indian and Mexican descent, moved to London in 1966 where he formed his own power trio and mixed blues and psychedelia in a similar way as Cream did. In his few years of performing and recording — he died in 1970 — Hendrix would prove to be at least as influential as Eric Clapton for the development of rock guitar sound. The racial politics surrounding Jimi Hendrix have been analyzed by various scholars. Quite a few accounts see Hendrix as transcending "race" but at the same time reifying racial stereotypes to the point of minstrelsy and thereby displaying the complex racial attitudes of the time.<sup>62</sup> All these accounts are more concerned with

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<sup>61</sup> Chris Dreja quoted in Platt, *Disraeli Gears*, 13.

<sup>62</sup> See Charles Shaar Murray. *Crosstown Traffic: Jimi Hendrix and the Post-War Rock'n'Roll Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic:*

discourses of "blackness" (quite ironic, considering Hendrix's heritage) than how they relate to the "whiteness" of Hendrix's admirers (and Hendrix's own "whiteness"). Recently, Hendrix has even been reclaimed as a "black" musician by members of the Black Rock Coalition.<sup>63</sup>

Eric Clapton first met Jimi Hendrix in 1966 when they jammed together. As Clapton remembers, "When I saw him I knew immediately that he was the real thing. [...] I thought, 'If I was black, I would be this guy.'"<sup>64</sup> What is noteworthy here is how Clapton diffuses "black" looks with "black" sound — he knew Hendrix is the "real thing" when he *saw* him ("real" equating "black" in this context) rather than when he *heard* him play, and he wanted to "be" Hendrix but could not because of his own irreversibly "whiteness." In an interview with *Rolling Stone* from 1968, Clapton went even further in admitting his racialized perception of Hendrix: "Everybody and his brother in England still sort of think that spades have big dicks. And Jimi came over and exploited that to the limit, the fucking tee. Everybody fell for it. Shit. I fell for it."<sup>65</sup> Clapton went on to say that he was able to see the "incredible musical talent" behind Hendrix's showmanship, even as that showmanship marked him as irrevocably inauthentic to Clapton. Apparently, Hendrix's overt play with racial stereotypes, which might have been at least partly liberating for a musician who did not neatly fit labels like "black," "white," "British" and "American" (or even "male" or "female"), was distracting

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*Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Waksman, *Instruments*; Lauren Onkey, "Voodoo Child: Jimi Hendrix and the Politics of Race in the Sixties" in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>63</sup> See Maureen Mahon, *Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>64</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Platt, *Disraeli Gears*, 26.

<sup>65</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in *The Rolling Stone Interviews: Talking with the Legends of Rock & Roll 1967-1980*, ed. Peter Herbst (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 28.

Clapton's purist view of the blues. Shortly before Hendrix died, Clapton recorded "Little Wing," one of Hendrix's most introspective and "pure" compositions.

Eric Clapton's perspective on Jimi Hendrix shows that he was far from abandoning racial constructions in his thinking, yet musically Cream was creating a hybrid of blues, jazz, amplification and Euro-American pop songs that was equally as formative for rock music and heavy metal as Hendrix's compositions. With John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, Clapton had contributed his own slight variation of Chicago blues guitar playing. Cream's blues covers, on the other hand, changed the songs significantly. Interesting in this context are Susan McClary's and Dave Hedlam's musicological analyses of Cream's blues transformations.<sup>66</sup> Both authors take on what later became one of Eric Clapton's trademark songs, a cover of Robert Johnson's "Crossroad Blues" that was released as a live version under the title "Crossroads" on Cream's *Wheels of Fire* (1968). McClary notes the de-emphasizing of Clapton's vocal as opposed to Johnson's "staggering range of timbres"<sup>67</sup> and finds the band's collective improvisation a symbolical rape: "Cream pushes the envelope of Johnson's strophic organization, imposing on it the dynamic, climax-oriented shape typical of European-based narratives."<sup>68</sup> Hedlam also notes a simplified and regularized harmonic and metric framework but mentions that other Robert Johnson compositions were more regular, such as "From Four Till Late," which was also covered by Cream. Furthermore, Hedlam states that Cream's cover version of Muddy Waters' "Rollin' and Tumblin'" (which itself is a simplified version of the Robert Johnson composition "If I Had Possession over

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<sup>66</sup> McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*; Dave Hedlam, "Blues Transformations in the Music of Cream" in *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, ed. John Covach and Graeme M. Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>67</sup> McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, 58.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

Judgment Day") has a *stronger* metric conflict than Waters' recording because of Ginger Baker's offbeat drumming interfering with the syncopated guitar riff. Based on this evidence, it seems more accurate to say that Cream was actively reshaping rather than "raping" the blues compositions they covered.

Unfortunately, Cream's musical transformations of blues music have been interpreted as cultural colonialism and a hijacking of "blackness" that more accurately describes some of Clapton's music before and after Cream. For instance, Nick Bromell admits in a revealing passage that part of the appeal of Cream's music "may have come from a kind of cultural chauvinism; I sometimes suspect that white kids, including myself, heard in this music not just the absorption of blues they heard in all rock but a going-beyond or trumping the blues; a radical revision of the blues into an idiom — the psychedelic — they could claim as their own."<sup>69</sup> Whereas Bromell's interpretation of Cream's blues transformations is misguided but positive, other scholars have simplified the racial configurations of the music in similar ways in order to dismiss it as "racist." Incidentally, the context for this critique is oftentimes that Cream are British, not American musicians. Michael Bane argues that American rock and roll was a communication between "black" and "white" cultures but that British bands like Cream, under the guise of making race-unconscious music, turned blues from a "black" to a "white" music form.<sup>70</sup> In a similar vein, Andrew Ross, in his otherwise persuasive essay on the connections between hipness and discourses of authenticity, contends that American rock and roll musicians like Elvis Presley were more radical and transgressive than British blues players for whom "blues music represented an exotic taste, not a lived

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<sup>69</sup> Nick Bromell, *Tomorrow Never Knows: Rock and Psychedelics in the 1960s* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 105.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Bane, *White Boy Singin' the Blues: The Black Roots of White Rock* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991 [1982]), 159.

experience for a racial minority," yet it remains unclear why blues was more of a "lived experience" for Presley than for Clapton since neither one of them ever claimed to belong to a "racial minority."<sup>71</sup>

With their sophomore album *Disraeli Gears* (1967), it became increasingly harder even to label Cream's music as "blues." The chord structures of most songs were still blues-based, but both the album cover art and the sound of the music suggested Cream was now part of the album-oriented psychedelic rock laid out by the recordings of American groups like Frank Zappa's Mothers of Invention (*Freak Out!*, 1966, and *Absolutely Free*, 1967) and the Beach Boys (*Pet Sounds*, 1966) as well as their British colleagues the Beatles (*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, 1967) and Pink Floyd (*The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, 1967). *Disraeli Gears*, which made it to number five in the British charts and eventually climbed to number four on the U.S. charts, contained the riff-based hit single "Sunshine of Your Love" (number five in the U.S.), which a recent article has analyzed as a "sonic synecdoche of the psychedelic 60s" due to its persistence in public memory and widely consumed media texts.<sup>72</sup>

The lyrics to "Sunshine of Your Love" and a number of other songs from *Disraeli Gears* were written by London poet Pete Brown and were marked by surrealism (as in the song "SWLABR," short for "She Walks Like a Bearded Rainbow") and even modestly left-leaning political statements — "Take It Back" was about refusing a draft card and had Jack Bruce sing the following lines over background party chatter "borrowed" from Bob Dylan's "Rainy Day Women #12 & 35:" "Don't let them take me to where streams are red/I want to stay here and sleep in my own bed."<sup>73</sup> Pete Brown would also

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<sup>71</sup>Ross, *No Respect*, 95.

<sup>72</sup> Arnold S. Wolfe, Chuck Miller and Heather O'Donnell. "On the Enduring Popularity of Cream's 'Sunshine of Your Love': Sonic Synecdoche of the 'Psychedelic 60s,'" *Popular Music* 18, no.2 (May 1999): 259-276.

<sup>73</sup> Cream, "Take It Back," *Disraeli Gears*, LP (RSO, 1967).

contribute lyrics to the next Cream album *Wheels of Fire*. Other psychedelic lyrics were brought in by the record producer Felix Pappaladi's wife Gail Collins, who transformed Junior Wells' blues song "Hey Lawdy Mama" about a big-legged woman who is leaving her man into the story of "a witch of trouble in electric blue" concocting a "strange brew" that "kill[s] what's inside of you."<sup>74</sup> Cream had already indirectly referenced mind-altering drugs in *Fresh Cream's* "Spoonful," but "Strange Brew" was more blatant in combining images of satanic spirituality with drug-intake, two themes that became very popular in rock music of the late 1960s.

In addition to the psychedelic lyrics, Cream was entering new territory musically as well. Eric Clapton introduced various technological innovations for electric guitar playing on *Disraeli Gears*, on which he began using a Gibson SG painted in rainbow colors, with a naked nymph and a starry landscape. "Tales of Brave Ulysses" featured one of the earliest examples of the wah-wah foot pedal (the company Vox had just started selling these gadgets commercially in 1966). The wavering wah-wah sounds were derived from trumpet and trombone playing and reproduced electronically by a foot pedal that shifted the peak response of the frequency up and down to create a "crybaby" sound. In addition to wah-wah, Clapton also employed a fuzz box, first prominently used by Keith Richards on the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction" in 1965. A fuzz box turns the sine wave input signal into a square wave, creating distortion without as much "crunch" as other distortion effects pedals for electric guitars. Finally, Clapton played non-Western harmonies with a twelve-string electric guitar on the Byrds-influenced "Dance the Night Away." These innovative sounds for electric guitar playing, along with Ginger Baker's virtuosic drumming and Jack Bruce's pseudo-operatic singing and melodic bass playing, contributed to Cream's move from purist blues to psychedelic rock. And to prove that

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<sup>74</sup> Cream, "Strange Brew," *Disraeli Gears*.



Cream was not going to fall into the trap and create a new form of purism with rock music (like many other bands would subsequently do), Eric Clapton referenced the pop standard "Blue Moon" in his guitar solo for "Sunshine of Your Love." In addition, the band included the barroom ditty "Mother's Lament" as a closing song, on which the musicians celebrated British music hall singing in thick cockney.<sup>75</sup>

Cream's musical innovations were visually accompanied by Martin Sharp's cover art for *Disraeli Gears*. Whereas *Fresh Cream* had merely featured pictures of the band (albeit with unusual accessories — Ginger Baker was depicted wearing a fur cap while Eric Clapton and Jack Bruce sported pilots' glasses), Cream's second album cover consisted of a full-fledged psychedelic collage clearly inspired by Peter Blake's groundbreaking design for the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The collage contained pictures of the band as well as an African chief, Superman, drawings by Albrecht Dürer and Michelangelo, and flower designs, all of which were overlaid with fluorescent pink paints. The overall effect was as psychedelic and slightly ironic as the music featured on the album (the African chief as a spoof on cultural authenticity, Superman as a spoof on the superstar status the musicians had achieved). With *Disraeli Gears*, Cream were both musically and visually signaling a playful and disrespectful reworking of authenticated "originals."

On the double album *Wheels of Fire* (1968), Cream continued the course set by *Disraeli Gears*. The first two-record set to ever go platinum, it made the top ten in Great Britain and stayed at the top spot in the U.S. for a month. *Wheels of Fire* was divided into a studio and a live record. The studio record opened with the hit single "White Room" (number six in the U.S.), which featured a distorted wah-wah solo by Eric Clapton and

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<sup>75</sup> That the band was not taking itself completely serious was also evident in the title *Disraeli Gears*, play on words mixing derailleur gears for bicycles with the former British prime minister and colonialist.

Pete Brown's cryptic lyrics talking about "a white room with black curtains near the station," "tired starlings," "yellow tigers," and "silver horses" who "ran down moonbeams in your dark eyes."<sup>76</sup> As on *Disraeli Gears*, there were psychedelic reworkings of blues songs (Howlin' Wolf's "Sitting on Top of the World" and Albert King's "Born under a Bad Sign"), some mild stabs at social critique ("Politician"), and a trippy album cover by Martin Sharp (in this case, an explosion of grey patterns, UFO's and facial features). Finally, there was an even stronger emphasis on European musical traditions on *Wheels of Fire* than on its predecessor. Cream employed a range of classical instruments (recorder, cello, glockenspiel, calliope, tubular bells), used complex song structures, and included three pieces co-written by the classically trained avant-garde jazz pianist Mike Taylor ("Those Were the Days," "Passing the Time," and "Pressed Rat and Warthog," the latter, like "Mother's Lament," delivered in cockney and highlighting the humorous side of the band).

The live record of *Wheels on Fire* was showcasing the band's instrumental virtuosity on a mere four tracks. Eric Clapton took center stage on the previously discussed "Crossroads" and also played some inspired guitar parts on an extended version of "Spoonful," Jack Bruce supplied the lengthy harmonica piece "Traintime," and Ginger Baker went through a tiring fifteen-minute drum solo on "Toad." The live album was recorded at Bill Graham's Winterland and Fillmore West in San Francisco in March of 1968, one year after Cream's U.S. debut and seven months after their first series of shows at the Fillmore, which had been the starting point of Cream's self-indulgent soloing on stage. As Jack Bruce recalls:

The big change happened on our first trip to San Francisco in 1967. We played the Fillmore, and prior to that time, we did the songs more or less as they were on the record, short three- and five-minute-versions. But when we got to San Francisco, there was

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<sup>76</sup> Cream, "White Room," *Wheels of Fire*, LP (RSO, 1968).

such a loose feeling about the whole time. I remember we were on stage, and we went through a couple of short songs, and the audience was shouting out, "Just play!" So we started to improvise, to lengthen our solos, and go along with the feeling. And that, I feel, was the beginning of what we became well-known for — the extended improvisations. It was the direct result of this hippie summer, or the time in San Francisco.<sup>77</sup>

The audience at the Fillmore West would signal the "crossover" to the "white" market for B.B. King in 1968, a "crossover" that left King financially recuperated but feeling emotionally alienated. For Cream, playing at the Fillmore also meant "crossing over," in their case from British to American audiences, but there was less alienation involved because racialization was not an issue: "I was very, very at home there," Clapton remembers.<sup>78</sup> Playing blues-based music for an American audience had a missionary aspect, because, as Clapton phrased it, Cream was "bringing their music back home and showing it to them for the first time."<sup>79</sup>

However, soon enough Eric Clapton began to feel that by playing lengthy pieces of collective improvisation on stage and recording psychedelic pop songs in the studio he was tainting the purity of authenticated "black" music. Throughout 1968, Cream played mostly bigger venues in the U.S. and thereby helped to jumpstart stadium rock.<sup>80</sup> In July of 1968, Clapton explained to *Melody Maker* why Cream was disbanding — apart from the personality clashes between Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker: "You get really hung up and try to write pop songs and create a pop image. I went through that stage, and it was a shame, because I was not being true to myself. I am and always will be a blues

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<sup>77</sup> Jack Bruce quoted in Tom Mulhern, "Jack Bruce: Cream's Bassist on Clapton's Influence," *Guitar Player* 19, no.7 (July 1985): 43-49; 46.

<sup>78</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Graham and Greenfield, *Bill Graham Presents*, 215.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>80</sup> See the timeline in Chris Welch, *Cream: The Legendary Sixties Supergroup*. (London: Bantam Books, 2000), 160-187.

guitarist."<sup>81</sup> Cream cashed in with a farewell tour (their final show was on November 26th, 1968) and the album *Goodbye* (1969), which again was split into a studio and a live side and made it to the top spot in the United Kingdom and number two in the U.S. In addition, two live albums were released in 1970 and 1972.<sup>82</sup>

Arguably, Eric Clapton produced his most memorable and innovative music to date in the two and a half years he played with Cream.<sup>83</sup> This coincided with Clapton disregarding his claims to authenticity and racial purity and embracing hybrid forms of musical production that mixed "black" blues influences with technological inventions for the electric guitar, collective improvisation from jazz and compositional and performative elements from European classical music as well as psychedelic iconography and a healthy dose of distinctly British humor. Ironically, Eric Clapton was dismissive about Cream's music in interviews he gave after their breakup: "All through Cream, I was lost, really *trying* to find an identity but not really knowing whether I had one or not."<sup>84</sup> For Clapton, "trying to find an identity" was inconceivable when he was playing too much "like a white man," as integrity presupposed the appropriation of the racial Other.

Musically, Cream had its most lasting impact on what started to emerge in the early 1970s as heavy metal, a genre marked by loud, distorted guitars and pounding rhythms and enmeshed in a theatrical display of masculinity and power. Heavy metal

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<sup>81</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Pidgeon, *Eric Clapton*, 55.

<sup>82</sup> These albums with recordings from 1968 were entitled *Live Cream Vol. 1* and *2*. Cream did not play together again until their induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in January 1993. The group also played four highly publicized reunion shows in May 2005, which were released on CD and DVD.

<sup>83</sup> Sheila Whiteley has attempted to show the sociopolitical impact of psychedelic rock groups (including Cream). As I hope to have made clear, my positive assessment of Cream is solely on *musical* grounds. Contrary to Whiteley's claims, there is little evidence that the group was concerned with any kind of countercultural political agenda. See Sheila Whiteley, *The Space Between the Notes: Rock and the Counterculture* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>84</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Forte, "The Eric Clapton Story," 116.

achieved its peak popularity in the 1980s and started to wane in the 1990s. Cream's riff-based "Sunshine of Your Love" sonically set the tone, and *Disraeli Gears* appeared on *Hit Parader* magazine's "heavy metal hall of fame" list.<sup>85</sup> Jack Bruce's quasi-operatic singing and Ginger Baker's employment of a double bass drum and lengthy drum solos became staples for the genre. Clapton's fetishization of the electric guitar was taken up by musicians like Eddie van Halen, who slowed down Clapton's virtuosic solos on record in order to copy them note for note. As Robert Walser points out, van Halen was influenced by blues guitarists as much as the European classical music of Bach and Vivaldi (and by the virtuoso playing of Paganini).<sup>86</sup> Interestingly, Eric Clapton has repeatedly articulated his reservations about van Halen: "He *is* very fast, and to my ears, he kind of goes over the top."<sup>87</sup> Clapton goes on to say that van Halen has "technique" but lacks "personality and feel."<sup>88</sup> Ultimately, what Clapton seems to suggest is that van Halen is too "white" for his taste, a "whiteness" that in Clapton's racialized thinking equates "technique," whereas "blackness" is linked to "personality and feel." Van Halen logically followed the transgressive racial move Clapton was ashamed of making with Cream, whereas Clapton left the group to return to notions of authenticity and racial purity he had endorsed when playing with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers.

#### Powellism and the Return of Purity

While Eric Clapton produced music with Cream that was less concerned with authenticity and racial purity, his dichotomizing of racial attributes persisted, as his

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<sup>85</sup> The only other 1960s acts on the poll were Jimi Hendrix, Blue Cheer, and Led Zeppelin. See Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 174.

<sup>86</sup> Walser, *Running*.

<sup>87</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Coleman, *Clapton!*, 258.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

assessment of Jimi Hendrix has shown. Furthermore, much of Clapton's dissatisfaction with Cream resulted from what he perceived as their "pop" sound and lack of "blackness," the same characteristics that had made him leave the Yardbirds.<sup>89</sup> After the disbanding of Cream, Eric Clapton dabbled in various short-lived projects and, largely due to his heroin addiction, disappeared for nearly three years before resurfacing in 1974 with the appropriation of another "black" musical genre, reggae. Only two years later, Clapton made the headlines by supporting the anti-immigration politics of British Member of Parliament Enoch Powell. As I will argue, Clapton's positive racism in appropriating racialized "black" sounds and his endorsement of Powell's negative racism are inextricably linked because both rely on the same conceptualization of racial purity.

After the end of Cream, Eric Clapton formed another "supergroup," Blind Faith, which featured Ginger Baker on drums, Steve Winwood on keyboards, and Rick Grech on bass guitar. Blind Faith's first performance at London's Hyde Park in June of 1969 drew 36,000 fans and their self-titled album reached number one on the British and American charts, but the band broke up after a disastrous tour. Eric Clapton subsequently joined the "blue-eyed soul" group of Delaney and Bonnie and released one live album with them before recording his first solo record, which essentially featured the same band and sound. Clapton then founded the blues rock outfit Derek and the Dominoes, with whom he recorded the critically acclaimed *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs* (1970) before caving in to his drug addiction and largely disappearing from public view between May 1971 and April 1974.

Eric Clapton's comeback album *461 Ocean Boulevard* (1974) featured a much more subdued sound and very few guitar solos. Most remarkable, however, was Clapton's

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<sup>89</sup> Eric Clapton's rejection of "pop" sounds needs to be seen in the context of the aforementioned feminization of pop music. After all, the sounds Clapton was authenticating were both "black" and "male."

appropriation of reggae music, which was just beginning to "cross over" from Caribbean to British and American audiences at the time. Clapton's version of Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff" became his only number-one hit in the U.S. to date. The arrangement was virtually identical; the content of the song, which dealt with post-colonial uprising against forces of oppression exemplified by Sheriff John Brown, got lost in translation. Clapton reportedly had a telephone conversation with Marley in which he asked about the message of the song but only received vague answers.<sup>90</sup> In addition to "I Shot the Sheriff," Clapton recorded a number of other songs with reggae sound in the mid-1970s, among them his answer to Bob Marley, "Don't Blame Me," Caribbean-flavored versions of the spiritual "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" and Bob Dylan's "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," and a collaboration with Marley sideman Peter Tosh entitled "Watcha Gonna Do" (on which, as Clapton admitted, he had no idea what he was singing about).<sup>91</sup>

What is significant about Eric Clapton's toying with reggae sounds is that in his search for an identity he turned to another "black" musical genre, even if only temporarily (Clapton eventually returned to blues as his main source of material). More importantly, playing "black" music did not stop Clapton from making a comment on stage in the British working-class city of Birmingham on August 5th, 1976 that was taken by many people as openly racist: "Do we have any foreigners in the audience tonight? If so, please put up your hands... I think we should vote for Enoch Powell."<sup>92</sup> To understand the significance of Clapton's *faux pas*, which, along with a racist comment by David Bowie,

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<sup>90</sup> Christopher Sandford quotes an anonymous musician who overheard the telephone conversation that, "read like a Harold Pinter script... he couldn't understand a word Bob said. Eric may have been a big fan of the Rastas, but coming from Guildford he wasn't exactly on their frequency." Sandford, *Clapton*, 140.

<sup>91</sup> Eric Clapton was not the only "white" British musician who incorporated reggae into his music in the 1970s. Other famous examples include the Rolling Stones and the Police.

<sup>92</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Schumacher, *Crossroads*, 205.

led to the founding of Rock Against Racism,<sup>93</sup> it is necessary to explore British politics of immigration in the 1960s and Powell's involvement in these politics.

The former colonial power Great Britain faced some significant changes in the 1960s. As Mark Donnelly points out, foreign policy was reoriented towards Europe, diminishing Britain's global power.<sup>94</sup> In addition, immigrants from New Commonwealth countries (India, Pakistan, the West Indies and African territories) began to immigrate in larger numbers — circa 70,000 a year between 1965 and 1974.<sup>95</sup> Both factors led to a perceived threat of British national identity in a country that had won two world wars and had repeatedly made claims of racial superiority. The Conservative party under prime minister Harold Macmillan had already issued the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962, which restricted immigration to people with Ministry of Labour vouchers (not surprisingly, "white" immigrants from Australia, Ireland, Canada and South Africa were exempt from the act). The Labour party under Harold Wilson, who was elected in 1964, cut back the number of vouchers in 1965 and issued the Race Relations Act in the same year to combat discrimination in public places; however, housing and employment, clearly important arenas in which racial discrimination took place, were not included in the act.<sup>96</sup>

Enoch Powell (1912-1998) evolved as an ultra-conservative voice of the Tories in the late 1960s. In 1968, while a new and stricter Race Relations Act was being discussed, he delivered what the press called his "Rivers of Blood" speech in Birmingham (not coincidentally the same city in which Eric Clapton would offer his support six years

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<sup>93</sup> See Paul Gilroy, "'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation" (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 120.

<sup>94</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, xiv.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.



later). Powell believed the consequence of unrestricted immigration would be a "river of blood" and predicted that within fifteen to twenty years, "the black man will have the whip hand over the white man."<sup>97</sup> Powell was consequently sacked from Edward Heath's Conservative shadow government but received support from thousands of dockworkers that marched through the streets of Westminster.<sup>98</sup> Powell remained popular and left the Conservative party in 1974 as a protest against the U.K.'s entry into the European Common Market and joined the Ulster Unionist Party.

Eric Clapton's support for Powell caused a storm of protest but Clapton, although admitting he was "drunk at the time," staunchly defended his position:

I don't think Enoch Powell is a racist. I don't think he cares about colour of any kind. His whole idea is for us to stop being unfair to immigrants because it's getting out of order. [...] Racist aggravation starts when white guys see immigrants getting jobs and they're not. Yeah, I'm getting a lot of stick for what I said, but so did Enoch. He was the only bloke telling the truth for the good of the country.<sup>99</sup>

Apparently, Eric Clapton's worries about immigrants hurting "the good of our country" had been fueled by an Arab making advances to his wife-to-be Pattie Boyd in a hotel lobby, showing parallels between Clapton's racist attitude and his sexist need to protect Boyd against the sexualized racial Other.<sup>100</sup> As a cultural colonialist, Eric Clapton would appropriate Caribbean music in his search for an identity and simultaneously attempt to keep Caribbean immigrants at bay. When Jamaicans confronted him about his support for Enoch Powell, Clapton did not find a good excuse: "It's a shame because there's nothing I

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<sup>97</sup> Enoch Powell, *Reflections of a Statesman: The Writings and Speeches of Enoch Powell* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1991), 374.

<sup>98</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, 112.

<sup>99</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Coleman, *Clapton!*, 238.

<sup>100</sup> Coleman, *Clapton!*, 238.

can do. I keep saying, 'No, man, it was a joke. I was drunk.' And that doesn't help, because they don't like people who drink either."<sup>101</sup>

Most of Eric Clapton's biographers have de-emphasized his support for Enoch Powell by connecting it to his alcoholism and associating it with Clapton's "naiveté" regarding political matters. Michael Schumacher, for instance, calls Clapton's remarks "insensitive and poorly timed, but [...] not racist in nature."<sup>102</sup> Contrary to this assessment, I do not view Clapton's comments as accidental, but as complementary to his racialized construction of music in which he was allowed to transgress racial lines to form an identity but the racialized Other was not. This racialized construction allowed Clapton to simultaneously play the music of Caribbean immigrants and prevent them from entering his country.

Eric Clapton did not continue to incorporate reggae sounds into his music after his album *There's One in Every Crowd* (1975), but his appropriation of "black" musical traditions continued — one could even argue that his purism intensified in his later work. Although Clapton's studio output of the 1970s and 1980s was more rock- than blues-oriented, live albums like *E.C. Was Here* (1975) and *Just One Night* (1980) prominently featured lengthy blues solos. With the commercial blues revival of the 1990s (and after receiving six Grammys for his blues-flavored number-one album *Unplugged* in 1992), Eric Clapton began alternating rock albums with records that exclusively featured "pure" blues, including the chartbreaking *From the Cradle* (1994, number one in the U.S.), his collaboration with B.B. King on *Riding with the King* (2000, number three in the U.S.), and an album of Robert Johnson covers entitled *Me and Mr. Johnson* (2004, number six in the U.S.).

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<sup>101</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Schumacher, *Crossroads*, 206.

<sup>102</sup> Schumacher, *ibid.*

In recent interviews, Eric Clapton has repeatedly revealed his problematic racialized conception of blues music. He has said he feels "qualified to sing the blues because of what has happened to me, but I still don't think I'll ever do it as good as a black man"<sup>103</sup> and that for him "it takes a great deal of studying and discipline to sing the blues" whereas "for a black guy from Mississippi, it seems to be what they do when they open their mouth — without even thinking."<sup>104</sup> Clapton here echoes the racist presumption of "whites" learning through training and "blacks" being born with inherent abilities like rhythm. Clapton's naturalized conception of blues as inherently "black" explains his prediction that blues, despite its commercial success among "white" listeners, will be "dying a slow and graceful death" and that Robert Cray, a "black" middle-class blues player who ironically learned to play by listening to Clapton, remains "the one player I know who is absolutely, totally authentic"<sup>105</sup> solely because of his racial makeup.

### Conclusion

As I have argued in this chapter, Eric Clapton's racialized conception of authenticity and purity in terms of "blackness" was evident in his musical work and comments he made before and after he played with Cream. The examples I have dwelled upon included Clapton's involvement in the purist ideology of the British blues movement that echoed the notion of the "white negro" and his support for the anti-immigration campaign of the British Conservative Enoch Powell. However, in the two and a half years Eric Clapton played with Cream, he produced music that blended "black"

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<sup>103</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Schumacher, *Crossroads*, 313.

<sup>104</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in Mike Baker, "Eric Clapton: My Long Overdue Testament to the Blues," *Guitar Player* 28, no.11 (November 1994): 89-94, 94.

<sup>105</sup> Eric Clapton quoted in James Henke, "The Rolling Stone Interview: Eric Clapton," *Rolling Stone* 615 (October 17, 1991): 42-49, 106; 49.

blues with "white" psychedelia and European modes of composition and overall defied easily applied racial categorizations. Yet, Clapton's dichotomized perception of music ultimately prevailed, as was evident in his racialized perception of Jimi Hendrix and his assessment of Cream's music as shamefully "white."

In not addressing pain directly but detouring through black surrogates, Eric Clapton and many other prominent rock musicians coming out of the British blues movement as well as their fans were engaging in what Elizabeth Spelman has called the "commodification of suffering."<sup>106</sup> Spelman critically interrogates the appropriation of the discourse of slavery by white American feminists in the mid-nineteenth-century and concludes that, "claims of shared human suffering can do as much to reinforce claims of superiority and inferiority as they can to undermine them."<sup>107</sup> Similarly, in emulating "black" blues musicians, Eric Clapton and other white blues enthusiasts of the 1960s occasionally tended to reinforce and not challenge patterns of racialization and racism.

In addition, Eric Clapton's career reflects the growing transatlantic dimension of blues music which began in the 1960s and also manifested itself at the American Folk Blues Festival in Europe, British bands like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones promoting "black" American blues musicians in the U.S., and the astonishing career of Jimi Hendrix (who had his breakthrough in England). More importantly, however, Eric Clapton's interview statements and his music itself reveal the solidification of a *conservative* or *preservative* blues ideology that rested on essentialist notions of "race" (and, to some degree, gender). The music Eric Clapton created with Cream at the height of the psychedelic rock explosion between 1966 and 1968 suggests the possibility of a more fluid approach to the racial (and gendered) constructions of musical genres, particularly

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<sup>106</sup> Elizabeth V. Spelman. *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

blues. However, this more fluid approach, which is also apparent in B.B. King's music from the late 1960s, ultimately did not seriously challenge naturalized conceptions of blues as a black man's music — or, in the case of Eric Clapton, as the music of "white negroes" who are desperately trying to find an identity.

CHAPTER III  
THE REAL FOLK BLUES: BLUES PERFORMANCES  
AT NEWPORT, 1959-1969

Introduction

In 1960, when the folk revival was just beginning to gather momentum, blues singer Muddy Waters appeared with his band at the Newport Jazz Festival. In an attempt to revitalize his career, Waters had just put out an album of songs associated with folk blues singer Big Bill Broonzy, but at Newport, he played a rather raucous set of electric blues including two versions of his showstopper "I Got My Mojo Working." Yet, when a photographer asked Waters to pose for the album cover of his recorded set, he left his electric Fender Telecaster on the stage and grabbed his colleague John Lee Hooker's acoustic guitar, which he had never played in his life. When *Live at Newport* was released, it showed Waters posing with Hooker's guitar, and despite or maybe even because of the false labeling, the album sold remarkably well.<sup>1</sup>

Muddy Waters' switching from electric to acoustic guitar for a falsified visual representation of his music exemplifies the way conceptualizations of "folk" and authenticity increasingly entered discourses of blues music in the former half of the 1960s. This interest by mainly "white" enthusiasts in blues music as an authenticated expression of "people's" consciousness can be traced back to 19th and early 20th century constructions of folk music and culture in Western Europe and the U.S. and both predated and overlapped the authentication of electric blues towards the end of the 1960s and beyond.<sup>2</sup> While in recent years a number of scholars have severely criticized the

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Pennell. "The Fariña Files: Newport Folk Festival 1965," <http://www.members.tripod.com/farinafiles1/Newport3.htm>, 2002 (accessed January 10, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> I address these aspects in chapter V.

conceptualization of authentic folk culture,<sup>3</sup> the racialized and problematic political implications of celebrating "folk blues" during the Civil Rights era deserves more attention.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I investigate the intersections of "folk" and "blues" in the 1960s by examining blues performances at the Newport Folk Festival between 1959 and 1969. Muddy Waters' display of an acoustic guitar at the related jazz festival in 1960 foreshadowed the conflicted and racialized perception of blues music that became particularly relevant for the Newport Folk Festivals between 1963 and 1965. I begin by tracing the historic and current conceptualizations of "folk" and the ongoing debates about authenticity before turning to a more specific history of folk music in the U.S. and a history of the Newport Folk Festival, which, despite its immense popularity, has been widely ignored by scholars and popular historians. In my discussion of blues performances at Newport, I pay particular attention to the way the mostly "white" middle class directors and the audience attending the festival made meaning of blues as a "black" musical form in the context of the Civil Rights Movement. Through the "rediscovery" (or, as I will argue, "discovery") of ostensibly pre-industrial musicians like Mississippi John Hurt, "white" blues consumers took part in actively repressing contemporary

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<sup>3</sup> See Robin Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Folk,'" *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992): 1400-1408; Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997); Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> While "folk blues" as an ideological construct was not invented with the Newport Folk Festival, it did become a much stronger force than it had been when musicians like Big Bill Broonzy, Leadbelly and future Newport performers Josh White, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee performed "black" music for largely "white" audiences in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. It was in the 1960s that acoustic pre-war musicians like Skip James, Mississippi John Hurt and Son House became more popular than they had ever been before and that electric blues guitarists like Lightnin' Hopkins and John Lee Hooker switched to acoustic instruments to sound more "folky." In authenticating acoustic rural blues from before World War II, the 1960s folk revivalists tended to ignore the urban blues musicians that would become the focus of *Living Blues* magazine in 1970. See chapter V.

"black" politics. I conclude this chapter by analyzing the way public attention shifted from acoustic folk blues to electric blues in the wake of the much-publicized "plugging in" of Bob Dylan at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. Instead of focusing on Dylan, however, I emphasize the role of the Jewish electric blues guitarist Mike Bloomfield, who, with the Butterfield Blues Band, was not only the most audible source of the subsequent controversy but had already caused quite an uproar when performing without Dylan the day before.

By analyzing the blues performances at the Newport Folk Festival, I am attempting to connect critiques of folk authenticity more explicitly with racial formations than other scholars have done. The invention of a blues tradition is apparent in the selected authentication of an imagined pre-modern "folk blues" at Newport, which went along with the rejection of the electrification of the blues despite the fact that this electrification had been firmly established more than a decade before. It is not a coincidence that the nostalgic celebration of "old-time" blues took place while battles over civil rights were heating up in the U.S. I argue that at Newport, the audiences, the cultural brokers (such as the "rediscoverers" of older blues musicians), and the performers were actively participating in the denial of contemporary "black" politics through a racialized construction of, to use the title of a series of reissues from the Chess label in the 1960s, "the real folk blues."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Under this title and *More Real Folk Blues*, Chess reissued compilations of R&B hits from the 1950s by Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Sonny Boy Williamson, Memphis Slim and John Lee Hooker between 1965 and 1967. I am investigating the connection between notions of blackness and authenticity further in chapters I, II and IV. The term "invention of tradition" was popularized by *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric J. and Terence Ranger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).



### The Concept of *Folk*

In the second edition to his *Keywords*, Raymond Williams included the term *folk* and discussed the complex, ambivalent and variable relations between this term and the equally nebulous *popular*, the latter being one of his key concepts in mapping out cultural studies. As Williams points out, one of the main problems in identifying *folk* cultures is that the word has come to relate not only to the "general and scientific interest in old forms of poetry, story, belief, custom, song [and] dance" but also to the "survival" of these older forms. Furthermore, in the retroactive process involved in defining the term, Williams sees a problematic tendency to "isolate the pre-industrial and pre-literate *folk* or to make categorical distinctions between different phases of internal and autonomous, sometimes communal, cultural production."<sup>6</sup>

Williams' demythologizing of the concept of *folk* and his emphasis on the temporal dimension of its construction are helpful for understanding how *folk* has been deployed as a political instrument. In his critique of Lawrence Levine in "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Folk'," Robin Kelley (without mentioning Williams) explicates the specific conditions of this deployment: "Terms like 'folk,' 'authentic,' and 'traditional' are socially constructed categories that have something to do with the reproduction of race, class and gender hierarchies and the policing of the boundaries of modernism."<sup>7</sup> In addition to the "preindustrial survivals" also mentioned by Williams, Kelley explicitly notes that *folk* oftentimes signifies "cultural practices of the Other," thereby extending the problematization of the term to an interrogation of racial politics. For Kelley, diverse cultural forms, through their identification as *folk*, "become categorized in a racially or

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<sup>6</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 136-137.

<sup>7</sup> Kelley, "Notes," 1402.

ethnically coded aesthetic hierarchy."<sup>8</sup> It is this racialized conceptualization of *folk* that I want to address in this chapter.

It is important to point out that the romanticization of folk culture is inextricably linked with identity politics. Jeff Todd Titon has described how in debates about authenticity and skill among folk revivalists in the 1960s the question quickly became, "Who was 'more ethnic' (as the saying went) than whom?"<sup>9</sup> As I will show, the "folk revival" of the 1960s (and earlier celebrations of "folk" culture) were not limited to identifying the Other as "black" — Appalachian string music, in particular, played a major part in the "rediscovery" of old styles. Since my analysis focuses on blues performances, I will not discuss this element of the "revival" at length as other scholars have done.<sup>10</sup> However, the identification with the Other in the appropriation of "black" blues music provides some striking similarities to the identification with the Other in the appropriation of other "ethnic" musical forms. As Benjamin Filene has observed, "just as isolated cultures became harder to define and locate in industrialized America, the notions of musical purity and primitivism took on enhanced value, even in avowedly commercial music."<sup>11</sup> These notions of "purity" and "primitivism" were equally attributed to "pre-industrial" blues and string band music.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Jeff Todd Titon, "Reconstructing the Blues: Reflections on the 1960s Blues Revival" in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 221.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Neil V. Rosenberg, "Introduction" in *Transforming Tradition*; Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Filene, *Romancing the Folk*; Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 3.

One way to link the identification with different forms of "folk" cultures is by discussing the related concept of "authenticity." In addition to books looking at authenticity as it applies to literary texts<sup>12</sup>, Regina Bendix has supplied an invaluable analysis of the concept as it applies to the academization of folk culture. Her argument that "behind the assiduous documentation and the defense of the authentic lies an unarticulated anxiety of losing the subject"<sup>13</sup> can serve as a fitting description not only of folklore studies but also of folk (and blues) "revivalists" attempting to preserve and revitalize a "vanishing" culture. In the particular case of 1960s "folk blues," I would even further argue that "revivalists" anxieties were not so much about losing the subject but rather the *object* of racialized desire in an attempt to reimagine or even invent a past in which racial politics were non-threatening and non-violent. I will explore this particular point more after a brief historiography of folk music and culture.

#### Folk and Folk Music<sup>14</sup>

The formation of a folk culture as imagined by intellectuals can be traced back to late 18th and early 19th century Germany. In his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity), published between 1784 and 1791, the German philosopher, theologian and critic Johann Gottfried von Herder distinguished between *Kultur des Volkes* (folk culture) and *Kultur der Gelehrten* (learned culture), a distinction that allowed "learned men" to romanticize folk culture as

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<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) and Vincent J. Cheng, *Inauthentic: The Anxiety over Culture and Identity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> For this section, the general contours of my arguments are indebted to the work of folk music scholars. See Rosenberg, "Introduction"; Cantwell, *When We Were Good*; Filene, *Romancing the Folk*; and Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*.

something Other. In 1778, Herder also published a collection of *Volkslieder* (folk songs), establishing a connection between *folk* and folk music early on. Even more than Herder, it were the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm who, with their fairy tale collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales), would shape notions of authentic folk culture. The collection, published in different editions between 1812 and 1857, became internationally regarded as a prime example of genuine folk heritage although the Brothers Grimm had significantly altered and sanitized the stories they had collected in the field.<sup>15</sup>

A number of English language folk songs had already appeared in the 19th century collections of Sir Walter Scott and Francis James Child. The 1870s also saw a rise in popularity of spirituals with the university-based Fisk Jubilee Singers singing on concert stages for upper-class audiences including the British queen Victoria and U.S. president Ulysses Grant.<sup>16</sup> A number of collections of American folk songs appeared in the early 20th century, among them John Lomax's *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910) and Cecil Sharp's *English Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (1917). The popularization of folk music was further established by the anthology *American Songbag* (1927) by renowned poet Carl Sandburg. In addition to folk song collections and appearances on the concert stage, recordings of folk music became available and were widely disseminated in the 1920s and 30s. Recording stars like Jimmie Rodgers, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, the Carter Family and Bessie Smith had close ties to "traditional" forms of music like "hillbilly" and "blues" while John and Alan Lomax created a "cult of

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, in the introduction to the 1819 edition, the Brothers Grimm state that they have erased all the expressions they deemed unsuitable for children. See Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Vorrede der Brüder Grimm" in *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (Düsseldorf: Artemis und Winkler 1999 [1819]), 31.

<sup>16</sup> The Fisk Jubilee Singers' attempt to turn folk music into high art was continued in the 20th century by trained singers like Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson.

authenticity"<sup>17</sup> with their field recordings for the Library of Congress. Old-time music was a popular staple of the radio as well. The popularization of academically approved folk music continued through the 1930s and 1940s with the work of musicologist Charles Seeger, record producer Moses "Moe" Asch and recording artists like Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, Aunt Mollie Jackson, the Almanac Singers, and Burl Ives.

Long before the emergence of the Popular Front, the antifascist coalition movement of the U.S. Communist party, folk songs had been connected to leftist politics. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) published different editions of the *Little Red Song Book* between 1904 and 1935, and artists like Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly openly supported leftist political causes. Because of its ties to Marxist politics, folk music became less popular in the 1950s with the Cold War and the Red Scare. Pete Seeger, the son of ethnomusicologist Charles Seeger and one of the main figures of the 1960s folk revival, had had a number one hit with the Weavers and their version of Leadbelly's "Goodnight Irene" in 1950. However, because of their ties to the Communist party, the Weavers were blacklisted and eventually disbanded in 1952. In the late 1950s, non-ideological performers like the Kingston Trio and Harry Belafonte became the most visible representations of folk music.<sup>18</sup>

To augment the conventional narrative of folk music as I have laid it out so far, a few scholars have recently paid attention to the institutionalization of folk music since the 1930s. Neil V. Rosenberg mentions nationalist American Studies scholars as one stream of interest in folk song in the late 1930s.<sup>19</sup> Regina Bendix critically interrogates the

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<sup>17</sup> I borrow this term from Benjamin Filene. See his *Romancing the Folk*.

<sup>18</sup> For a more thorough analysis of the connections between folk song and leftist politics, see Richard A. and JoAnne Reuss, *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000) and R. Serge Denisoff, *Sing a Song of Social Significance*, second edition (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Rosenberg, "Introduction."

formation of U.S. folklore studies in the 1950s and its ties to *Volkskunde* in Germany.<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Filene discusses government funding for the Library of Congress' Archive of American Folk-Song (established in 1928; funding began in 1937) and the American Folklife Foundation of the Smithsonian (established in 1969).<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, in these accounts folk music also functions as an ideological tool used not exclusively for leftist but also for nationalist causes. The institutionalization of folk music, also pursued in the field of ethnomusicology emerging in the 1950s, illustrates the way that what is perceived as authentic folk culture gets shaped and reimagined by hegemonic power structures, creating a series of paradoxes like, in the words of Neil V. Rosenberg, a "professionalized music with an ethos of non-professionalism" or an "intellectual music with an anti-intellectual ethos."<sup>22</sup>

### The Folk Revival

Even during the hiatus of folk song enthusiasm in the 1950s, a small group of connoisseurs kept promoting the music and helped to prepare for the full-scale folk revival between 1958 and 1965.<sup>23</sup> The folk music magazine *Sing Out!* was launched in 1950 as a small-scale operation, which would grow into a formidable publication in the 1960s. Harry Smith's six-disc *Anthology of American Folk Music*, which featured commercial recordings of blues, gospel and string band music from the 1920s and 30s, came out on Folkways in 1952 and would serve as an inspiration for many emerging folk

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<sup>20</sup> Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*.

<sup>21</sup> Filene, *Romancing the Folk*.

<sup>22</sup> Rosenberg, "Introduction," 8.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Cantwell locates the "folksong movement" between the emergence of the Popular Front in 1935 and the Wallace presidential campaign of 1948 and the "folksong revival" between the release of the Kingston Trio's "Tom Dooley" in 1958 and Bob Dylan going electric at Newport in 1965. Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 21-22.

musicians in the 1960s and for attempts to "rediscover" the musicians featured on the recordings. In 1958, the Kingston Trio's version of the traditional "Tom Dooley" climbed to number one on the U.S. charts and ended up selling four million copies.<sup>24</sup> The group appeared on TV with Milton Berle, Perry Como and Patti Page, released six gold records and provoked debates about authenticity and the commercial potential of folk music. As Ronald D. Cohen convincingly argues, the first wave of the folk revival in the late 1950s, which the Kingston Trio represented, was part of a backlash against the emerging youth culture surrounding rock and roll.<sup>25</sup> Robert Cantwell even goes so far as to say that, "it was [...] the suppression of earlier political affiliations that enabled the folk revival to flourish as it did."<sup>26</sup> Cantwell is referring to leftist political affiliations, however, as I have shown above, folk music also served nationalist interests in the 1930s and 40s. While it is true that the folk revival was less overtly political in the late 1950s and early 1960s than in the 1930s and 1940s, leftist politics would become quite prominent in the work of Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs and others.

While the Kingston Trio was storming the charts, a local folk scene was forming in New York City. Buskers would congregate every Sunday on Washington Square and folk musicians also played in the various coffeehouses in Greenwich Village. Israel G. "Izzy" Young's Folklore Center and the live club Village Gate became other hot spots for aspiring young folk performers. Dave van Ronk distinguishes between the established folk artists like Pete Seeger, Odetta and Josh White and the struggling "folkniks" (with certain ties to the "beatniks" of the 1950s) like himself and Eric von Schmidt.<sup>27</sup> Bob

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 96.

<sup>26</sup> Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 22.

<sup>27</sup> Dave van Ronk with Elijah Wald, *The Mayor of McDougal Street: A Memoir* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005), 74.

Dylan and Joan Baez, who would become major recording stars in the 1960s and explicitly connected folk music and civil rights struggles, were part of the New York City folk scene. Other folk scenes emerged in Chicago, L.A., San Francisco and Philadelphia. Musically, folk music was loosely defined as a mix of "rediscovered" older musical forms like Southern blues and string band music as well as newly composed material in traditional styles.<sup>28</sup> Simple harmonies, instrumentation and sing-along melodies allowed amateur musicians to actively participate in the folk revival and blurred the distinctions between performers and audiences. One of the most consistent imperatives was that folk music was not just simple but played on acoustic (in particular string) instruments. Electrification, associated with commercialized rock and roll, appeared as a modern dilution of the purity of "old-time" music.<sup>29</sup>

As the popularity of folk music among younger enthusiasts grew in the 1960s, it became commercially viable for the entertainment industry. Peter, Paul & Mary emerged on the scene in 1962 and produced a number of bestselling records including their smooth rearrangement of Bob Dylan's anti-war song "Blowing in the Wind." *Newsweek* and *Time* reported on the folk craze, and in 1963 ABC launched *Hootenanny* as a weekly prime time show, reaching eleven million viewers in the U.S.<sup>30</sup> The commercial appeal of acoustic folk music was short-lived, however. Bob Dylan's turn to electric rock music in 1965 and the emergence of groups like the Byrds and Buffalo Springfield signaled the absorption of folk music by folk rock, which then was overshadowed by psychedelic rock

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<sup>28</sup> Titon, "Reconstructing the Blues," 221.

<sup>29</sup> Mike Seeger notes that in choosing musicians for the Newport Folk Festival, he and other members of the board of directors "always tried to encourage acoustic music." Mike Seeger, personal communication, October 17, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 198.



in 1967. Folk music had become a niche market.<sup>31</sup> Yet, in the years after the boom, folk music continued to evolve and was marked by the recreation of older styles, specialization and regionalism.<sup>32</sup>

### The Emergence of the Newport Folk Festival<sup>33</sup>

The Newport Folk Festival was one of the main catalysts of the 1960s folk revival. The showcasing of "rediscovered" blues artists, in particular in the years between 1963 and 1965, aptly demonstrates the emergence of a distinctive "white" blues fan culture that drew from notions of folk authenticity developed in 19th century Europe and refined by the folk revivalists. There are a number of parallels between the formation of racially charged constructions of authenticity among folk fans at Newport and the American Folk Blues Festival in Europe as well as the audiences and musicians of the nascent British Blues movement. Yet, as I argue in this chapter, the Newport Folk Festival also revealed a particular form of anti-modern blues purism which entailed a nostalgic "rediscovery" of and "hunt" for pre-war "black" musicians. This purism would eventually clash with the "diluted" but not necessarily less racist "white" notions of blues authenticity represented by the "plugging in" of Mike Bloomfield and others.

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<sup>31</sup> A good account of folk music losing its appeal among younger fans in the late 1960s is Happy Traum, "The Swan Song of Folk Music," *Rolling Stone* 33 (May 17, 1969): 7-8.

<sup>32</sup> More recently "rediscovered" musical forms have included polka, Cajun and klezmer music.

<sup>33</sup> Despite the major cultural impact of the Newport Folk Festival, the only monograph is Cheryl Anne Brauner's M.A. thesis. Other important sources for research on Newport include Robert Shelton's coverage in the *New York Times*, the folk magazines *Sing Out!* and *Broadside*, program books, recordings of the festival released on Vanguard, David Gahr's photographs in *The Face of Folk Music* and Murray Lerner's highly informative film *Festival*. See Cheryl Anne Brauner, *A Study of the Newport Folk Festival and the Newport Folk Foundation*, M.A. thesis (St. Johns: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1983); David Gahr with Robert Shelton, *The Face of Folk Music* (New York: Citadel Press, 1968); and *Festival: Folk Music at Newport 1963-1965*, DVD, directed by Murray Lerner (New York: Eagle Rock Entertainment, 2005 [1967]).

Folk festivals were an integral part of folk music enthusiasm from the early stages of what became known as the folk revival. "Folky" plantation songs and dances had been brought to urban stages in the 1830s through blackface minstrelsy and folk concerts but folk festivals did not become prominent until the 1920s and 30s with a number of annual gatherings celebrating national, ethnic or regional identity. These included the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina (1928), the American Folk Song Festival in Ashland, Kentucky (1930), the White Top Folk Festival in Southwestern Virginia (1931), and the National Folk Festival in St. Louis (1934). These festivals were planned as educational events and oftentimes featured spirituals but not blues, the latter still being a music of disrepute at the time. The National Folk Festival, which did not feature any "black" performers at all, attracted an audience of 20,000 when Eleanor Roosevelt came to visit in 1933.<sup>34</sup> Debates about the authenticity of the performers, in particular at the National Folk Festival, foreshadowed those of the 1960s as when musicologist Charles Seeger criticized the high admission charge and the lack of "authentic" performers at the festival.<sup>35</sup>

The city of Newport, Rhode Island had been a watering hole for upper-class Americans since the Civil War with its sandy beaches and 19th century mansions. In 1953, Elaine and Louis Lorillard presented two concerts by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra at Newport in hopes of bringing life into the community. However, the concerts were poorly attended.<sup>36</sup> One year later, in 1954, the Lorillards had the idea for a non-profit jazz festival. The renowned producer John Hammond, Sr. recommended

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<sup>34</sup> See David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapell Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 185.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Burt Goldblatt, *Newport Jazz Festival: The Illustrated History* (New York: Dial Press, 1977), xi.

George Wein as organizer. Wein, a jazz pianist and owner of two jazz clubs in Boston as well as a record label, would become one of the main forces behind both the jazz and the folk festivals at Newport. The first jazz festival on the tennis court and at Newport casino featured artists like Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie and Billie Holiday and was a financial success. In the wake of the success of Alan Lomax's "Folksong '59" concert at Carnegie Hall in April of 1959, George Wein added a folk festival to the events at Newport and hired Albert Grossman, who owned the folk club Gate of Horn in Chicago and was managing folk star Odetta at the time, as producer.

Although the first two Newport Folk Festivals in 1959 and 1960 were financial disasters, they drew about 12,000 people each, an impressive number for the time. In the program book for the first festival, folk singer Billy Faier claimed, "The Scholars, the City-bred folksingers, and the 'authentic' singers are here to give you what is probably the first representative picture of American Folk Music ever held on the concert stage."<sup>37</sup> Although this was quite an overstatement, the first Newport Folk Festival did feature many important artists and an appreciative audience. Earl Scruggs and the Stanley Brothers helped to popularize bluegrass (a reinvented acoustic folk music with highly skilled instrumental solos which had originated in the 1940s) and Memphis Slim, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee played blues. Among the crowd favorites were Pete Seeger, Odetta, the Kingston Trio and the Joan Baez. The second Newport Folk Festival in 1960 was another showcase for the same recording stars as the first one but also included artists from Israel, Spain and the British Isles. Unlike the first Newport, the audience consisted mostly of young college students from the Northeast, many of whom brought their own instruments.<sup>38</sup> The only blues performers were John Lee Hooker, Robert Pete

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<sup>37</sup> Billy Faier, "Folk Music Today," *Newport Folk Festival 1959* program book, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Brauner, *A Study*, 55-56.

Williams and Reverend Gary Davis. The financial problems of both the jazz and the folk festival and the raucous crowds of the jazz festival in 1960 forced the organizers to cancel the folk festival in 1961 and 1962. However, the real reason for the disappointing start of the Newport Folk Festivals seems to have been mostly an ideological one. Robert Cantwell notes that the first Newport Folk Festival in particular featured mostly performers who "had made their reputation in musical comedy [...], in nightclubs, or on television"<sup>39</sup> — a far cry from the notion of a preindustrial authentic folk culture. The professional urban singers who dominated the festivals as well as the purely capitalist motivations behind the festivals were not befitting for the folk revivalists' conceptualization of authenticity.

After the two-year hiatus, the Newport Folk Festival became a non-profit operation in 1963. Among the board members of the newly established Newport Folk Foundation were George Wein, Pete Seeger and Alan Lomax. The foundation's mission was "to promote and stimulate interest in the arts associated with folk music."<sup>40</sup> In addition to organizing the festival, this included fostering folk music and material culture "in the field" and in schools. Ralph Rinzler, another member of the board of directors, worked as "talent and folklore coordinator" and would seek out potential performers for the festival in rural regions of the U.S. and Canada. In an attempt to democratize the festival, each participant would receive a standard fee of \$50 (regardless of popularity) as well as travel and food reimbursements.<sup>41</sup> More amateur musicians were invited and the directors recruited more women and musicians from a wider musical spectrum (in

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<sup>39</sup> Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 296.

<sup>40</sup> Elliot L. Hoffman, "The Report of the Secretary," *Newport Folk Festival 1965* program book, 50.

<sup>41</sup> See Robert Shelton, "Newport Folk-Music Festival Opens 3-Day Run Before 13,000," *New York Times* (July 27, 1963): 9 and Ralph Rinzler, "The Newport Folk Foundation Keeping the Roots of Music Alive," *Newport Folk Festival 1964* program book, 4-7.

addition to blues, the music featured at Newport included a variety of country string music, gospel music, ballads, and non-English "ethnic" music from U.S. and abroad). The attempts to make the Newport Folk Festival more diverse paid off. An audience of 45,000 came to see 75 performers on the three-day event, a number that would rise to 64,000 in 1964 and 71,000 in 1965 with gross profits between 63,000 and 70,000 dollars.<sup>42</sup> The Newport Folk Festivals between 1963 and 1965 were crucial for the careers of artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez and exposed large crowds to amateur performers at the major evening concerts and "workshops," smaller, informal concerts with audiences of 300 to 3,000 people. In addition to the concerts, the Newport Folk Festival featured discussion sessions, children's events, sing-alongs, and craft exhibits.

The Newport Folk Festival would become the most important American folk festival in the second half of the 20th century but it is important to note that it was not necessarily a unique event. A number of U.S. campuses hosted folk musicians, notably the University of California with the "Weekend of Folk Music" (1958) and the University of Chicago with their folk festival, which was launched in 1961 as a less glitzy version of Newport and included notable blues performers like Memphis Slim and Willie Dixon. The success of the Newport Folk Festival led to a number of other similar events like the Ozark Folk Festival, the Monterey Folk Festival and the American Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina. As folk music became thwarted by the psychedelic rock explosion in 1967, rock festivals drew increasingly larger numbers of people and began to reveal organizational problems of such large-scale events already foreshadowed by riots at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1960. At Monterey (1967) and even at Woodstock (1969), those problems did not seem as prominent as the countercultural messages

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<sup>42</sup> Bruce Jackson, "Newport: The Who, What, Where, When, Why and How of America's Biggest, Most 'Successful,' Most Controversial Folk Festival," *Sing Out!* 16, no. 4 (September 1966): 6-14.

attached to the events, but at Altamont (1971) the unruliness of the crowd and the decision of the Rolling Stones to hire members of the Hell's Angels as security for a free festival proved disastrous and led to the stabbing of an audience member in front of the stage.

Despite the huge scale of the festival, the conceptualizations of authenticity characteristic of the folk revival remained largely intact for the organizers until the festival's demise in 1969 as is evident in the program books. In 1963, Peter Yarrow, one part of the highly commercial folk trio Peter, Paul and Mary and also a board member of the Newport Folk Foundation, noted "the importance of a music that deals with basic human problems and needs and emotions; not with market-researched, manufactured desires that are sated by placebo tablets."<sup>43</sup> Newport founder George Wein, who remained connected to the festival, wrote in his opening remarks for the 1966 event, "We are not interested in music gimmicks or compromise. We want musical truth and sincerity."<sup>44</sup> In the same year, Alan Lomax, another member of the board of directors, claimed that, "Folk singers and their forebears always detested sham. The excitement at Newport builds because the new young audience perceives this. Young men and women are naturally attached to the truth and hope for a peaceful future for themselves and for mankind."<sup>45</sup> The Newport Folk Festivals between 1963 and 1965 helped to establish the countercultural folk ideology described by Yarrow, Wein and Lomax. It was the "rediscovered" music of Mississippi John Hurt and Skip James that became increasingly identified as pivotal for the shaping of this ideology and securely placed "blues" as a

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Yarrow, "Greetings from the Directors," *Newport Folk Festival 1963* program book, 5.

<sup>44</sup> George Wein, "Welcome," *Newport Folk Festival 1966* program book, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Alan Lomax, "Greetings from the Directors," *Newport Folk Festival 1966* program book, 9.

distinctive category of identification for some elements of "white" countercultural youth in the U.S.

### The Newport Audience

There is general agreement by eyewitnesses of the festival that the audiences at the massively successful Newport Folk Festivals between 1963 and 1965 were almost exclusively young, "white" and middle class. Dick Waterman recalls the people at the festival as, "white... very white... they were college kids from Harvard, Brandeis, Wesleyan, etc."<sup>46</sup> Robert Shelton mentions an audience "predominantly comprising teenagers and collegians."<sup>47</sup> Bruce Jackson describes the fans as "mostly, but not close to entirely, young; evenly split m/f; nearly entirely white; middle class."<sup>48</sup> Mary Katherine Aldin, who attended the festivals as a fan, makes an interesting distinction between the audiences at the large evening concerts and at the smaller blues workshops:

The audience at Newport overall was divided roughly into two camps: at the afternoon blues workshops, there were young middle class white men who were fanatic blues enthusiasts and who hung respectfully on every word and note, while at the evening concerts there were bored young middle class white men and women who were sitting impatiently through the blues performers while waiting for Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Bob Dylan and so forth to come on stage. At the evening concerts, the audience, which was primarily there to see the "folk stars," felt that the older traditional artists were "forced on them" and there was some impatience manifested.<sup>49</sup>

The largely young male "white" audience for blues Aldin describes needs to be seen in conjunction with the men who went out in search for authenticated older "black" blues

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<sup>46</sup> Dick Waterman, e-mail to the author, September 16, 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Shelton, "'64 Folk Festival Ends in Newport," *New York Times* (July 27, 1964): 21.

<sup>48</sup> Bruce Jackson, e-mail to the author, September 24, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Katherine Aldin, e-mail to the author, September 16, 2006.

performers I will discuss below and the blues aficionados who founded *Living Blues* magazine in Chicago in 1970.<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly, although blues was racially coded as "black" or "of black origin" at Newport, much of the music in question was a nostalgic rehash of styles dating back to the 1920s and 1930s fraught with essentialist notions of blackness and therefore few "black" people attended the concerts. *Sing Out!* editor Irwin Silber grudgingly admitted that the Newport Folk Festival was "not an atmosphere designed to appeal to minority groups or to make them feel comfortable,"<sup>51</sup> and "black" blues musician Taj Mahal remarked, "it always amazed me that black people never made the connection to the Newport Folk Festival with all the roots black musicians there."<sup>52</sup> Jackie Washington, who was one of the few younger "blacks" actively participating in the folk revival, found himself moving away from folk music because by not being a *blues* singer he did not meet the racialized conceptions of the genre: "I realized finally that people had an idea of what somebody black was supposed to be. And I wasn't it."<sup>53</sup> Washington's "black" friends would not come to see him perform because "they were going out to lounges where you could get a decent drink. This business of being ethnic and real wasn't for them. They wanted Scotch, not Darjeeling tea."<sup>54</sup>

The blues performances at the Newport Folk Festival indicated the shifting role of dancing in the reception of the music, which was connected to blues' increasingly "white"

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<sup>50</sup> See chapter V.

<sup>51</sup> Irwin Silber, "What's Happening — Festivals: Newport," *Sing Out!* 17, no. 5 (October/November 1967): 1.

<sup>52</sup> Taj Mahal quoted in *Baby, Let Me Follow You Down: The Illustrated Story of the Cambridge Folk Years*, ed. Eric von Schmidt and Jim Rooney (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1979), 218.

<sup>53</sup> Jackie Washington quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*



audiences and their perception of blues as racially Other (and therefore disconnected from their own bodies). Interestingly, folk enthusiasts reacted to "black" music quite differently than rock and roll fans of the 1950s, who, oftentimes through the mediation of "white" performers like Elvis Presley and Bill Haley, utilized the music for dancing. Although both rural and urban blues of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s were generally accompanied by bodily movement,<sup>55</sup> this was not the case at the Newport Folk Festival.

Dancing was not encouraged by the organizers of the Newport Folk Festival and rarely occurred. "Dancing had never been and never became an integral part of the program," Cheryl Brauner notes,<sup>56</sup> and a *Rolling Stone* reviewer complained that the festival was "designed by programmers who find it natural to remain stationary on a 14-inch wide wooden chair for hours at a stretch."<sup>57</sup> For the evening concerts, the crowds sat on these reserved seats, whereas for the more informal workshops, audiences sat on the grass at the feet of the musicians. With the exception of organized dance workshops and a few folk dancing troupes performing on stage, there are very few accounts and documentations of dancing occurring at the Newport Folk Festival<sup>58</sup> and many indications of what Stephen Calt, in reference to Newport audiences, has described as "reverential gawkers."<sup>59</sup> A good example is the way country blues singer Skip James was

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<sup>55</sup> Dancing was ubiquitous in juke joints as well as urban blues bars. See Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin': The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African-American Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990).

<sup>56</sup> Brauner, *A Study*, 131.

<sup>57</sup> Jan Hodenfield, "Newport 1969," *Rolling Stone* 40 (August 23, 1969): 20-21, 21.

<sup>58</sup> According to Cheryl Brauner, in 1967 the Muddy Waters Band and the Chambers Brothers had people standing on their chairs and dancing on the grassy slope to the rear of the festival field. There are also a handful of people dancing to Howlin' Wolf's performance in Murray Lerner's *Festival*. Yet, the organizers actively discouraged dancing. When audience members started dancing in the rain at a performance of Dick and Mimi Fariña in 1965, host Peter Yarrow advised the crowd to "sit down and keep dry." Brauner, *A Study*, 147, 106.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Calt, *I'd Rather Be the Devil: Skip James and the Blues* (New York: Da Capo, 1994), 229.

received at the blues workshop of the 1964 Newport Folk Festival, only one month after his "rediscovery" by "white" blues collectors. As Samuel Charters notes in the liner notes for *Blues at Newport 1964*:

It was one of the most moving moments of the entire festival. There was almost complete silence as he sang. In the audience young city singers like Geoff Muldauer had gotten half to their feet to watch Skip's fingers. When he finished there was a roar of applause that must have carried half way back to Mississippi.<sup>60</sup>

The acoustic country blues performances that dominated the workshops in the peak years of the festival were perceived as a return to an older, quieter time before the advent of rock and roll and did not call for bodily movement although some of the same musicians had literally moved juke joint crowds in the 1930s. The view of blues as a music to primarily listen to was even endorsed by a performer like Son House, who in Murray Lerner's film *Festival* comments, "The real old blues don't call for no jumpin'. If you go to jumpin', that ain't the blues."<sup>61</sup> Skip James, on the other hand, seemed to have been uncomfortable with the sedentary manner of his audiences at Newport: "Sometimes they would just look at me like I was... I don't know what — a bear or somethin'."<sup>62</sup> And B.B. King, who had not fully crossed over to "white" audiences yet, remarked after his appearance in 1968: "To really dig B.B. King you can't sit on your chair and watch. You have to be able to move your body, and do what you want to do. And that was impossible within the concert setting of Newport."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Samuel Charters, liner notes, *The Blues at Newport 1964, Part 2*, LP (Vanguard 1964).

<sup>61</sup> Son House quoted in *Festival*.

<sup>62</sup> Skip James quoted in Calt, *I'd Rather Be the Devil*, 275.

<sup>63</sup> B.B. King quoted in Jon Landau, "The Newport Folk Festival," *Rolling Stone* 16 (August 24, 1968): 16-17, 17.

The shifting role of dancing as I have sketched it out here does not imply a more "natural" affinity of "blacks" to dancing but rather symbolizes the racialized perception of "white" audiences at Newport of blues as something Other, something outside of their own bodies.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, to some degree, blues remained a music to listen to when it became an influence on the psychedelic rock scene with bands like Big Brother and the Holding Company and Cream. As Owsley Stanley described the atmosphere at San Francisco's Fillmore West in the years 1966 and 1967,

As soon as it started being as much money as a movie, the whole character of the thing changed. Instead of people just having a good time and dancing and everything, they stood around mesmerized, staring at the stage as if they were going to miss a stroke of the guitar player's pick or something. It became like watching a movie. Eventually they even started sitting down and staring at 'em.<sup>65</sup>

Although Stanley is downplaying the drug-induced "hippie dancing" that undoubtedly remained part of the Fillmore, he is making a valuable point about the audience perception of "white" blues musicians, in particular virtuoso guitar players. The "reverential gawking" at Mike Bloomfield or Eric Clapton had some distinct parallels to the "reverential gawking" at pastoral rural country blues singers like Mississippi John Hurt and Mance Lipscomb. Both implied that blues — played either by "blacks" or by musicians endowed with "black" spirit — had to remain outside the body.

Even if the audiences at the Newport Folk Festival were overwhelmingly "white," it is important to note the presence of "black" *performers*, in particular at the blues workshops and concerts. In describing the blues performances at Newport, I am trying

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<sup>64</sup> It is important to note that blues was quite unique in this respect. The tempo and the perception of much of the music as historic might have contributed to the lack of dancing at Newport, and members of the audience may have been dancing to then-current Motown hits on different occasions.

<sup>65</sup> Owsley Stanley quoted in Bill Graham and Robert Greenfield, *Bill Graham Presents: My Life Inside Rock and Out* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 202-203.

equally to represent the "white" audiences and cultural brokers (organizers and artist managers) and the "black" musicians themselves. The difficulty, however, is the lack of first-hand accounts by the musicians. Not surprisingly, folk enthusiasts and "rediscoverers" of blues artists have oftentimes meticulously documented their work. However, apart from the music itself the blues singers being covered have had little opportunity to speak up. Musicians like Mississippi John Hurt, Skip James and Son House were in old age when they were "rediscovered" and were all dead by the end of the 1960s. As Mary Katherine Aldin remembers, at Newport many "rediscovered" blues musicians appeared "disoriented and confused" as "there was a certain amount of disconnection between performers and audience."<sup>66</sup> Growing up in the Jim Crow South and suddenly performing for mostly "white" crowds and being interviewed by "white" folk enthusiasts in the 1960s, these musicians have offered little open dissent. Yet, this dissent, which comes through in John Hurt suing his "discoverer" Tom Hoskins and Skip James' derisive comments about his audience, needs to be taken seriously if one wants to deconstruct "folk blues" ideology. If "whites" reimagined "blacks," those "blacks" could still talk back, and they did.

#### (Re-)Discovering the Blues

While blues performers had only represented a small part of the lineup at the first two Newport Folk Festivals, they became one of the major attractions in the years between 1963 and 1965 and emerged as a genre that could be separated from "folk music" by the fans. As Mary Katherine Aldin remembers,

Interestingly, I was born in Greenwich Village and grew up in the folk scene there in the late 1940s and \*until\* the Newport Folk Festival I \*never\* heard any distinction made between "folk" and "blues." Never once. It was \*all\* folk music in those days. Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie and Josh White and Pete Seeger and

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<sup>66</sup> Aldin, e-mail.

Brownie & Sonny and Cisco Houston were ALL folk singers regardless of color or content.<sup>67</sup>

Blues was more clearly identified as a distinctive genre at the 1963 festival through articles in the program book by Bob Koester, Lightnin' Hopkins and Eric von Schmidt and by a well-attended blues workshop which introduced the audience to the recently "rediscovered" Mississippi John Hurt. John Lee Hooker, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee also appeared, as did handsome John Hammond, Jr., son of the affluent record producer, who presented his note-by-note reenactments of pre-war country blues. Vanguard also released an album with performances solely taken from the blues workshop.

For the 1964 festival, the organizers managed to bring together the arguably largest group of country blues performers ever assembled in one place, among them Elizabeth Cotton, Sleepy John Estes with Yank Rachel and Hammie Nixon, Skip James, Reverend Robert Wilkins, and reappearances by Robert Pete Williams and Mississippi John Hurt. Newport talent coordinator Ralph Rinzler, who had traveled and recorded performers in the U.S. and Canada between March and July of 1964, hired Willie Doss from Alabama and Fred McDowell and his wife Annie Mae from Mississippi to play at the festival.<sup>68</sup> The three-hour blues workshop was hosted by Samuel Charters and Dr. Willis James and drew 3,000 people. As Charters noted in the liner notes of the two albums culled from the workshop, it was "one of the most important moments of the recent blues revival" as "Newport proved that blues in its most uncompromising form had gotten through to a larger audience."<sup>69</sup> In 1965, the blues performances of Willie Dixon, Memphis Slim, Son House, Mance Lipscomb, Lightnin' Hopkins, Reverend Gary Davis

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Other blues performers who appeared at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival were Muddy Waters, Otis Spann and Dave van Ronk.

<sup>69</sup> Charters, *Blues at Newport*.

and Fred McDowell were upstaged by the controversy over an appearance of Bob Dylan with the rock-inspired and "integrated" Butterfield Blues Band, as I will discuss in the next section.

The blues performances at the Newport Folk Festival were interesting in many ways, but possibly their most interesting aspect was the revitalization of blues musicians who had been most active in the 1920s and 1930s. These "rediscoveries" — which, as I will argue, are more appropriately described as "discoveries" — represent changes in racialized perceptions of blues music in the 1960s, as thousands of mostly "white" audiences at Newport began to listen to a number of elderly "black" performers who had previously only played in front of relatively small "black" crowds. Blues singers like Mississippi John Hurt, Skip James and Son House became stars among the folk fans and began recording albums in the last few years of their lives.<sup>70</sup> In addition to the performers and their audiences, it is also important to consider the role the "discoverers" of the performers played. These mostly urban "white" men helped to create a world of rural "black" blues culture that fed into racialized conceptualizations of authenticity prevalent among fans of the folk revival (as represented by the audiences of the Newport Folk Festival).

Efforts by well-educated "white" men to discover what they viewed as authentic black blues musicians can be traced back to research trips of folklorists like John and Alan Lomax in the 1930s (on which they "discovered" authenticated musicians like Leadbelly and Muddy Waters), but with the growing interest in blues among "white"

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<sup>70</sup> In authenticating acoustic rural blues from before World War II, the 1960s folk revivalists tended to ignore the urban blues musicians that would become the focus of *Living Blues* magazine in 1970 (see chapter V). For instance, *Sing Out!* magazine, founded in 1950, began to feature blues in 1960 but limited its coverage to "folk blues" singers like Mance Lipscomb and Mississippi John Hurt. In 1965, the magazine started introducing electric Chicago blues musicians like Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf but the main focus even in the late 1960s remained acoustic blues.

urban audiences — in particular among members of the burgeoning folk revival — these efforts took on renewed urgency in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As Pete Welding wrote in *Down Beat* in 1961,

It's almost as if the death of the superb blues artist Big Bill Broonzy in the early summer of 1958 had spurred every collector, musicologist, folklorist, and owner of a tape recorder to invade the rural South in an effort to preserve as much of the rough; natural; vigorous, and, it was feared, perishable music of the Southern Negro — especially the secular blues — as possible before all the older practitioners had died.<sup>71</sup>

Welding manages to capture the conceptualizations of folk and authenticity of the blues "rediscoverers" but obscures the fact that, as managers of the artists, they oftentimes profited significantly from introducing "black" Southern blues musicians to larger audiences both on the stage and on newly recorded albums. It is also ironic that Welding describes Big Bill Broonzy as one of the last "authentic" blues singers considering that Broonzy — like John Lee Hooker and Lightnin' Hopkins after him — had switched from electric to acoustic guitar to accommodate his mostly "white" audience's perceptions of folk music. How popular the "rediscovery" of rural Southern musicians had become by 1966 was evident in an article for the program book of that year's Newport Folk Festival entitled "Contemporary Music: The Hunt," in which Mack McCormick calls Mance Lipscomb "a rare find" and advises readers on how to track down traditional folk artists.<sup>72</sup>

The list of blues musicians that were "rediscovered" in the late 1950s and early 1960s is long and includes both professional musicians who had recorded some songs in the 1920s and 1930s (like Son House and Skip James) and musicians that had mainly been farmers and had only played and sung on the side (like Mance Lipscomb and

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<sup>71</sup> Pete Welding, "The Rise of Folk Blues," *Down Beat* (September 14, 1961): 15-16, 15.

<sup>72</sup> Mack McCormick, "Contemporary Music: The Hunt," *Newport Folk Festival 1966* program book, 25.

Mississippi John Hurt). None of these musicians had been recording stars in the rank of Bessie Smith or Louis Armstrong (or even Leadbelly), and it is therefore more appropriate to speak of "discoveries" than of "rediscoveries."<sup>73</sup> Although most of the 1960s folk blues "rediscoveries" had had relatively small "black" crowds before "crossing over" to "white" folk revivalists, the latter constituted the most significant part of their audiences when they discovered an at least partly fabricated blues culture of the past.

The almost exclusively "white" male blues fans who went out in search for "authentic" musicians would oftentimes go on to manage, record and "coach" the talents they had discovered. Stephen Calt, himself involved in the "rediscovery" of Skip James, quotes an anonymous record collector saying, "It was really a plantation mentality. Everyone wanted to own a nigger."<sup>74</sup> Financial motivations of blues "rediscoverers" occasionally led to fights about the "ownership" of certain artists and attempts by the blues musicians themselves to get out of the contracts they had signed.<sup>75</sup> Financial motivations were not the only reason for "rediscovering" blues artists, however. The "rediscoverers" were partly businessmen and partly fans. Like Alan Lomax and Ralph Rinzler, many saw themselves as music scholars preserving a disappearing culture while some were ruthless capitalists. Dick Waterman recalls fellow "rediscoverer" Nick Perls speaking derisively about blues singer Will Shade when they recorded some of his songs in 1964: "He'll be dead soon but we have his music on tape. He gave us a couple of hours

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<sup>73</sup> In addition to Mississippi John Hurt, the "rediscoveries" included Mance Lipscomb (by Chris Strachwitz and Mack McCormick), Skip James (by Henry Vestine, Bill Barth and John Fahey), Son House (by Phil Spiro and Dick Waterman), Robert Pete Williams (by Harry Oster), Bukka White (by John Fahey and Ed Denson), Fred McDowell (by Alan Lomax), Lightnin' Hopkins (by Mack McCormick), and Sleepy John Estes (by David Blumenthal). All of these performers played at the Newport Folk Festival in the 1960s.

<sup>74</sup> Calt, *I'd Rather Be the Devil*, 272.

<sup>75</sup> See the discussion of Mississippi John Hurt below.



out of his empty life and we have given him eternity."<sup>76</sup> Phil Spiro, one of the "white" men heavily involved in discovering Southern "black" blues musicians, has given a critical reflection of his and other blues "rediscoverers'" activities in the 1960s:

We [...] consciously or unconsciously tried to shape the music that [the blues musicians] played on stage. [...] Our motivation was a strange combination of ego, scholasticism, and power. I wonder now what would have happened if we had just left them alone instead of telling them what songs to sing and what instruments to play them on. [...] Aside from a couple of people like Chris Strachwitz and Dick Waterman, the rediscoverers all too often didn't see the old guys as real breathing, feeling, intelligent people. In general, we were collectors of people, who we tended to treat as if they were the very rarest of records — only one copy known to exist.<sup>77</sup>

Spiro, in these rare words of critical self-reflection by a "white" blues enthusiast, contends that it might have been a mistake to lift Southern blues artists from obscurity and reveals the selfish and colonialist motivations of the majority of the "rediscoverers" who viewed the musicians as precious property and not as fellow human beings.

The blues "rediscoverers" were a fairly small yet influential group of people who blurred the line between blues professionals and blues fans. Unlike the majority of folk blues fans of the 1960s, they were profiting financially from promoting "black" musicians. Yet, what connected the more actively and the less actively involved blues "rediscoverers," the managers and the fans, was their common consumption of a culture connected to a racialized Other. As the "white" folk musician Eric von Schmidt described the blues revival of the early to mid-1960s, "For most of the bluesmen this experience was like the flame of a candle just before it goes out. For those of us who were lucky enough to be there, the light was a blessing and perhaps was enough to enable our own

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<sup>76</sup> Nick Perls quoted in Dick Waterman, *Between Midnight and Day: The Last Unpublished Blues Archive* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003), 67.

<sup>77</sup> Phil Spiro quoted in Eric von Schmidt and Jim Rooney, *Baby, Let Me Follow You Down: The Illustrated Story of the Cambridge Folk Years* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1979), 198.

candles to burn a little bit brighter, a little bit longer."<sup>78</sup> In von Schmidt's account, "white" fans appropriated "black" blues culture in a quasi-religious way to make up for what they might have perceived as their own lack of identity. But what did this mean for the "black" blues musicians whose lights were about to go out? In the following, I want to discuss Mississippi John Hurt, a blues performer who gained hitherto unknown notoriety through the Newport Folk Festival but only had three years to enjoy his fame.

### Mississippi John Hurt

Mississippi John Hurt was born as John Smith Hurt between 1892 and 1894 (accounts vary) in Teoc, Mississippi and, until his "rediscovery," spent almost all his life in Carroll County close to where he was born, in particular in the small town of Avalon. He worked mostly as a farm laborer and played music at local community events. After being "discovered" by talent scout Tommy Rockwell from Okeh records, Hurt recorded thirteen songs for the company in 1928, twelve of which were released without any major success. Hurt's ragtime-inspired, melodic fingerpicking style on the guitar and his gentle recitative approach to singing were not marketable to "black" blues fans of the period. Harry Smith included the obscure singer and guitarist in his 1952 *Anthology of American Folk Music* with the songs "Frankie" and "Spike Driver Blues," and Hurt's rare records consequently became sought after by blues connoisseurs.

In 1963, the blues collector Tom Hoskins from Washington, D.C. traveled to Avalon, Mississippi because of a reference in John Hurt's "Avalon Blues" of this town being his home. Hoskins was able to locate Hurt, whose first thought was that Hoskins, as a "white" man approaching him, had to be a cop going after his bootlegging: "Reluctant to leave his \$28.00-a-month job as a farmhand, he eventually departed, firmly believing that his discoverer was from the FBI or some other police agency, and that he would have

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<sup>78</sup> Von Schmidt, *Baby, Let Me*, 199.

no real choice in the matter anyway."<sup>79</sup> Tom Hoskins took Mississippi John Hurt to Washington, D.C. and made the 70 year-old singer the resident blues artist at the coffee shop Ontario Place. Hoskins also had Hurt sign a contract that guaranteed the "rediscoverer" 50 per cent of Hurt's wages, the ownership of his publishing and the control over his business.<sup>80</sup> After Hurt's breakthrough at the Newport Folk Festival, on which he appeared in 1963 and again in 1964 and 1965, he made successful records for the Vanguard label, had a guest spot on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* and was featured in *Time*, *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*. Hurt died in 1966 with little money to show for his success. At the time of his death, after three years in the business, Hurt had finally begun suing Tom Hoskins to get out of his contract. The legal dispute ended with Hoskins receiving a stellar \$280,000 settlement from Vanguard records for the rights on Hurt's catalog.<sup>81</sup>

The portrait of Mississippi John Hurt I have sketched out here — as an elderly amateur musician rightfully distrusting the white power structure who "discovered" and exploited him in the last years of his life — stands in marked contrast to the way Hurt has been described by members of the folk revival. In the program book for the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, Stacey Williams admiringly described Hurt's "deeply lined, benevolent face."<sup>82</sup> *Sing Out!* writer and blues scholar Lawrence Cohn saw in Hurt "a

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<sup>79</sup> Lawrence Cohn, "Mississippi John Hurt," *Sing Out!* 14, no. 5 (November 1964): 16-21, 17. Mance Lipscomb describes a similar incident how when Chris Strachwitz and Mack McCormick came by his house for the first time, he mistook them for policemen. See Glen Alyn, *I Say Me for a Parable: The Oral Autobiography of Mance Lipscomb, Texas Bluesman* (New York: Norton, 1993), 396.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Gordon, *Can't Be Satisfied: The Life and Times of Muddy Waters* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 2002), 188.

<sup>81</sup> Von Schmidt, *Baby, Let Me*, 199.

<sup>82</sup> Stacey Williams, "Mississippi John Hurt," *Newport Folk Festival 1965* program book, 30.

down-to-earth, unembittered individual," a "shy, comparatively introspective man" whose "everyday work clothes" and weathered felt hat were visual markers of the singer's authenticity.<sup>83</sup> In his obituary for Hurt in *Sing Out!*, Dick Waterman, owner of a booking agency for "rediscovered" blues singers in the 1960s, highlighted the qualities that folk fans liked about the singer they perceived as humble and non-threatening: "He was innocently naive and he was Supper Hippie. He was so completely unique that this tired and bickering world is infinitely poorer that he is gone." Although admitting that "John never felt at home in white society," Waterman presented Hurt as "sweet," "kind and gentle," and a "loveable rascal."<sup>84</sup> Newport founder George Wein also remembered Hurt's "modest exterior" and "deep inner calm and confidence."<sup>85</sup>

In fact, most of the existing depictions of Mississippi John Hurt say a lot more about the folk and blues revivalists than they say about Hurt himself. Hurt's first major public appearance at the blues workshop of the 1963 Newport Folk Festival which turned him into a star among the folk crowd might have been a pivotal event for the 70-year-old singer but even more so for the connoisseurs who were in the audience. In his introduction of Hurt on stage at Newport 1963, Dick Spotswood, a Washington D.C. blues collector and friend of Tom Hoskins, talked not only about Hurt's family and employment history but also about what the singer meant for his own life as a fan: "[Hurt] made twelve sides for the Okeh Company that are now very obscure collector's

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<sup>83</sup> Lawrence Cohn, "Mississippi John Hurt," *Sing Out!* 14, no.5 (November 1964): 16-21, 20.

<sup>84</sup> Dick Waterman, "John Hurt: Patriarch Hippie," *Sing Out!* 17, no.1 (February/March 1967): 4-7, 4, 7, 6.

<sup>85</sup> George Wein with Nate Chinen, *Myself Among Others: A Life in Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2003), 323.

items. I know myself, in twelve years of hunting old blues records, I have been able to find two of John's recordings and both of these are wrecked."<sup>86</sup>

The performance that followed Spotswood's introduction was by all accounts "a fantastic success, he captured not only the eyes and ears of the audience, but also the imagination of all concerned."<sup>87</sup> As Newport director Mike Seeger remembers, "[the audience] absolutely fell in love with him."<sup>88</sup> John Hurt, with his plain clothes, felt hat, gentle, almost inaudible voice and delicate fingerpicking style, epitomized folk fans' imagination of a romantic past steeped in authentic blackness. Some of his lyrics might have been a bit bawdy (in "Candy Man" he sang about the "ladies'" admiration for his "stick of candy just nine inch long"<sup>89</sup>) but both Hurt's appearance and his music appeared non-threatening and lacked all of the meanness of the blues: no bent notes, no Howlin'-Wolf-type growls, no funky dance moves á la Buddy Guy. Blues "rediscoverer" Phil Spiro remembers Hurt performing "Spike Driver Blues" on the Newport stage:

It was unreal. John Hurt was dead. *Had* to be. All those guys on that Harry Smith anthology were dead. They'd all recorded back in the twenties and thirties. They'd never been seen or heard from since. But there was no denying that the man singing so sweet and playing so beautifully was *the* John Hurt. He had a face — and what a face. He had a hat that he wore like a halo.<sup>90</sup>

As it is common among "white" blues connoisseurs of the 1960s, Spiro employs religious imagery (the halo) to describe the experience of watching a blues performer, thereby indirectly taking on the role of a "reverential gawker." The consumption of a "black"

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<sup>86</sup> Dick Spotswood quoted in Brauner, *A Study*, 100.

<sup>87</sup> Cohn, "Mississippi John Hurt," 19.

<sup>88</sup> Mike Seeger, personal communication, October 17, 2006.

<sup>89</sup> Mississippi John Hurt, "Candy Man," *Blues at Newport*, CD (Vanguard 1991).

<sup>90</sup> Spiro quoted in von Schmidt, *Baby, Let Me*, 189.

blues performer like Mississippi John Hurt entailed a split from one's own body to that of the performer who was perceived of as an Other in religious as well as racial terms.

### Newport and the Civil Rights Movement

Strikingly, the "rediscovery" of blues artists like Mississippi John Hurt took place at the exact time when civil rights debates were becoming explosive in the United States. In 1963, Martin Luther King writes his seminal "Letter from Birmingham Jail," calling for active resistance against civil rights violations. 200,000 people participate in the March on Washington. Images of police dogs attacking "black" demonstrators are broadcast across the nation. Among the casualties of the year are NAACP member Medgar Evers and four girls in a Birmingham church bombing. In the following two years, President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, two of the most important documents in U.S. history. In 1965, Malcolm X is shot to death and later that year riots break out in Watts, a predominantly "black" section of Los Angeles.

Both the organizers and audiences at the Newport Folk Festival repeatedly expressed their solidarity with and their connectedness to the Civil Rights Movement. The Freedom Singers, active members of the movement from Georgia, sang gospel, Phil Ochs, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and others presented topical songs, and the festivals routinely closed with a number of singers sharing the stage singing "We Shall Overcome" with the audience. The Newport Folk Foundation was also explicitly involved in promoting civil rights — one example was the organization and sponsoring of activities for the Poor People's March on Washington in 1968.<sup>91</sup> In the introductory remarks for the 1968 program book, the board members of the Newport Folk Festival mentioned the

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<sup>91</sup> Brauner, *A Study*, 199.

deaths of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the Vietnam War and the Watts riots and posed Newport as the "opposite" to these events.<sup>92</sup>

In light of all these connections to the Civil Rights Movement and its calls for drastic changes, it is quite remarkable how much emphasis the organizers of the festival put on the preservation of "traditional" styles like pre-war acoustic blues. Cheryl Brauner describes the coaching of amateur performers by the directors of the festival:

In addition to style, performance content also was reviewed carefully. Among the reasons for this was that the directors wanted to ensure that the country blues musicians and Appalachian ballad singers they were presenting would indeed play traditional blues or sing Child ballads.<sup>93</sup>

This policing of the performers was an obvious attempt by the organizers of the Newport Folk Festival to reify their notions of authenticity and purity. Dick Waterman relates an interesting incident involving the "rediscovered" blues musician Son House and young "white" blues musician Al Wilson (of blues rock group Canned Heat), which provides further evidence to the extent in which "white" people actively shaped their own constructions of authenticated "black" blues music. Son House, an alcoholic who had not played in the years between 1948 and 1964, had to relearn his old songs in order to be able to perform at the Newport Folk Festival:

A month or so [after his "rediscovery"], we brought Son to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to get him ready for the Newport Folk Festival [and introduced him to] Al Wilson. [...] Al played open-tuning bottleneck and could play all the styles. He could play Bukka White, Son House, Charley Patton, and Blind Lemon Jefferson — he could really play. And he sat down with Son, knee to knee, guitar to guitar, and said, "Okay, this is the figure that in 1930, you called 'My Black Mama,'" and played it for him. And Son said, "Yeah, *yeah*, that's me, that's me. I played that." And then Al said, "Now about a dozen years later, when Mr. [John] Lomax came around, you changed the name to 'My Black Woman,' and you did it this way." He showed him. And Son would say,

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<sup>92</sup> "From the Directors." *Newport Folk Festival 1968* program book, 4-5.

<sup>93</sup> Brauner, *A Study*, 185.

"Yeah, yeah. I got my recollection now, I got my recollection now." And he would start to play, and the two of them played together. Then, Al reminded him of how he changed tunings, and played his own "Pony Blues" for him. There would not have been a rediscovery of Son House in the 1960s without Al Wilson. Really, Al Wilson taught Son House how to play Son House.<sup>94</sup>

The "conservation" of Son House, who also appeared at the American Folk Blues Festival in 1967, was at odds with Newport's alignment with progressive civil rights politics. Like the "rediscovery" of Mississippi John Hurt, it revealed "white" fantasies of a non-threatening and pastoral Southern past rather than an acknowledgment of current "black" politics articulated by leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. When Dick Waterman introduced Son House on stage at Newport in 1965, he consequently lauded Son House's break from playing and omitted Al Wilson's influence: "The post-World-War-II Negro music had gone to a basic rhythm and blues, rock and roll sound. A man of great pride, he stopped playing rather than change his music. [...] His music is still completely unchanged."<sup>95</sup>

The festival organizers' insistence on blues "purity" occasionally became downright bizarre. In 1964, the elderly country blues musicians were forced to stay in a segregated, hardly furnished white frame building that was dubbed "blues house." As Samuel Charters put it in his liner notes for the *Blues at Newport Blues 1964* album,

The rooms were bare, the floors without rugs, the furniture mostly iron cots that had been carried into the house just before the performers began arriving. [...] For many of the men it was as though they were back at one of the sukey jumps or the cabin buck dances of their youth, and they spent hours playing for each other.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Dick Waterman quoted in Francis Davis, *The History of the Blues* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 219.

<sup>95</sup> Dick Waterman, stage announcement, *Blues with a Feeling*, CD (Vanguard, 1993).

<sup>96</sup> *The Blues at Newport 1964, Part 1*, LP liner notes (Vanguard, 1964).



The nostalgic atmosphere Charters is trying to evoke here might have rather been some of the blues performers' realization that sharecropping in the 1930s and performing at Newport in the 1960s could be equally exploitative. The Newport Folk Foundation even received a letter attacking their racist housing politics.<sup>97</sup> Yet, some of the foundation's problematic practices continued. In 1966, Alan Lomax hosted a "blues carving session" as part of an evening program entitled "The Battle of Music" that also included a fiddle contest, a ballad swapping session and a gospel music battle. Presumably for educational purposes, Lomax asked Skip James, Son House and Bukka White to sing only one verse of the same song.<sup>98</sup> The results were catastrophic:

None of the three was enthusiastic about the idea and one was violently opposed to it (and when no one would listen to his argument he responded by getting visibly drunk, the only kind of protest of which he was capable that might penetrate the Powers-in-Charge who were obviously immune to his words).<sup>99</sup>

Jackson's eyewitness account of the event is a good indication for how much the supposedly uncompromised and unadorned performances of blues singers were shaped by the Newport Folk Foundation's board of directors (which included Alan Lomax) and how the performers themselves had to develop subtle ways of resisting being co-opted.<sup>100</sup>

The conscious promotion of non-threatening and pre-modern forms of "black" music for the consumption of a "white" urban middle-class audience was a sign that the alignment between the Newport Folk Festival and the Civil Rights Movement was only

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<sup>97</sup> Wein, *Myself Among Others*, 327.

<sup>98</sup> Brauner, *A Study*, 143.

<sup>99</sup> Bruce Jackson, "Newport '66: Good Music, Diabolical Programming," *Sing Out!* 16, no. 5 (November 1966): 16-17.

<sup>100</sup> In addition to the workshop, Alan Lomax also directed the film "Devil Got My Woman: Blues at Newport 1966," which does not contain footage of the festival but has some of the country blues lineup perform at a juke joint Lomax "recreated" in Newport.

perfunctory. In 1966, the strong police presence at the festival resulted in an incident in which Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leaders including Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown were attacked by uniformed guards and removed from the festival premises. Reportedly, the policemen shouted, "We'll give you a dose of *blue* power!"<sup>101</sup> Unlike Bob Dylan's going "electric," no outrage among the largely "white" audience of the festival was reported, and organizer George Wein's reaction to SNCC protests was, "What do you want me to do — call the NAACP?"<sup>102</sup> The following year, *Sing Out!* editor Irwin Silber complained that the musicians at Newport had not been able to adequately respond to the Watts riots and called the festival "irrelevant."<sup>103</sup> The Newport Folk Foundation's ties to the Civil Rights Movement had been weaker than its mission to preserve "traditional" forms of music to begin with, and it was the latter purism, not black power politics, that would continue to inform decisions of the Newport board of directors in the second half of the 1960s.

#### Mike Bloomfield

Mississippi John Hurt, as shown on the album cover of *Blues at Newport 1964*, represented the majority of the blues performances at the Newport Folk Festival: an elderly "black" man from the rural South in plain clothes, he is depicted with his back to the viewer playing acoustic guitar on stage with a mass of largely young "white" fans listening attentively. The "rediscovered" older "black" musicians like Hurt, Skip James and Son House did in fact dominate the blues performances at Newport in the festival's peak years but there were other performers as well — the occasional urban blues legends like Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy and B.B. King, the young "white" imitators of acoustic

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<sup>101</sup> Jane Friesen, "Newport 2," *Broadside* 73 (August 1966): 15-16.

<sup>102</sup> Wein, *Myself Among Others*, 337.

<sup>103</sup> Irwin Silber, "What's Happening," 1.

folk blues from the 1920s and 1930s like John Hammond, Jr., Spider John Koerner, Dave van Ronk and Eric von Schmidt, and the blues-inspired rock stars like Janis Joplin and Van Morrison. All of these musicians contributed to shifting conceptualizations of folk and blues in the 1960s. Yet, arguably the only musicians whose impact on the perception of blues and "race" were comparable to that of the blues "rediscoveries" were the members of the "integrated" Butterfield Blues Band, in particular their "white" guitar player Mike Bloomfield.<sup>104</sup>

Michael Bernard Bloomfield was born on July 28, 1943 as the son of affluent Jewish parents and grew up in Glencoe, a suburb of Chicago. After he receiving a transistor radio for his bar mitzvah, he listened to rockabilly and blues on Southern radio stations and eventually began to join "black" blues musicians on Chicago's South Side on stage where the audience received the "white" blues musician as a novelty act. In 1964, John Hammond, Sr. signed the guitarist who had been playing as a session musician and managing the Chicago folk club Fickle Pickle to CBS Records. Bloomfield became a major rock star when he joined the Butterfield Blues Band the following year. Their appearance at the Newport Folk Festival in the summer of 1965, in particular their backing of Bob Dylan's electric set, stirred up heated debates over authenticity and folk. After a few excursions into Indian raga music on the Butterfield Blues Band's second LP *East West*, Bloomfield left the group and formed the short-lived Electric Flag, which appeared at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967. Bloomfield continued to record into the 1970s, but his alcohol and heroin addictions rendered later musical efforts less successful. Bloomfield died of an overdose of heroin in 1981 at age 37.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> This is apparent in the choice of songs for the three-CD box set *Newport Folk Festival: Best of the Blues, 1959-1968* (Vanguard, 2001), which exclusively features "rediscovered" blues musicians with the exception of two tracks by the Butterfield Blues Band.

<sup>105</sup> Ed Ward, *Michael Bloomfield: The Rise and Fall of an American Guitar Hero* (New York: Cherry Lane Books, 1983; Jan Mark Wolkin and Bill Keenom, *Michael Bloomfield: If You Love These Blues* (San Francisco, CA: Miller Freeman Books, 2000).

Much has been written about Bob Dylan's electrified appearance at the Newport Folk Festival 1965 and the crowd's supposedly uniformly negative reaction to Dylan's "progressive" move from acoustic folk to folk rock with the help of the Butterfield Blues Band (Mike Bloomfield, incidentally, had also played on Dylan's single "Like A Rolling Stone" a few months earlier). Dylan's presentation of three electric songs, oftentimes cited as a key moment in the history of rock music, actually drew mixed reactions from both organizers of the festival and people in the crowd, and Pete Seeger's threat to cut the power lines behind the stage might have been motivated more by the inefficient sound system than by the fact that Dylan played an electric guitar.<sup>106</sup> In any case, boos from the audience and pleas from festival organizer Peter Yarrow motivated Dylan to return to the stage and play two acoustic songs, seemingly trying to appease the old folkies. Yet, Dylan's "going electric" symbolized a larger movement from topical acoustic folk to psychedelic rock music in the mid-1960s. Accounts of Bob Dylan's appearance at Newport 1965 oftentimes do not discuss the impact the Butterfield Blues Band and Mike Bloomfield in particular had on the proceedings — after all, it was their electric sound that rendered Dylan's words unintelligible. Moreover, these accounts generally fail to mention the appearance of the Butterfield Blues Band *sans* Dylan a day earlier at the blues workshop, which provoked a similar debate about folk authenticity and showed how much racialization was part of this debate.

The Butterfield Blues Band had already played an opening set on the first day of the festival as people were just arriving but they returned for the blues workshop on the following day after performances of blues "originals" like Mance Lipscomb, Son House and Skip James. Alan Lomax, who was hosting the workshop, took offense with the time

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<sup>106</sup> Von Schmidt, *Baby, Let Me*, 261-262; Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 235.

the musicians needed to set up their equipment. On stage, he openly questioned the Butterfield Blues Band's authenticity:

Used to be a time when a farmer would take a box, glue an axe handle to it, put some strings on it, sit down in the shade of a tree and play some blues for himself and his friends. Now here we've got these guys, and they need all of this fancy hardware to play the blues. Today you've heard some of the greatest blues musicians in the world playing their simple music on simple instruments. Let's find out if these guys can play at all.<sup>107</sup>

In his introduction of the Butterfield Blues Band, Alan Lomax was emphasizing the kind of blues music authenticated by folk fans, which was rural, acoustic and dating back to the 1920s and 1930s — ironically, "authentic" blues musicians in Chicago had been playing electric blues for more than a decade at this point. Behind the stage, Lomax was confronted by the Butterfield Blues Band's manager Albert Grossman, who became infamous as a ruthless businessman and also handled the careers of Bob Dylan, Odetta, Theodore Bikel and Peter, Paul and Mary. "What kind of fuckin' introduction was that?" Grossman asked. "What do you know about blues?" responded Lomax. Grossman retorted: "I don't have to know anything about blues to know that was a terrible introduction." Lomax, in turn, asked, "Oh yeah? What are you going to do about it?" Finally, the two men were wrestling in the dust.<sup>108</sup>

Like the reactions to Bob Dylan "plugging in" a day later, Alan Lomax's and Albert Grossman's quarreling over the sound of the Butterfield Blues Band represented conflicting conceptions of musical authenticity.<sup>109</sup> For festival organizer George Wein, "Lomax symbolized the sacrosanct traditions of folklore; Grossman was the power broker

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<sup>107</sup> Alan Lomax quoted in von Schmidt, *Baby, Let Me*, 253.

<sup>108</sup> Von Schmidt, *Baby, Let Me*, 258.

<sup>109</sup> In opposition to Alan Lomax, Mike Bloomfield firmly believed that his band was playing "folk music" from Chicago: "What we played was music that was entirely indigenous to the neighborhood, to the city that we grew up in. There was no doubt in my mind that it was folk music." Mike Bloomfield quoted in Ward, *Michael Bloomfield*, 44.

whose very existence threatened to corrupt those traditions."<sup>110</sup> Yet, there was also a racial component to Lomax's critique. After all, the blues musicians that had played earlier were all harking back to an imagined past when blues was black and pure, whereas the electrified sound of the Butterfield Blues Band was produced by both "blacks" (bassist Jerome Arnold and drummer Sam Lay) *and* "whites" (singer and harmonica player Paul Butterfield as well as the two guitarists Mike Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop). Lomax, then, was not just criticizing what he perceived as an impurity of sound but also the racial impurity that came with it.

Interestingly, Alan Lomax was not the only person to question the Butterfield Blues Band's musical and racial authenticity; Mike Bloomfield did too. Murray Lerner's film *Festival* contains a segment in which comments by Bloomfield are intercut with comments by Son House. In his comments, Bloomfield echoes Alan Lomax in describing himself as a pale imitation of the "real thing" which is Son House:

It's very strange 'cause I'm not born to blues, you know. It's not in my blood. It's not in my roots, in my family. Man, I'm Jewish, you know. I've been Jewish for years. [...] Son House turns into the blues. He turns into a demon of some sort. He doesn't hear. He doesn't feel. Every nerve and fiber of his body is taken up in that music. You see, Son House is stone blue. He's where it's at. [...] I'm not Son House. I haven't been pissed on and stepped on and shitted on like he has. Man, my father is a multi-millionaire, you know. I've lived a rich fat happy life, man. I had a big bar mitzvah, you know. I'm not Son House. I can play blues, you know, and I can feel it in a way. Those guys are a different story.<sup>111</sup>

In Bloomfield's account, both his wealth and his racial identification as Jewish mark him as inauthentic and an outsider to blues culture, which in its essence remains the province

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<sup>110</sup> Wein, *Myself Among Others*, 331.

<sup>111</sup> Mike Bloomfield quoted in *Festival*.

of "black" people. In this respect, he is in agreement with Alan Lomax's put-down of the Butterfield Blues Band's music as racially and musically impure.<sup>112</sup>

Not all "white" blues musicians of the 1960s shared the humbleness and lack of authentic identity expressed by Mike Bloomfield (and similarly by Eric Clapton<sup>113</sup>). Nick Gravenites, who would later become the vocalist for Mike Bloomfield's Electric Flag, had written the song "Born in Chicago," which the Butterfield Blues Band presented as their signature song at Newport. Sung by Paul Butterfield, it displayed a cocky attitude that was in stark contrast to Mike Bloomfield's self-deprecation: "I was born in Chicago in 1941/well my father told me, 'son, you had better get a gun.'<sup>114</sup>" Nick Gravenites, who had frequented "black" blues bars on the South Side of Chicago in the early 1960s on a regular basis, described his assessment of the racial politics of the time as follows:

I started going to those clubs because I was nuts. Quote *nuts* unquote. It took a certain amount of craziness to do it, and at that time in my life I was crazy. I was a hoodlum — used to carry a gun, that sort of thing... I didn't care. I figured I would shoot somebody on one of those trips. See, it was a strange situation. I knew nothing about black people. My first introduction to black society was at the university. Otherwise I knew nothing, absolutely *nothing*. So, I went in with this certain attitude. Well, the black had a different attitude altogether. [...] But the blacks knew that whitey was crazy. Whitey couldn't take that kind of upfront shouting and screaming. Whitey'll pull a gun and kill ya. [...] The blacks were well aware of what would happen if the morning's headlines read, "White student killed in bar brawl." Somebody black would do time, hard time. Once you got used to what was happening, you realized that we were a whole lot more dangerous to them than

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<sup>112</sup> Mike Bloomfield presents himself in a similar way in a small book he wrote about his relationship to the older "black" blues singer Big Joe Williams. See Michael Bloomfield, *Me and Big Joe* (San Francisco, CA: ReSearch Productions, 1980).

<sup>113</sup> See chapter II.

<sup>114</sup> Butterfield Blues Band, "Born in Chicago," *Blues with a Feeling*, CD (Vanguard, 1993).

they were to us. We'd pull the trigger. Felt real cocky and *white*, you know.<sup>115</sup>

Like Mike Bloomfield, Nick Gravenites presents himself as a privileged outsider appropriating black culture, however, in contrast to Bloomfield, Gravenites ends up embracing, not rejecting his racialized identity and gains a sense of what might most adequately be labeled "white power." By openly acknowledging and even celebrating his white privilege, Gravenites inadvertently unveils the problematic racial politics of actively or passively enjoying blues in the 1960s without being stigmatized.

The controversy over the appearance of Mike Bloomfield and the Butterfield Blues Band at the Newport Folk Festival 1965 shows how for folk authenticity, musical sound was an important factor. Acoustic and "pure" sounds were thwarted by the group's electric blues rock, which Alan Lomax, among others, perceived as "tainted." Yet, as I have shown, controversies over sound were entwined with conceptualizations of racial identity. For "white" blues musicians and audiences, racial identity remained an integral part of blues. Both Mike Bloomfield's deprecating remarks about his own lack of musical authenticity and Nick Gravenites' unabashed declaration of white power, although transcending Alan Lomax's narrow definition of folk culture, still place blues music firmly in a set of racial taxonomies and fail to acknowledge the possibility of musical sound beyond a clear demarcation of "black" and "white."

#### The Demise of the Newport Folk Festival

In the wake of Bob Dylan's appearance with Mike Bloomfield and the Butterfield Blues Band at the Newport Folk Festival 1965, folk rock, electric blues and psychedelic rock became more prominent among "white" audiences in the United States and on the Newport stage as well. The Newport Folk Festival continued to draw large crowds but

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<sup>115</sup> Nick Gravenites quoted in Michael Bane, *White Boy Singin' the Blues: The Black Roots of White Rock* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 187.



did not have the same cultural impact as in its peak years and eventually faltered at the end of the decade. The four-day event of 1966 featured over 200 musicians (among them Howlin' Wolf and Chuck Berry) and drew 65,000 people, slightly less than the previous year, partly due to the lack of big-name artists.<sup>116</sup> The five-day festival of 1967 was conceived as a continuation of acoustic folk traditions in light of the growing popularity of other forms of music deemed more "commercial," in particular folk rock. Among the performers of that year were Muddy Waters, Arlo Guthrie and Joan Baez. In 1968, an impressive 73,000 people showed up, many to see the psychedelic blues rock of Janis Joplin and her band Big Brother and the Holding Company.<sup>117</sup> Junior Wells, Buddy Guy and B.B. King played on the big stage with a volume that forced smaller folk workshops to close down.<sup>118</sup>

After riots at the Newport Jazz Festival 1969, the Newport City Council demanded more security for the folk festival including the implementation of a chain link fence costing \$28,000, a limited capacity of 18,000 per concert, a curfew of 12:15 a.m. and a ban on "rock music."<sup>119</sup> Eric Clapton's Blind Faith was among the bands that got cancelled. The remaining stars like Muddy Waters, Big Mama Thornton, James Taylor and Johnny Cash only managed to draw a crowd of 51,000,<sup>120</sup> which was not enough to cover the expenses. As a result, the Newport Folk Festival had to be called off for 1970. A festival was planned for 1971 but had to be cancelled one week before opening after

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<sup>116</sup> Robert Shelton, "Newport Starts its Folk Festival." *New York Times* (July 22, 1966): 20.

<sup>117</sup> Hodenfield, "Newport 1969," 21.

<sup>118</sup> Landau, Jon. "The Newport Folk Festival," 16.

<sup>119</sup> John S. Wilson, "Ban on Rock Clouds Newport Festival," *New York Times* (July 18, 1969): 15.

<sup>120</sup> Hodenfield, "Newport 1969," 21.

raucous crowds had forced the Newport Jazz Festival to close early. By this time, it was obvious that Newport had been upstaged by rock festivals like Monterey and Woodstock.<sup>121</sup>

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by situating the blues performances at the Newport Folk Festival in their historical context as part of the 1960s folk revival as well as academic debates about authenticity. As I have shown, racialization was an important aspect of the histories of both the concept of *folk* and folk music and appears prominently in the emergence of "folk blues." By looking at key moments in the blues performances at the Newport Folk Festival, in particular during the most relevant period between 1963 and 1965, I pointed to the way racial formations are crucial for understanding the glorification of "(re)discovered" blues musicians who had been active in the 1920s and 1930s, Mississippi John Hurt being a case in point. I argued that the nostalgic authentication of older, Southern "black" blues musicians by a mostly young "white" middle-class audience was an indirect attempt to repudiate the pressing demands for civil rights posed by "black" leaders at the time. Finally, I discussed controversies surrounding the performance of the Butterfield Blues Band at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, which — through its electrification but also through its threat of mixing "black" and "white" music — collided with the purist ideology prominent among older folk revivalists.

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<sup>121</sup> In 1979, rock promoter Frank J. Russo attempted to revive the festival but a lack of ticket sales forced him to cancel the concerts. However, the Newport Folk Festival did return in 1985 with three days of indoor and outdoor concerts and a mix of chart-topping performers and lesser-known, "traditional" musicians. With sponsors like Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream and Dunkin' Donuts, the Newport Folk Festival has been successfully put on since 1985 without having the major cultural impact it had in the first half of the 1960s. Recent artists that have played at the festival include Newport veterans like B.B. King, Bob Dylan and Odetta as well as younger performers like Billy Bragg and the Violent Femmes. "Newport Folk Festival History," 2006, <http://www.festivalproductions.net/newportfolk/2006/history.php>.

Mike Bloomfield's appearance at the Newport Folk Festival was symptomatic of changing perceptions of blues authenticity in the mid-1960s as the folk revival merged into the psychedelic rock explosion. While older blues connoisseurs like Alan Lomax were still holding on to a folk ideology that only authenticated pre-industrial acoustic blues forms, cultural brokers like Albert Grossman were promoting electric blues rock stars like Mike Bloomfield (and, in England, Eric Clapton). Despite this shift in authentication, racial classifications remained substantial for conceptualizations of blues music. Older "black" musicians like Mississippi John Hurt were replaced by younger "white" musicians who had to acknowledge their lack of "authentic" identity while ostensibly taking blues to another level of virtuosity and technology. The increasing popularity of "white" blues rock musicians in turn led to the renewed success of older "black" electric blues musicians by "white" audiences, as the success story of B.B. King illustrates. Throughout these changes, "blackness" remained a codifier for authenticity while strategies of economic exploitation of "black" blues musicians stayed firmly intact. Ultimately, both "black" and "white" blues represented at the Newport Folk Festival worked to support a patronizing "white" liberalism.

CHAPTER IV  
GERMANY GETS THE BLUES: NEGOTIATIONS OF  
"RACE" AND NATION AT THE AMERICAN FOLK  
BLUES FESTIVAL

Introduction

In June of 1966, *Ebony* magazine published an article about the blues performer Memphis Slim and his life as an expatriate in Paris. After touring Europe with the American Folk Blues Festival in 1962, the singer and pianist had decided to stay in France. Whereas in Chicago his payment had been "rent money and grits," Slim had now found *la bonne vie*: "a six-room flat along Paris' Boulevard Exelmans, cruises around Montmartre in his bar-equipped Jaguar Mark X, a consistent schedule of club bookings and a growing account in the Banque de France." The pictures for the article showed the not-so-slim singer performing at a lavish nightclub in Paris, socializing with other black expatriates and snuggling up with his French wife, "a perceptive homemaker," in his luxurious apartment.<sup>1</sup>

One need only to think of James Baldwin's essays to realize that the success story of Memphis Slim glossed over some details of what it meant to be a black man in Paris in the 1960s. Yet, the *Ebony* article points to the much-neglected transatlantic dimension of blues which did not only play out in "black" blues musicians finding a growing audience in Europe but also in the active reshaping of blues, in particular by British artists, who in turn "re-imported" blues to the United States.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I focus on the emergence of a transatlantic blues culture by looking at the American Folk Blues Festival, which brought Memphis Slim and other "black" American blues performers to both Germanys

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<sup>1</sup> "Memphis Slim: La Vie Est Bonne." *Ebony* 21, no. 6 (June 1966): 57-62.

<sup>2</sup> Examples include the Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton, see chapter II.

and other European countries in the 1960s. The "festival" was an annual event, which took place in symphony halls and a TV studio specifically designed to create an "authentic" atmosphere and was organized by Fritz Rau, a former member of the Hitler Youth, and Horst Lippmann, who was persecuted by the Nazis because of his Jewish ancestry. I am particularly interested in the way claims by these concert promoters that jazz and blues served to "denazify" Germany held up in light of the festival's multiplicitous reification of racial stereotypes.

I begin by situating my analysis of the American Folk Blues Festival in the methodological framework of transnational American Studies, in particular as it applies to black culture in Germany. For the immediate historical context, I will dwell on the role jazz and blues music played during and after the Third Reich. The history of jazz and blues in Germany during this time is reflected in the biographies of Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau. I argue that Lippmann and Rau supported attempts to claim upper-middle-class respectability for jazz and blues and saw a potential for modernizing Germany through black music. Yet, Lippmann and Rau also tapped into romantic constructions of authenticity and blackness that posited blues as the pre-modern or "primitive" root of jazz, much like the way blues was presented at the Newport Folk Festival. I will support this argument by closely looking at different aspects of the American Folk Blues Festival: statements by the festival promoters, the participating musicians and audience members about the concerts, the actual performances on stage and in the TV studio, and the posters and stage designs by Günther Kieser, which visually represented the festival's ideology. Taken together, these aspects suggest that Lippmann's and Rau's claims that listening to blues could serve as an anti-racist strategy in the larger context of German denazification were undercut by their deployment of racialist ideology and their ignorance of then-current black civil rights politics. Therefore, despite its specific localized meaning in post-war Germany, the American Folk Blues Festival revealed the more ubiquitous problematic construction of blackness which has informed white countercultural

discourses of the 1960s and beyond. Memphis Slim might have been living *la bonne vie*, but the price he had to pay was becoming the object of his "white" listeners' fantasies as they gawked at his authenticated performances from a safe distance.

### "Blackness" in Germany

The existing scholarship on blues has paid little attention to its transnational dimension with the exception of the music's contentious "origins" in Western African cultures like the *griots* of Mali, Senegal and the Gambia.<sup>3</sup> Although the cross-pollination of European and American blues styles, in particular since the 1960s, and the American exporting and re-importing of blues are hard to deny, the full impact of these border-crossings has been largely ignored. In its parochialism, blues scholarship mirrors the academic history of American Studies and could benefit from recent trends to understand American culture as embedded in and in conflict with national and racial constructions from outside of the U.S. My analysis of the American Folk Blues Festival shows how the juncture of negotiations of "race," class and nation in the 1960s was vital for the way blues music has been categorized and understood in the last forty years.

In a recent essay, Günter Lenz discusses the internationalization of American Studies in the 1990s. According to Lenz, American Studies had become an intellectually useless tool of American imperialism and was revitalized through British cultural studies, critiques of U.S. imperialism and border discourses of the Americas. Lenz pleads for an understanding of American culture as "multiplicitous, inherently differentiated and conflicted, and always changing in active responses to alternative, multicultural, and intercultural experiences and discourses."<sup>4</sup> It is in this context that I see transatlantic

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Charters, *The Roots of Blues: An African Search* (New York: Putnam, 1981) and Gerhard Kubik, *Africa and the Blues* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Günther H. Lenz, "Towards a Dialogics of International American Culture Studies: Transnationality, Border Discourses, and Public Culture(s)," in *The Futures of American Studies*, ed. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 461-485.

movements of blues cultures in the 1960s — not as the one-directional flows of culture from Africa to the U.S. and eventually to Europe but as the complex interchanges of European and European American cultures with those of the "Black Atlantic," to borrow Paul Gilroy's term.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of transnational American Studies, German representations of blackness, in particular as they relate to African Americans, have become a topic worthy of examination. As Sander Gilman points out, conceptualizations of blackness had formed in Germany in the 18th and 19th centuries despite a conspicuous absence of "black" people in the country.<sup>6</sup> German colonial rule in African countries led up to the explosion of racist ideology during the Nazi era. After World War II, the stereotyping of black bodies continued relatively unabated, even in supposedly "progressive" circles. Sabine Broeck has critically examined the representation of blackness in writings of the post-war German intelligentsia and their lack of historical contextualization. Drawing on Hortense Spiller, Broeck compares these representations to Abolitionist discourses:

German progressives did not devise a critical epistemology which could have taken German anti-black racism, Germany's role in the history of the slave trade and colonialism, actual German implications in an international black diaspora, and a self-critical reading of white hegemony into account.<sup>7</sup>

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A good indication for the trend in American Studies to consider transnational issues are the presidential addresses of the annual American Studies Association conference, which since the mid-1990s began to acknowledge transnationality, and, in 2006, even made it the theme of the conference.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *On Blackness Without Blacks: Essays on the Image of the Black in Germany* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982).

<sup>7</sup> Sabine Broeck, "The Erotics of African-American Endurance, Or: On the Right Side of History? White (West-) German Public Sentiment Between Pornotroping and Civil Rights Solidarity," (unpublished manuscript, 2006).

Instead of devising a critical epistemology, German leftists of the 1960s and 1970s — including the promoters of the American Folk Blues Festival — became fascinated with the "black embodiment of suffering" and blacks' "overwhelming, yet powerless presence, and [their] assumed visceral, charismatic energies."<sup>8</sup> This process is what Detlef Siegfried, in his critical analysis of West German counterculture's constructions of blackness and blues in the 1960s, has called the "fascination with the real."<sup>9</sup>

Until greater numbers of West Africans began immigrating in the 1980s, the largest presence of actual blacks in Germany had been African American GIs (and, as I will show later, they became entangled in the racialized construction of the American Folk Blues Festival). Between 1951 and the early 1990s, roughly 250,000 U.S. soldiers were stationed in Western Germany at a time, about 20% of which were African American.<sup>10</sup> In the immediate post-war years, "fraternization" or any contact between Germans and GIs was outlawed, but these regulations could not be upheld and were eventually overruled. It is quite remarkable that despite the explicitly anti-racist politics of post-fascist Germany, "fraternization" between white American GIs and German women became somewhat acceptable but sexual relationships between African American GIs and German women were vilified, echoing pre-war racism like the forced sterilization of children from German women and Senegalese soldiers who had been part of the French army occupying the Rhineland in the 1920s.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Detlef Siegfried, *Time Is On My Side: Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahre* (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Ute G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2000), 34; Signe Seiler, *Die GIs* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1985), 50.

<sup>11</sup> Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). For an account of the children that resulted out of relationships between German women and "black" GIs, see Heide



My own analysis of the American Folk Blues Festival in Germany addresses not only the complicated transnational movements of U.S. culture (in this case, blues music) and their indebtedness to a "Black Atlantic" but also the problematic racialist and occasionally downright racist construction of blackness by German "progressives" like Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau. To understand the motivation of the concert promoters for utilizing black music to "denazify" and modernize Germany, it is necessary to present a brief history of jazz before, during and immediately after the Nazi era. For Lippmann and Rau and, perhaps to a lesser degree, for the many people that populated their concerts, jazz and later blues became the catalyst for individuality and democracy. Like Eric Clapton, they had to appropriate an authenticated black culture to find their own identities in a reconstructed Germany after World War II.

#### Jazz and the Nazis<sup>12</sup>

Jazz music proliferated in Germany in the wake of World War I as popular dances like the cakewalk, the foxtrot and the charleston swept the country and suggested a modernizing liberation of the body.<sup>13</sup> In the 1920s, U.S. jazz orchestras toured Germany, and native composers like Kurt Weill, Paul Hindemith, and Hans Eisler began incorporating jazz into their compositions. Jazz was also a major influence on the

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Fehrenbach, *Race After Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> For the historical data on jazz in Germany, I am drawing on the following: Horst H. Lange, *Jazz in Deutschland: Die deutsche Jazz-Chronik 1900-1960* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1966); Michael Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Horst J.P. Bergmeier and Rainer E. Lotz, *Hitler's Airwaves: The Inside Story of Nazi Radio Broadcasting and Propaganda Swing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Michael J. Budds, ed., *Jazz and the Germans: Essays on the Influence of 'Hot' American Idioms on 20th-Century German Music* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Berndt Ostendorf, "From Liberating Modernism to Subversive Reeducation? The Impact of Jazz on European Culture" in *Americanization - Globalization - Education*, ed. Gerhard Bach, Sabine Broeck, and Ulf Schulenberg (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003), 35-57.

successful vocal group Comedian Harmonists and was popularly featured in Ernst Krenek's opera *Jonny spielt auf* (1927), which drew heavily on stereotypical representations of blackness, and in Joseph von Sternberg's movie *The Blue Angel* (1930) starring Marlene Dietrich and the jazz group Weintraub Syncopators. Conservatives criticized what they saw as Germany's Americanization and feminization through jazz as "Girrkultur."<sup>14</sup>

Despite attempts to suppress the music, jazz, in particular big-band swing, survived and flourished underground during the Nazi era. Due to its popularity and the difficulty of classifying it, jazz was never officially banned, although U.S. musicians ceased to perform in Germany and some "non-Aryan" performers like Benny Goodman were put on the index. The most visible act of suppressing jazz was the 1938 exhibition of "degenerate music" in Munich, the poster for which linked Jewish and African American art by showing the caricature of a black man resembling a monkey, playing a saxophone and wearing the Star of David.<sup>15</sup> The police also cracked down on swing fans in Hamburg and deported some members of the decidedly cosmopolitan *Swingjugend* ("swing youth") to concentration camps in 1940. Yet, the Nazis also cultivated jazz-like dance music to entertain and distract the troops and the civilian population during the war, replacing swing's brass section with violins and thereby softening and "Germanizing" the music.<sup>16</sup>

After World War II, modern jazz fans evolved as an upper-middle-class subculture. Occasionally mingling with American GIs in nightclubs called *Jazzkeller*

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<sup>14</sup> Manuela Thurner, *Girrkultur and Kulturfeminismus: Gender and Americanism in Weimar Germany, 1918-1933*, Ph.D. thesis (New Haven: Yale University, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Budds, *Jazz and the Germans*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, 23.

("jazz basements") and listening to the American Forces Network (AFN),<sup>17</sup> these young Germans understood jazz as an anti-fascist and anti-racist strategy.<sup>18</sup> Reinhold Wagnleitner claims that jazz, as part of a larger absorption of U.S. popular culture in post-war Europe, served as a rebellion against cultural elites through Americanization in the "Cool War."<sup>19</sup> However, in their attempts to make the music respectable, jazz fans created new cultural hierarchies and were possibly even rebelling against the feminization of popular culture through rock and roll, whose working-class female fans were challenging gender norms at dances, concerts and in the streets.<sup>20</sup>

### Denazification and Jazz Respectability<sup>21</sup>

Jazz during and immediately after World War II shaped the socialization of Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau significantly. Lippmann, born March 17th, 1927 in Eisenach, grew up as the only son of a wealthy Jew who owned the Hotel Continental in downtown Frankfurt. In 1941, Lippmann, along with Carlo Bohländer and Emil Mangelsdorff, founded the illegal Hot Club Frankfurt and held jazz concerts at his father's restaurant. Lippmann was arrested by the Gestapo after publishing a jazz newsletter with listings of swing shows on BBC London and Radio Stockholm. Lippmann spent a few days in jail,

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<sup>17</sup> AFN, although aimed at the U.S. armed forces, had an audience of 90% Germans. See Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 41.

<sup>18</sup> Ostendorf, "From Liberating Modernism."

<sup>19</sup> Reinhold Wagnleitner, "The Empire of Fun, or Talkin' Soviet Union Blues: The Sound of Freedom and U.S. Cultural Hegemony in Europe," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 499-524.

<sup>20</sup> Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*.

<sup>21</sup> For biographical details on Lippmann and Rau, see Fritz Rau, *50 Jahre Backstage: Erinnerungen eines Konzertveranstalters* (Heidelberg: Palmyra, 2005); Barry Graves, Siegfried Schmidt-Joos, and Bernward Halbscheffel, ed., *Das neue Rocklexikon*, vol. 1 (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1998), 538-540; Kathrin Brigl and Siegfried Schmidt-Joos, *Fritz Rau: Buchhalter der Träume* (Berlin: Quadriga, 1985).

was released when he became seriously ill and hid in a friend's basement for the last months of the war. After the war, he played drums for the Two Beat Stompers, hosted a show on AFN and began promoting jazz from Germany and the U.S. It was Lippmann who organized the first American jazz concert on German soil after World War II (Coleman Hawkins in 1948) and who founded the seminal jazz festival in Frankfurt (in 1951), which has continued to this day. For Lippmann, there was an unequivocal connection between the plight of Jews and African Americans, and being persecuted by the Nazis made him an undisputed authority on what he viewed as the music of an oppressed minority. In a 1997 radio interview, Lippmann recounts how black Americans protected him at a B.B. King show in Chicago in 1961 against the attacks of one black man. He explains what he perceives as his affinity to black Americans with his own experiences in Germany during the war, "where we also lived in a quasi-ghetto in opposition to the almighty Nazi regime."<sup>22</sup>

The story of Fritz Rau's early life could hardly appear more different. Rau, who was born March 16th, 1930 in Pforzheim as an only child, lost both his parents at a young age and moved to Berlin in 1940 to live with his older half-brother Walter and his wife. Walter Rau owned a textile factory and was a consultant for military apparel for the Nazis. He carried the title of *Wehrwirtschaftsführer* ("military economy leader") and was a good friend of Albert Speer, Adolf Hitler's chief architect. The young Fritz joined the Hitler Youth and was excited about the prospect of fighting in the war for Germany. After 1945, Rau discovered swing and modern jazz, which he listened to on the radio and at the club Cave 54 in Heidelberg, where Rau worked as a bookkeeper to finance his law school education. Rau has repeatedly described his "rebirth" through jazz, which served for him as an "embodiment of freedom, individuality, and humanity, the polar opposite of

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<sup>22</sup> Horst Lippmann, "Sonnabend nacht auf 88 acht," radio interview, SFB, November 22, 1997. The translations of these and other quotations from the German in this chapter are my own.

what National Socialism stood for."<sup>23</sup> For Rau, jazz was the "denazification of body and soul."<sup>24</sup>

Different as their stories may seem, Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau had both experienced jazz as a tool of denazification and believed in its potential to augment the liberation of Germany. Lippmann and Rau had also both grown up in wealthy capitalist families. Both factors contributed to their collaborative work as concert promoters between 1955 and 1974, which began with organizing the "Jazz at the Philharmonic" concerts of American impresario Norman Granz in Germany. Through Granz, Lippmann and Rau were able to present Oscar Peterson, Ella Fitzgerald, Lester Young, Dizzy Gillespie and Benny Goodman on their first German concert dates. In 1957, Lippmann and Rau began promoting jazz concerts on their own, including those of aspiring German artists like the trombone player Albert Mangelsdorff. In their attempt to raise jazz to upper-middle-class respectability, they employed abstract art to advertise the shows and made sure the artists played in symphony halls and wore tuxedos. As Rau noted about their presentation of the Modern Jazz Quartet in Frankfurt:

For us, the Modern Jazz Quartet was the best way of demonstrating how to become liberated. Even judges who had previously labeled Louis Armstrong as an evil Negro promoting uninhibited sexuality could not resist this sophisticated quartet that could easily live up to the quality of European classical concerts. [...] It was our intention to alter the cultural landscape of Germany by promoting jazz, and we accomplished that.<sup>25</sup>

Here, Rau explicitly refers to the liberation of Nazi ideology through the modernity of American jazz, which could appeal to an upper-middle-class sensibility informed by

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<sup>23</sup> Rau, *50 Jahre Backstage*, 35.

<sup>24</sup> Rau quoted in Brigl and Schmidt-Joos, *Buchhalter der Träume*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

standards of European high art.<sup>26</sup> In their presentation of the American Folk Blues Festival, Lippmann and Rau would maintain some of these elements — namely, the setting in symphony halls and the requirement for the artists to dress formally — but they also reverted to some of the primitivizing stereotypes they had been so adamant in rebelling against.

### The American Folk Blues Festival Takes Off

Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau developed the American Folk Blues Festival in cooperation with German jazz authority Joachim-Ernst Berendt, who hosted the bi-monthly TV show *Jazz gehört und gesehen* ("Jazz Seen and Heard") and, after spending four months in Chicago in 1960, had raved about the local blues scene and had suggested to bring some of the artists over to Germany. Berendt, the leading jazz authority in Germany due to his seminal *Jazz Book* from 1952 and his broadcasts on TV and radio network SWF (Südwestfunk), had already promoted his view of blues as the organic root of jazz music in a 1957 essay. For Berendt, blues music's "archaic ur-world of love"<sup>27</sup> offered a rejuvenating pre-modern source for over-fed Germans in the wake of the economic miracle:

The complete absence of any awkwardness in the way blues deals with love is almost shocking in the world of our European morality clichés. [...] Blues has a superior unsentimental greatness and strength of emotion and passion that in this country we only know from the works of "great literature."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Lippmann's and Rau's employment of jazz in the context of post-war Germany compares nicely with the international jazz tours of the 1950s and 1960s which were funded by the U.S. State Department and sought to promote American democracy abroad. In both cases, jazz was implemented as a tool of liberation by ignoring the subtle ironies of the music's racial politics. See Penny M. von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Joachim-Ernst Berendt, *Blues: Ein Essay* (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1957), 22.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

Here, Berendt is setting the tone for the American Folk Blues Festival: blues appears as the primitivized precursor of jazz, which ironically is legitimized in terms of high art respectability — hence the comparison to European literature. Berendt reinforced his maintaining of cultural hierarchies by dismissing rock and roll as a bastardized and commercialized form of blues.<sup>29</sup>

The appearances of the blues musicians in Joachim-Ernst Berendt's TV show secured the funding for the American Folk Blues Festival, advertised as "a documentation of the authentic blues with the best blues artists of America in concert."<sup>30</sup> The festival began as a three-week tour through symphony halls in Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland and England in 1962 and was expanded up to six weeks and appearances from Helsinki to Barcelona in the following years. In notable difference to the Newport Folk Festival, the concerts were held indoors and limited to a capacity of 1,800 to 2,500, therefore trading a proper festival atmosphere with upper-class respectability.<sup>31</sup> They would generally last three to four hours, featuring eight to ten headliners backed by the

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<sup>29</sup> Joachim-Ernst Berendt maintained his romanticized (and masculinized) view of blues music as the American Folk Blues Festival was underway. In an announcement for the first festival, Berendt quotes the French blues connoisseur Jacques Demétre to explain why European audiences are interested in the blues: "In European countries, art has become too intellectual, too 'classical' and too removed from the true essence of folk art." Joachim-Ernst Berendt, "Zwien präsentiert: American Folk Blues Festival," *Twen* 4, no. 10 (October 1962): 54-56; 82. The quote is on page 54. And in an essay entitled "About the Blues" for the 1963 program book, Berendt notes, "In the world of blues there is a congruence between the man and his life which otherwise cannot be found in our society anymore." Joachim-Ernst Berendt, "About the Blues," *American Folk Blues Festival 1963* program book).

<sup>30</sup> The 1962 concert series was billed as "American Negro Folk Blues Festival," which was shortened to "American Folk Blues Festival" the following year. Similar to the Newport Folk Festival, the term "folk" conveyed non-commercial authenticity, but Lippmann and Rau were pioneers in championing the term "blues" to promote their concerts (and choosing exclusively performers that they saw as representing this genre).

<sup>31</sup> Willie Dixon, with Don Snowden, *I Am the Blues* (London: Quartet Books, 1989), 122. Chris Strachwitz, who attended both the American Folk Music Festival and the Newport Folk Festival, remembers the atmosphere in Germany as "more formal," which produced "difficulties" for the participating musicians. Chris Strachwitz, personal communication, December 13, 2006.

same rhythm section or playing on their own. The best-documented and most successful period of the American Folk Blues Festival was between 1962 and 1965 but Lippmann and Rau continued to promote the event each year until 1970 and again in 1972, 1980 through 1983 and in 1985 on a smaller scale with virtually unknown blues musicians.<sup>32</sup>

The roster for the American Folk Blues Festival in the early years included some of the top blues performers from Chicago, including Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf, Otis Spann, and Eddie Boyd, as well as other blues luminaries like Big Mama Thornton, Big Joe Turner, T-Bone Walker, and John Lee Hooker. This was made possible through Horst Lippmann's close cooperation with Willie Dixon, who had worked in multiple functions for the Chess label and, as producer, bass player and composer of songs like "Hoochie Koochie Man" and "Evil," had helped to create the Chicago blues sound in the 1950s. With his central role in the Chicago blues scene as well as his experiences in international traveling (he had played in England in 1959 and Israel in 1960), Dixon became as indispensable for Lippmann and Rau as he had been for Leonard and Phil Chess. Dixon's duties included arranging birth certificates and passports for the musicians, making sure the band showed up on the airport on time, and rehearsing the show. After the 1964 festival, Dixon decided to stay in Chicago but remained Horst Lippmann's consultant for the bookings of artists.

Through Willie Dixon's input, the performers featured at the American Folk Blues Festival represented a slightly more contemporary selection of blues artists than the

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to the official American Folk Blues Festivals, some of the performers played gigs in different constellations in smaller jazz clubs throughout Germany. For instance, two non-commercially recorded concerts at the Jazzhaus Wiesbaden from November 1963 and November 1964 featuring Willie Dixon, Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf and others show the musicians perform in a much looser atmosphere to a quite raucous crowd. These appearances, however, are not representative for the American Folk Blues Festivals at large. The CDs "American Folk Blues Festival 1963" and "American Folk Blues Festival 1964" are part of the Günter Boas collection at the International Jazz and Blues Archive Eisenach, Germany. Lore Boas confirms the looseness of the American Folk Blues Festival's offshoots. Lore Boas, personal communication, December 12, 2006.



"rediscovered" blues artists at Newport but, with a few exceptions like Buddy Guy and Matt Murphy, most of the musicians were in their fifties and sixties and had seen better days. Musicians like the toothless and alcoholic Sonny Boy Williamson, Big Joe Williams with his taped-up nine-string guitar or the virtually unknown John Henry Barbee singing "I Ain't Gonna Pick No More Cotton" guaranteed a folk authenticity for European blues fans that was far removed from current trends in African American music, as was the music of Lightnin' Hopkins, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, who had adapted acoustic "folk blues" to suit their "white" audiences in the U.S. Some singers, like Sippie Wallace, Victoria Spivey and Lonnie Johnson, had had their biggest successes in the 1920s. It was therefore only slightly tongue-in-cheek when in 1963 Memphis Slim introduced fellow pianist Otis Spann as "a young man we call the future of the blues because he's young in the business. He's only been playing and singing the blues for twenty-five years."<sup>33</sup>

#### The American Folk Festival's Reception in Germany

In particular in its first three years of existence, the American Folk Blues Festival was reviewed enthusiastically by both audiences and the press. A good example is an article by Dieter Zimmerle in Germany's leading jazz magazine *Jazz Podium*, in which he described the massive impact of what he called "the most important jazz event of 1962" for the recognition of blues in Germany. He went on,

These seasoned blues musicians superbly illustrated the multi-faceted ways of performing the folk music of the American Negro population. Powerful expression, a feeling for swing and improvisation but also naïveté and a tendency for showmanship, rough humor and grotesque are second nature to these people in such a unique way that there is hardly any doubt after attending the concert that this music may appeal to everybody and is therefore not out of place in this country but that this particular kind of

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<sup>33</sup> Memphis Slim quoted in *American Folk Blues Festival 1962-1966, Vol. 1*, DVD, directed by Horst Lippmann (Santa Monica, CA: Reelin' in the Years, 2003).

music can only be performed by those who are inextricably linked with it: such colored/colorful musicians (*farbige Musikanten*) as we were introduced to. You can't imitate them but you can learn a lot from them and their blues.<sup>34</sup>

Zimmerle explains the appeal of the concerts not so much with the musical qualities of the "colorful" musicians but rather with their "primitive" performing styles. The "Othering" of the blues musicians makes it impossible to fully identify with their music, therefore the audience becomes incapable of imitating their "blackness" and is left to stare in wonder and amazement.

Similar sentiments appear in statements by the mostly male older jazz fans and younger blues enthusiasts who attended the concerts. Asked about what impressed them most about the American Folk Blues Festival, Peter Turczak mentions the "incredible naturalness of the musicians."<sup>35</sup> Marita Letherby adds "spontaneity" and "emotionality,"<sup>36</sup> and Egbert Theissen recounts adoring the musicians' "authenticity," as "the people on stage clearly had the license to play the blues."<sup>37</sup> For Walter Liniger, "the music rolled over me and sucked me into a world of previously experienced fantasy. The musicians proved once again that my valuable record collection existed."<sup>38</sup> In all of these accounts, the presentation on stage reified stereotypes of blues music as exotic and primitive and brought about the realization of a "fantasy" as Liniger calls it. It is therefore hardly an understatement when Konrad Heidkamp remembers the concerts as being

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<sup>34</sup> Dieter Zimmerle, "American Folk Blues Festival 1962" in *Jazz Podium* 11, no. 10/11 (October/November 1962): 237.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Turczak, Sr., e-mail to the author, September 15, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Marita Letherby, e-mail to the author, September 16, 2006.

<sup>37</sup> Egbert Theissen, e-mail to the author, September 25, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Liniger, "Vorhang auf!" (unpublished manuscript, International Jazz and Blues Archive Eisenach, Germany).

deeply colonialist at heart: "After the Africans and the Indians of the 19th century now America's Negroes as they sing, dance and try to save their traditions."<sup>39</sup>

### Lippmann's and Rau's Blues Gets Challenged

Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau were catering to such audience expectations of blues as simple, raw and uninhibited. Rau has repeatedly proclaimed his vision of blues as "folk music of an underprivileged black minority"<sup>40</sup> or as "music of the black ghettos" reflecting "a deep feeling of desperation."<sup>41</sup> In their romanticization of blues, Lippmann and Rau made no qualms about their racialist view of the artists they presented. As the promoters put it in the liner notes for the recording of the 1964 festival,

[The musicians] can be sure [...] of the sympathy of European concert-goers. For above all — and beyond the artistic substance — it is the plain, genuine humanity of the message they proclaim, a message that does not pass the intellect first, but appeals directly to the heart.<sup>42</sup>

This primitivist view of blues, in which Lippmann and Rau echoed Joachim-Ernst Berendt's comments from seven years earlier, clashed with some of the performance practices of the musicians, such as T-Bone Walker's outrageous guitar acrobatics or Sonny Boy Williamson's refusal to play a predetermined set.<sup>43</sup> In 1962, Horst Lippmann had instructed the musicians to refrain from any disrespectable performance styles:

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<sup>39</sup> Konrad Heidkamp, "Einen Blues spielte er nicht. Er spielte den Blues" (unpublished manuscript, International Jazz and Blues Archive Eisenach, Germany).

<sup>40</sup> Rau quoted in "Blues Before Sunrise: Die Konzertveranstalter Horst Lippmann und Fritz Rau schrieben ein dickes Kapitel Popmusikgeschichte," Rauhut and Kochan, *Bye Bye Lübben City*, 326.

<sup>41</sup> Fritz Rau, personal communication, June 2, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau, *American Folk Blues Festival 1964*, LP liner notes, (Fontana, 1964).

<sup>43</sup> As Chris Strachwitz remembers, "thanks to the professionals like Willie Dixon and his Chicago contingent, Horst [Lippmann] could usually rely on them to perform a pre-arranged set of songs in a consistent manner. The same could not be said of Sonny Boy Williamson who would have different ideas every time and actually gave some of his best performances, totally

Before we started the tour, I held a meeting. I told the blues people, "You are now here in a different area. You're not back in America anymore, where you have to use gimmicks to entertain the people. What we want to do is just bring your message as a blues singer, as a blues artist. You don't have to play the guitar backwards, or with your feet, or with your tongue. Just play the blues." For some, it was very difficult to understand this.<sup>44</sup>

As Lippmann elaborated, European audiences preferred the atmosphere of a classical concert to that of a Chicago blues club and wanted to sit down, "hear the music and see the artist."<sup>45</sup> For the most part, the musicians who played at the American Folk Blues Festivals heeded Lippmann's advice. The majority of the filmed performances show the musicians playing sedate slow blues and toned-down solos with the audience sitting down, listening attentively and occasionally clapping along — sometimes throwing the musicians off by hitting the downbeat instead of the offbeat or by chuckling sheepishly when addressed from the stage.<sup>46</sup>

While most of the musicians quickly adapted to the expected performance style, it proved more difficult for others. Karlheinz Drechsel, who hosted the concerts in East Germany in 1964, remembers being thrown off by Howlin' Wolf's "green glitter jacket

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improvised but X-rated, on the bus from the airport to our hotel in Munich" Chris Strachwitz, "The Blues: Then and Now" (unpublished manuscript, International Jazz and Blues Archive Eisenach, Germany).

<sup>44</sup> Lippmann quoted in Bill Dahl, *American Folk Blues Festival 'Sixty Two to 'Sixty Five*, CD box set liner notes (Evidence, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> In a review of Koko Taylor's performance at the 1967 festival in Berlin, Helmut Hilbert and Peter van Spall wrote, "The 'chico beat' inspired one to clap along. This initially sounded like applause. Because the audience couldn't agree on the beat, they ended up clapping on the 'one.' [...] Young Germans' sense of rhythm seems to be fueled by the march rather than jazz" Helmut Hilbert and Peter van Spall, "American Folk Blues Festival '67," *Jazz Podium* 16, no.11 (November 1967): 322-323, 323. Buddy Guy remembers the European audiences as "so fucking quiet. When you finished a song, that's when you got this great big hand like you was listening at a symphony orchestra or something. And when they finished [clapping] — Boom! — you don't hear shit. You could drop almost a napkin on the floor and hear it! That was amazing to me!" Buddy Guy quoted in Rob Bowman, *The American Folk Blues Festival, 1962-1969, Vol. 3*, DVD booklet (Santa Monica, CA: Reelin' in the Years, 2004).

and amplifier" which did not agree with the "simple performance" he was expecting and instead "appeared like Wolf was putting on a show that was insincere."<sup>47</sup> That Lippmann's and Rau's back-dated vision of blues was at odds with African American music and politics of the 1960s became painfully obvious when the young Buddy Guy — who apparently had not received Lippmann's briefing — got booed for playing a medley of James Brown's "Out of Sight" and "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" and dancing around on stage in 1965. As Guy remembers,

I was here in Chicago and every joint we played in had a juke box and if you couldn't play those Top 10 numbers on the juke box, you wasn't gonna play in this club! So, that's what had me doing the James Brown. I didn't know what the fuck is going on in Europe. I've never been there before. Didn't nobody come up and tell me, "Hey, man, you gotta play blues!"<sup>48</sup>

In his review of the festival's appearance in Britain for *Blues World*, Bob Groom described Buddy Guy as "perhaps the most controversial figure of the whole tour." According to Groom, "some loved it calling it the best contemporary blues ever performed in this country. Others found the exaggerated actions and singing very distasteful."<sup>49</sup> For Lippmann and Rau and significant parts of the European audiences, the explosive rhythms of James Brown did not count as authentic black music. They did not want a "brand new bag" but the same old blues, played plainly and without "gimmicks." After getting negative reactions for playing the James Brown songs, Buddy Guy dropped them and played exclusively 12 bar blues for the rest of the tour.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Karlheinz Drechsel, personal communication, December 14, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Guy quoted in Bowman, *The American Folk Blues Festival*.

<sup>49</sup> Bob Groom, "Editorial" in *Blues World* 5 (November 1965): 2.

<sup>50</sup> In his critique of the American Folk Blues Festival from the following year, Bob Groom expressed his rejection of what he perceived as watered-down blues in the form of soul music much more openly when he criticized Junior Wells' "ending up with his James Brown act as expected. It was evident that Wells is rapidly deserting his Blues style for the currently popular 'Soul' vogue. While regretting this I do not begrudge him a share of the Pop music cake if he can get it" Bob Groom, "Editorial," *Blues World* 11 (November 1966): 3.

Although Buddy Guy eventually adapted to the expectations of his European audiences, his performance of James Brown songs can be seen as one of the ways the participating musicians resisted the clichéd conceptualization of blues they encountered, according to which the music was inherently plaintive and archaic. Other examples include the musicians' clowning around on stage (newspaper accounts of the festival routinely note that, against expectations to the contrary, the musicians appeared upbeat and lively<sup>51</sup>), the performance of novelty songs like Willie Dixon's "Nervous" and fiery rock and roll like Matt Murphy's "Guitar Boogie," and the occasional display of flashy clothes and suggestive dance moves. Like the blues performances at the Newport Folk Festival, the museumization of the music endorsed by the cultural brokers and audiences was challenged repeatedly by the objects of their desires.

### The Aesthetic Conceptualization of the American Folk

#### Blues Festival

The ideological configuration of the American Folk Blues Festival is evident in Horst Lippmann's and Fritz Rau's choice of participating musicians and in the instructions they gave them. The emphasis on "traditional" performers playing authenticated plain music, preferably without putting on a gimmicky "show," revealed a persistent primitivism within the highbrow setting of symphony halls in which the concerts took place. There was some conflict in this ideological construction between blues serving as a modernizing force in post-war Germany and blues being a Rousseauian source of untainted humanism. To further probe into the racial politics that informed the American Folk Blues Festival, it is helpful to turn to its aesthetic conceptualization by Günther Kieser, who was employed by Lippmann and Rau to develop the set design for

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<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, Brigitte Weckelmann, "Gesang von Haß und Lebensfreude: 'American Folk Blues Festival' gastierte mit elf Musikern in Iserlohn," *Westfalenpost* 252 (October 28, 1965).

the performances on stage and in the studio as well as the artwork for the festival's posters, program books and recordings.

Günther Kieser was born on March 24th, 1930 in Kronberg.<sup>52</sup> Like Fritz Rau, who was born a mere eight days earlier, Kieser became interested in jazz music immediately after World War II and acknowledges the music's liberating qualities but rejects Rau's notion of a "denazification" through jazz, a term he would only apply to the reeducation of Nazi criminals. After studying graphic design in Offenbach, he began working for Horst Lippmann in 1952 and developed what he called "visual music design." Drawing on 19th and early 20th century European poster art, Kieser created emblematic collages in which he mixed painting, sculpture, photography and graphic art in an attempt to visualize layers of musical sound. When Lippmann and Rau hired Kieser to design the sets, program books and posters for the American Folk Blues Festival, he had already earned a reputation for the jazz artwork he had created in the form of album covers and set designs for TV productions.

For the American Folk Blues Festival, Günther Kieser chose the guitar as leitmotif on all posters and album covers, foreshadowing the rise of the guitar-as-fetish in the reception of "white" blues fans (and performers like Eric Clapton) with the simultaneous devaluation of vocal blues styles. Around the leitmotif of the guitar, in "earthy" brown tones or black-and-white, Kieser placed different anonymous black bodies resembling 19th and 20th century stereotypes like Mammy and Sambo as well as old-fashioned Americana like steam engines, stagecoaches and riverboats. The participating musicians were not depicted but only announced with Western-style lettering. Kieser's curious blend of Southern and Western iconography, coupled with the

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<sup>52</sup> For Günther Kieser's biography and the analysis of his work, I am drawing on my interviews with him. Günther Kieser, personal communication, June 3, 2006 and September 12, 2006.

romantic primitivism of German Expressionism<sup>53</sup>, visually supported the American Folk Blues Festival's non-threatening, nostalgic (or even anachronistic) conceptualization.

In the later years of the festival, Günther Kieser further developed the leitmotif of the guitar through the sexualization of black female bodies (hands touching the strings in 1969; the guitar as female torso in 1972), a superficial nod to the Civil Rights Movement (the strings as prison bars with a black dove in the foreground in 1970) and more examples of racial stereotypes (a black Uncle Sam with exaggerated facial features in 1980). In his work outside of the American Folk Blues Festival, Kieser continued to depict his fascination with the Other with blacks oftentimes prominently featured as "naturalized" messengers of peace. Kieser's poster for the Berlin Jazz Festival in 1994 drew the criticism from participating African American jazz musicians who were offended by its big-lip caricature.<sup>54</sup>

In the elaborate stage designs Günther Kieser created for the live shows and the TV productions of the American Folk Festival between 1962 and 1965, the blues musicians stumbled through recreated juke joints, saloons and nightclubs. Kieser used a mix of pictures he had taken on trips to Chicago and rural Mississippi and studio props like furniture, barrels, palm trees and American cars to stage the "authentic representation of American musicians."<sup>55</sup> As a supplement for what Fritz Rau has called his "truthfulness to style"<sup>56</sup> but what might be more adequately called a museumization of blues, Kieser even used live black bodies to authenticate the recreated blues world for the

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<sup>53</sup> See Jost Hermand, "Artificial Atavism: German Expressionism and Blacks" in *Blacks and German Culture*, ed. Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

<sup>54</sup> James T. Jones IV, "Racism and Jazz: Same as it Ever Was... or Worse?," *Jazz Times* (March 1995): 52-61.

<sup>55</sup> Günther Kieser, personal communication (September 12, 2006).

<sup>56</sup> Rau quoted in Brigl and Schmidt-Joos, *Buchhalter der Träume*, 72.



1962 TV production. To avoid the lifeless German audience that populated the actual concerts, African American GIs who were stationed in Germany along with their girlfriends and wives were bussed to the TV studio and paid for dancing in front of the cameras.<sup>57</sup> By this display of black bodies on the screen, German audiences watching the show at home were duped into thinking they were watching an authentic "black" concert and that the type of blues presented still had currency among young African Americans. When Lippmann and Rau hesitantly began promoting concerts of soul artists in 1967, they were surprised to find out that it was a majority of African American GIs who purchased tickets for James Brown while at the American Folk Blues Festivals the only black people had been on stage.<sup>58</sup>

#### Lippmann and Rau as Benefactors

Günther Kieser's visualization of the American Folk Blues Festival's racist ideology, in particular his employment of black bodies as a means of authentication, reflected a paternalism also prevalent in Horst Lippmann's and Fritz Rau's interactions with the blues performers they presented. Fashioning themselves as benefactors and protectors of the musicians they employed, Lippmann and Rau developed what jazz pianist Oscar Peterson criticized as an "Uncle Tom mentality."<sup>59</sup> In all fairness, it should be noted that many musicians benefited greatly from Lippmann's and Rau's financial support (and consequently were hesitant to openly support Peterson's critique), but their roles as white mediators and purveyors of black culture in Europe need to be problematized.

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<sup>57</sup> Fritz Rau, personal communication, June 2, 2006.

<sup>58</sup> Rau estimates that out of the 5,000 tickets sold for two James Brown shows, 90% were purchased by African American GIs. Rau, *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Peterson quoted in Rau, *50 Jahre Backstage*, 88.

Remembering the American Folk Blues Festival, Horst Lippmann took pride in the fact that he was able to offer the performing musicians a royal treatment — including luxurious hotels, food and transportation:

To be picked up at the airport — not only at the airport, but on the airfield because we got special permission to have a band, correspondents and television on the airfield treating them like kings and queens. They never expected something like this. Can you imagine, you live on the South Side of Chicago, lucky to make it somehow and then you come by plane to Europe and there is something like a red carpet on the floor? That is something strange. I think with each bluesman, once they came and toured Europe, there had been a sort of pride that they played Europe in front of a white audience and they had been elected to do this. They felt this was a special message they gave to the people.<sup>60</sup>

In this account, Lippmann begins by presenting himself as merely helping the blues royalty to receive their well-earned merits. Yet, he goes on to say that playing in front of European audiences was a privilege for the "bluesmen" (he interestingly leaves out the numerous female blues singers who participated in the festival) that greatly surpassed playing in front of mostly "black" audiences in Chicago. While Lippmann claims to describe the feelings of the blues musicians performing at the American Folk Blues Festival, his account reveals more about his *own* position as a white man "electing" performers to deliver an unspecified "message" to European audiences.

Horst Lippmann's and Fritz Rau's over-protective and patronizing treatment of the blues musicians caused Muddy Waters to complain that he did not need a babysitter: "Don't overdo it! We are not children!"<sup>61</sup> Two examples help to illustrate the questionable role as white mediators and protectors the concert promoters took on while managing the blues artists in Germany. In 1962, after the concert in Kaiserlautern, harmonica player Shakey Jake Harris got arrested for threatening the manager of the

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<sup>60</sup> Lippmann quoted in Dixon, *I Am the Blues*, 131.

<sup>61</sup> Waters quoted in Rau, *50 Jahre Backstage*, 46.

hotel he was staying at with a knife after the manager had refused to let Harris take a German woman up to his hotel room. Rau managed to release Harris by making him play harmonica for the German chief of police.<sup>62</sup> A year later, Sonny Boy Williamson only received a small allowance until the final show of the year. As Horst Lippmann recalls, "At the end of the tour, I handed him a couple of thousand dollars. And he started to cry, because he never thought he'd get all his money."<sup>63</sup> In both cases, the concert promoters did not challenge but rather solidified white power structures by playing up their own privileged position in easily gaining access to power and money.

However, some of the blues musicians promoted by Lippmann and Rau took matters into their own hands and used the concerts as an opportunity to leave the racism of the United States and become expatriates. Memphis Slim stayed in Paris, Eddie Boyd lived in different European countries before settling in Finland, and Sonny Boy Williamson went back and forth between England and the U.S. until his death in 1965. In his song "I'm Trying to Make London My Home," which he performed at the American Folk Blues Festival 1964, Williamson declared, "I put in my application for my citizenship people, I'm going back to London for sure / Because if the good Lord let me live I'm not going back to the States no more." Not explicitly referring to racism he nonetheless quipped, "the people back in the United States I declare they just don't know what in the world is going on," whereas the Brits "treat you so warm and so cool and so kind."<sup>64</sup>

The ambiguity expressed throughout Sonny Boy Williamson's song, in particular in the expression "so warm and so cool," as well as the fact that Williamson died in

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<sup>62</sup> Rau, *50 Jahre Backstage*, 44-45.

<sup>63</sup> Lippmann quoted in Dahl, *American Folk Blues Festival*.

<sup>64</sup> Sonny Boy Williamson, "I'm Trying to Make London My Home," *American Folk Blues Festival 1964*, LP, (Fontana, 1964).

Arkansas and not in London hint at a different reality than Lippmann's and Rau's overtly positive evaluation of the artists' experiences in Germany. Willie Dixon, acknowledging his gratitude for the hospitality and the generous financial support he received, nonetheless points out that, "there wasn't very many black people over there so occasionally, a lot of people would point at you or something, which makes you wonder what the hell they were talking about"<sup>65</sup> and did not return after 1964. Sugar Pie De Santo recalls being treated "like royalty," but was also slightly disconcerted by the audience's taste for nothing but "plain old blues" and notes, "we brought them what they wanted to hear."<sup>66</sup> Lonnie Johnson complained, "Man, they want me to play all this stuff I recorded in 1925... That was a long time ago!"<sup>67</sup> Len Kunststadt, who accompanied Victoria Spivey on the 1963 tour, remembers, "A lot of the artists were bewildered by it. A lot of them were suspicious of what was going on."<sup>68</sup> Both Lore Boas and Stephanie Wiesand, who belonged to the small group of Germans who, in addition to Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau, were in close contact with the musicians of the American Folk Blues Festival, remember their initial shyness. Whereas Boas notes the "sharp sense of humor" the musicians displayed, Wiesand recalls being face-painted with black chalk because the musicians "didn't like white people that much."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Dixon, *I Am the Blues*, 128.

<sup>66</sup> Sugar Pie De Santo, personal communication, December 21, 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Johnson quoted in Dave van Ronk, *The Mayor of MacDougal Street: A Memoir* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005).

<sup>68</sup> Kunststadt quoted in Dixon, *I Am the Blues*, 131.

<sup>69</sup> Lore Boas, personal communication, December 12, 2006; Stephanie Wiesand, personal communication, December 12, 2006. Stephanie Wiesand, who worked as a photographer for the festival, suffered directly from racism when she was laid off by the German TV station Südwestfunk (SWF) after her affair with blues singer Lightnin' Hopkins. Reinhard Lorenz, personal communication, November 29, 2006.

Because of the scarcity of comments by participating musicians about the American Folk Blues Festival, it is difficult to come to any definitive conclusions about their assessment of their European tours. However, it is apparent that despite their gratitude about being treated like royalty and receiving large sums of money, at least some of the musicians were puzzled and offended by the racist behavior they encountered (such as the finger-pointing Willie Dixon mentions), by the conservative expectations of their audiences who demanded the same old blues, and by the occasionally patronizing attitude of their "benefactors" Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau.

### Playing it Safe

Because of Horst Lippmann's and Fritz Rau's conviction that black music could serve as an anti-racist and anti-fascist strategy in post-war Germany, the American Folk Blues Festival had been conceived as a catalyst for societal change from the start. Lippmann and Rau did not simply want to educate Germans and other Europeans about an underrepresented musical tradition but also about means of protesting the powers that be. As I have pointed out, this mission oftentimes conflicted with Lippmann's and Rau's racialized and even racist conceptualization of blues, with their ignorance of then-current African American music and politics and with their role as "benefactors" and "protectors" of the musicians they employed. As the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. became even more widely publicized — with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and the Birmingham church bombing in 1963 — and with the American Folk Blues Festival moving into East Germany and other Eastern European countries, politics of protest became more explicitly expressed in Lippmann's and Rau's work, yet remained within a non-threatening context that failed to challenge the concert promoters' or their audiences' views on "race."

The American Folk Blues Festival tours were expanded to include East Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1964 and went behind the Iron Curtain again in 1966 (and

in 1982, 1983, and 1985). As a non-commercial, alternative form of music (Lippmann had to fund the tours by utilizing the cheap recording facilities in East Berlin, and the artists were not working for a profit), blues could signify either opposition to American racism or a liberating alternative to their own socialist governments to East European audiences. Officially, blues was presented as an implicit critique of U.S. capitalism and therefore in line with East German politics. Karlheinz Drechsel, who hosted the American Folk Blues Festival in East Germany, introduced the concert at the Friedrichstadtpalast in East Berlin by pointing to blues' elements of social critique while simultaneously reiterating romanticizing stereotypes of the music:

Blues is the music of the other America, as we say. Blues is the expression of life, joy, suffering, laughing and crying. The blues has everything. With the blues, humans show their deepest inner self. Blues expresses personal feelings, which always stand in the shadow of racial discrimination. Blues is the artistic product of racial discrimination in the United States and should therefore be an unwelcome occurrence, however, it expresses a healthy America through its critique.<sup>70</sup>

The song that seemed to address blues' political message most explicitly was Junior Wells' "Vietnam Blues," in particular the song's last line, "please help me talk to the president now to send my onliest little brother back home."<sup>71</sup> In the liner notes for the 1966 recording of the festival for the East German record label Amiga, Drechsel praised Junior Wells as the representative of a generation "that no longer sits and waits for civil rights promised to the Negroes but vociferously demands them. With his 'Vietnam Blues,' Junior Wells is in the forefront of the 'other' America's progressive artists."<sup>72</sup> While blues

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<sup>70</sup> Karlheinz Drechsel, stage announcement, *American Folk Blues Festival 1966* (CD in the collection of the Jazz and Blues Archive Eisenach, Germany).

<sup>71</sup> Junior Wells, "Vietnam Blues," *American Folk Blues Festival '66, Vol. 1*, LP (Amiga, 1966).

<sup>72</sup> Karlheinz Drechsel, *American Folk Blues Festival '66, Vol. 1*, LP liner notes (Amiga, 1966).

was ostentatiously in line with official East German politics, the thundering success of the American Folk Blues Festival also had potentially destabilizing elements for the socialist state. As Michael Rauhut has pointed out, blues was endorsed by the East German government and celebrated as music of the oppressed masses in the U.S., but there was also a policing of longhaired blues fans, which were viewed as potential enemies of the state.<sup>73</sup> Looking back on the festival after the end of the Cold War, Drechsel modified his view of blues music's political message and explained why 6,000 people went to the shows at East Berlin's Friedrichstadtpalast on one day in 1966 alone with the music's "oppositional stance" which was "maybe felt more urgently in the East."<sup>74</sup>

For Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau, challenging East German socialism by bringing blues artists over the border was a fairly safe bet since it merely confirmed their own belief in blues music's liberating qualities. This was equally true when in 1965 they began to more explicitly link the American Folk Blues Festival to the American Civil Rights Movement. The program book for the festival from that year featured a picture of three "white" cops beating a "black" man and others of prisons and slums in the U.S. and of Martin Luther King, Jr. The 1965 festival also featured J.B. Lenoir, who had recorded topical blues with social criticism on "Eisenhower Blues" (1954) and "Korea Blues" (1951). Horst Lippmann recorded J.B. Lenoir's albums *Alabama Blues* (1965) and *Down in Mississippi* (1966), which featured songs about the Civil Rights Movement like "Shot

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<sup>73</sup> Michael Rauhut, "Blues in der DDR: Kulturelle Symbolik und politische Interpretation" in *PostScriptum* 8, <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/fpm/popscrip/themen/pst08/Rauhut.htm> (accessed 19 December, 2006). From the mid-1970s on, blues fueled what Rauhut describes as East Germany's most vital and longest living youth subculture: long-haired hippie blues fans known as *Blueser*, *Kunden* or *Tramper*. For a thorough account of this scene, see Rauhut and Kochan, *Bye Bye, Lübben City*.

<sup>74</sup> Karlheinz Drechsel, "Leuchtfeuer" in Rauhut and Kochan, *Bye Bye, Lübben City*, 329.

on James Meredith" and others protesting the war like "Vietnam Blues." In "Alabama Blues," Lenoir proclaimed,

My brother was taken up for my mother, and a police  
officer shot him down

My brother was taken up for my mother, and a police  
officer shot him down

I can't help but to sit down and cry sometime, think about  
how my poor brother lost his life.<sup>75</sup>

As on the pictures in the program book, the victimization of African Americans foreclosed the possibility of blacks as agents of social change, with J.B. Lenoir's protagonist merely reverting to crying. It is in this context that one has to read Horst Lippmann's comment, "What I liked was J.B.'s social commitment at the time. He was really speaking out."<sup>76</sup> It is true that Lenoir was playing incendiary songs in the context of the American South at the time, but for his West German listeners he merely catered to feelings of self-righteousness and pity.<sup>77</sup>

In the later years of the American Folk Blues Festival, Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau continued to play it safe and even the superficial acknowledgment of "black" music's potential to motivate social change largely disappeared. Instead, Lippmann and Rau emphasized the connection of "black" blues and "white" rock as with the rise of blues

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<sup>75</sup> J.B. Lenoir, "Alabama Blues," *American Folk Blues Festival 1965* program book.

<sup>76</sup> Lippmann quoted in Dahl, *American Folk Blues Festival*.

<sup>77</sup> The program books for the American Folk Blues Festivals from 1966, 1967 and 1968 continued this tendency by featuring pictures of impoverished urban black ghettos, statistics on "white views of the Negro" and the lyrics to J.B. Lenoir's "Mississippi" and Otis Rush's "Double Trouble," the repeated lines of the latter song being, "You know some of this generation is millionaires, but it's hard for me to keep decent clothes to wear." Otis Rush, "Double Trouble," *American Folk Blues Festival 1966* program book. Peter Turczak, who was in the audience of the American Folk Blues Festival in 1963 and 1964, echoes Lippmann's and Rau's political conceptualization of the concerts when he remembers blues in Germany as "a mixture of 'free America' (the occupying force that brought freedom) and oppressed America (the 'black-white' conflict)." Peter Turczak Sr., e-mail to the author, September 15, 2006.



rock in Europe and the U.S. they struggled to recruit big name artists for the lineup and saw themselves faced with an audience that had changed considerably over the years in terms of age and, to a lesser degree, class.

### Blues Giants — Rock Creators

Both Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau have commented on their surprise in finding out that the audiences that turned up at the American Folk Blues Festivals were different than the ones they had expected. As Rau recalls,

When we brought blues musicians to Europe the first couple of years we had no idea that our tour package hit the heart of a new youth culture that strongly identified specifically with blues. Following the ideology of our jazz pope Joachim Ernst Berendt, we had understood blues as a semi-rural precursor of jazz that had a historical but absolutely no current meaning. We put on blues festivals for jazz fans and they reacted with disdain. But for the kids in London, Amsterdam or Copenhagen these concerts were a revelation.<sup>78</sup>

Rau, underscoring the preservationist attitude that went into the conception of the American Folk Blues Festivals, might be exaggerating his surprise — after all, the very first festival had already been sponsored by the respectable German Jazz Federation *and* the magazine *Twen* that catered to young adults — but he is correctly identifying a generational change in the appreciation of "black" music among Europeans in the 1960s. As Rau elaborates, many of the older jazz fans viewed the performers as "primitive"<sup>79</sup> and preferred the sophistication of modern jazz to the American Folk Blues Festival's staged authenticity. Yet, the concerts began drawing younger Europeans searching for the "roots" of rock and roll, among them members of the burgeoning British blues movement like Mick Jagger, John Mayall and Jimmy Page. British bands like the Rolling Stones and the Animals further popularized blues in Germany and other European countries.

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<sup>78</sup> Rau quoted in Brigl and Schmidt-Joos, *Buchhalter der Träume*, 128.

<sup>79</sup> Rau, *50 Jahre Backstage*, 88.

Fritz Rau and Horst Lippmann began capitalizing on the younger audience right away. They hired Giorgio Gomelsky, former manager of the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds, as their British representative. Lippmann also recorded Sonny Boy Williamson with the Yardbirds (including Eric Clapton) at the Crawdaddy Club in 1963. What is noteworthy here is that the almost campy romantic primitivism of the early years of the American Folk Blues Festival went unchallenged by the younger European audiences because, as Charles Keil put it in 1966, compared to American blues fans they were had the "added virtue of being extremely catholic in taste."<sup>80</sup> In the second half of the decade, Lippmann and Rau maintained their sense of purity by organizing a number of other festivals featuring "folk" music from all around the world *except* Germany (gospel, flamenco, bossa nova, chanson, tango, even American country music) and by prominently featuring folk blues musicians Son House, Skip James and Bukka White at the American Folk Blues Festival 1967. Finally, beginning in 1969, the American Folk Blues Festival began to openly address the connection between blues and rock. Earl Hooker and Magic Sam headlined the festival with displays of guitar acrobatics that Lippmann had discouraged earlier. And in 1972, the slogan on the posters advertising the concerts had become "Blues Giants — Rock Creators."

By this time, Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau had already become the leading promoters of rock concerts in Germany and presented shows by Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, the Doors, the Rolling Stones and others. While Horst Lippmann inherited his father's hotel in 1969, gradually retreated from the rock business and quietly died in 1997, Fritz Rau continued to promote large-scale concerts from Marlene Dietrich to Madonna and Sammy Davis, Jr. to Michael Jackson until he retired in 2005. Rau reinforced his anti-fascist commitment when in 1978 he presented a concert by Bob

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<sup>80</sup> Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 101.

Dylan on the far end of Zeppelin Field in Nuremberg where Nazi party rallies had been held from 1933 to 1938, forcing 80,000 Germans to literally turn their backs on Hitler.<sup>81</sup> In the 1980s, Rau also became part of the peace movement in Germany and actively supported the Green Party. Yet, the protests by rock fans against high ticket prices in 1970 by chanting "Rau, Rau, *Kapitalistensau*" ("Rau, Rau, capitalist pig") had not lost their urgency. Despite his anti-fascist and leftist commitments, the concert promoter remained a money maker at heart.

### Conclusion

Fritz Rau's and Horst Lippmann's accomplishments in introducing European audiences to American blues were tremendously important for the transatlantic flows of "black" music and culture. As I have argued in this chapter, Lippmann and Rau situated their own engagement in "black" music within the history of World War II and its aftermath. For Lippmann and Rau, "black" music made respectable for an upper-middle-class audience was vital for post-war Germany's path to an anti-racist modernity. Although they strove to reject the elitism of European high culture, their emphasis on "authenticity" drew heavily on already existing cultural hierarchies. Furthermore, Lippmann and Rau as well as their stage designer Günther Kieser actively supported a museumization and "backdating" of blues in their conceptualization of the American Folk Blues Festival, which in other guises appeared at the "rediscovery" of country blues artists at the Newport Folk Festival and in the pages of *Living Blues* magazine with their appreciation of 1940s and 1950s Chicago blues. Lippmann, Rau and Kieser also catered to audience expectations that saw blues as the simple, raw and uninhibited precursor of jazz and occasionally displayed a paternalistic attitude towards the musicians they were working with. Although they made references to Civil Rights struggles in the U.S.

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<sup>81</sup> Brigl and Schmidt-Joos, *Buchhalter der Träume*, 217.

beginning in 1965, they only did so from the safe distance of an ostentatiously liberated, anti-racist Germany.

Like the British blues movement and the career of Eric Clapton, the American Folk Blues Festival can serve to document the transatlantic dimension of the blues in the 1960s. In both cases, "whites" from Western Europe re-imagined blues in similar ways than U.S. "whites." Whereas it is important to acknowledge the local specificity of blues in Germany with its direct ties to attempts of overcoming the Nazi past, the appropriation, romanticization and exoticization of blues informing the way the American Folk Blues Festival was conceptualized, presented and received points to a less local and more generally deployed problematic construction of blackness as it appears in countercultural discourses since the 1960s. As blues made its way into the "white" mainstream and "black" music moved on to birth genres like soul and funk, it became increasingly harder to locate any "blackness" in blues that wasn't largely a product of "white" fantasies of the real.

CHAPTER V  
RESEGREGATING THE BLUES: "RACE" AND  
AUTHENTICITY IN THE PAGES OF *LIVING BLUES*  
MAGAZINE

Introduction

In February of 1969, "white" blues guitarist Johnny Winter signed to Columbia records for an unprecedented advance of \$300,000. Three months later, *Rolling Stone* magazine ran an ad for Winter's first Columbia album in which the albino musician appeared as "a white flame ignited by black blues."<sup>1</sup> In the same year, "white" blues rock singer Janis Joplin appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* under the heading "Rebirth of the Blues."<sup>2</sup> Ostensibly, blues had swiftly and successfully moved from "black" to "white" in the popular imagination. Yet, as I have argued in previous chapters, despite changing demographics blues remained deeply connected with constructions of "blackness" throughout the 1960s. This resulted in some serious economic imbalances. While some newly evolving "white" stars were cashing in, "black" blues musicians playing on the South Side of Chicago were struggling to pay their rent.<sup>3</sup> In an attempt to give these "black" musicians the exposure they thought they deserved, a number of "white" blues aficionados congregating in Bob Koester's Jazz Record Mart founded *Living Blues* magazine in the spring of 1970.

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<sup>1</sup> "A White Flame Ignited by Black Blues," *Rolling Stone* 34 (May 31, 1969): 2.

<sup>2</sup> "Janis Joplin: Rebirth of the Blues," *Newsweek* 73 (May 26, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Jim O'Neal compares Johnny Winter's \$300,000 cash advance to the \$150 a week Willie Dixon was making against his royalties at the time. Jim O'Neal, "I Once Was Lost, But Now I'm Found: The Blues Revival of the 1960s" in *Nothing But the Blues: The Music and the Musicians*, ed. Lawrence Cohn (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 386.

The complex articulation of racial politics in blues music from the 1960s oftentimes took form in discourses that defied easy classifications as either "black" or "white," such as B.B. King's and Eric Clapton's music.<sup>4</sup> The liminal spaces created in the process became sites of contest over markers of "race" and authenticity. However, while these liminal spaces were created, what simultaneously took place was a nostalgic search for racial purity, which involved "white" agents consuming and distributing what they constructed as authentic black culture. In this chapter, I interrogate the active resistance against the "messiness" of conflated racial categories by the largely "white" editorial staff and readership of *Living Blues* with its exclusive coverage of "black" blues artists. I argue that the insistence on blues' inherent "blackness" set the stage for the conservative blues formations of the 1970s and beyond.

I will begin by situating the work of *Living Blues* founders Jim O'Neal, Amy van Singel, Paul Garon, and Bruce Iglauer within the context of earlier blues collectors and researchers. By drawing on interviews with the editors and on the content of the magazine itself, I will then describe how *Living Blues* formulated its mission. I will compare how *Living Blues* discussed "race" with similar debates in other publications of the late 1960s and early 1970s that featured blues, including *Sing Out!*, *Blues Unlimited*, and *Rolling Stone*. Finally, I will trace how former *Living Blues* editor Paul Garon has continued to express his controversial opinions regarding blues and "race" in recent years and how other blues enthusiasts have reacted to Garon's arguments. In doing this, I will sketch how discussions of the racial politics of blues music have been framed, at its epicenter, since the 1960s. This moment encapsulates the significant changes in the racialized perception of blues music, described in other chapters, and opened blues music to "white" consumption. Herein I enter into current debates about the segregation of

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<sup>4</sup> Compare chapters I and II.

sound at the outset of the 20th century. I argue that despite the desegregating impulses brought about by the Civil Rights Movement and (arguably) rock and roll, the segregation of sound has continued in different form on the pages of *Living Blues*.

### Resegregating the Blues

Recently, some scholars have begun to historicize the way racial categorizations of music are connected to the advent of the phonograph and the making of the recording industry in the 1920s. These scholars argue that particularly in the Southern United States, popular music relied on cross-racial practices and repertoires in the late 19th century and became segregated by "race" in the first three decades of the 20th century. The work of these scholars has helped to undermine the naturalization of "black" and "white" sound which has been a persistent feature of popular music in the 20th century and beyond.

Karl Hagstrom Miller analyzes the segregation of Southern (U.S.) music in its commercial dissemination through the burgeoning music industry, which he links to turn-of-the-century thinking in the Jim Crow South. In addition, Miller shows how capitalists, social scientists and field workers from the Northern United States provided a "rhetorical justification for Jim Crow" by perpetuating racialized musical categories like "blues" and "country."<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Thomas also situates country music within the context of "race" and argues that country became a symbol of "whiteness" despite its interracial history prior to its commercialization in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>6</sup> In a different account, Thomas also mentions the reinforcement of the "race" and gender stereotypes of the Jim Crow era and

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Folklore, Phonographs, and the Transformation of Southern Music, 1888-1935*, Ph.D. thesis (New York: New York University, 2002), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Rebecca Ann Thomas, *The Color of Music: Race and the Making of America's Country Music*, Ph.D. thesis (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri-Columbia, 2000).

shows how "black" influences on country were downplayed in a successful attempt to ascertain its "respectability" in the late 19th and early 20th century.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Ronald Radano argues that the characteristics associated with "black" music today, in particular "black" music's rhythmic qualities, are a modern invention and did not evolve until the late 19th century.<sup>8</sup>

What unites these scholars is their emphasis on the turn of the century as a time when racial categories were applied to musical sound. "Segregating sound," as Miller calls it, involved the marketing of distinctive musical genres according to racial affiliation, with the most prominent example being the production of "race records." By describing the segregation of sound, scholars like Miller, Thomas and Radano provide a useful corrective to the large number of desegregation narratives connected to the advent of rock and roll in the 1950s and to the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Acknowledging that music had *become* segregated, however, does not mean disregarding the immediate desegregating effects of rock and roll and the Civil Rights Movement. Integrated bands like Booker T. and the MG's, Sly and the Family Stone and the Butterfield Blues Band played music in the 1960s that defied easily applied racial classifications. However, things began to change in the late 1960s, as the career of "white" blues rock singer Janis Joplin can attest. Alice Echols explains Joplin's failure to establish herself as a legitimate "white" soul singer with a "decline of the interracialism that had marked popular music during the mid-1960s and the opening of a divide that would only widen in the years to come as black-and-white music diverged."<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Ann Thomas, "The Cow That's Ugly Has the Sweetest Milk" in *The Women of Country Music: A Reader*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 131-147.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Alice Echols, "Little Girl Blue" in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, ed. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank and Jason Toynbee (London: Routledge, 2006), 57-63; 59.



resegregating of sound practiced by the editorial staff of *Living Blues* thus was only part of larger social transformations akin to those in the early 20th century.

### Blues as Subcultural Capital

The founding editors of *Living Blues* continued in the tradition of a long line of "white" researchers, consumers and enthusiasts of "black" musical culture, which included folk song collectors like John and Alan Lomax, Harlem Renaissance notables like Carl van Vechten, and record producers like Harry Smith. Benjamin Filene has discussed the role of "middlemen," who — like the Lomaxes — shaped notions of folk authenticity in the 1930s.<sup>10</sup> Marybeth Hamilton has pointed to what she calls the "invention" of Delta blues as an apolitical expression of pain and suffering by male connoisseurs like James McKune in the early 1960s, who found "realness" (or what Walter Benjamin calls "aura") in the *recordings* (as opposed to the live performances) of forgotten "black" singers like Charlie Patton and Robert Johnson. According to Hamilton, "wrapping the blues in the cloak of the authentic meant disentangling it from the taint of the body" and devaluing female classic blues singers, who were deemed too "commercial."<sup>11</sup> The legitimizing of Delta blues as an authentic art form created the environment in which early blues scholars like Sam Charters, Paul Oliver and Jeff Todd Titon operated. Titon recalls how "our discoveries, like those of the European explorers,

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Marybeth Hamilton, "Sexuality, Authenticity and the Making of the Blues Tradition," *Past and Present* 169 (November 2002): 132-161, 139. What became known as "Delta blues" in the 1960s was not very popular among "black" audiences in the 1930s and 1940s. A very revealing sample of the content of jukeboxes in Clarksdale, Mississippi from 1941, which according to time and place should have been the hotbed of Delta blues activity, revealed that they contained mostly big band jazz and Tin Pan Alley music and very little country blues. See John W. Work, Lewis Wade Jones and Samuel C. Adams, Jr., *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-1942* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 311-314.

were mixtures of invention and interpretation, and in a way of finding our object, blues, we constituted it." Titon directly addresses a shift in racialized perceptions in which blues moved from "a music by and chiefly for black Americans" to "a music by black and white Americans primarily for white Americans and Europeans." Titon does not mention the masculinization of blues Hamilton criticizes and differs from her account insofar as that he sees the 1960s blues "revival" as a revolt against "conservative politics and middle class propriety" and not as depoliticized.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, the masculinization of blues in the 1960s is evident not only in the dominance of revered male blues performers. It is also found in particular in the almost exclusive presence of men as cultural brokers — concert promoters, biographers, field workers, and teachers of blues music. Will Straw and John Dougan have described record collecting as a masculinist discourse.<sup>13</sup> For blues "revivalists" of the 1960s, the adventure of hunting down out-of-print records and even hunting down forgotten blues musicians was perceived as an oppositional move that relied on appropriating "blackness," as evident in blues researcher Stephen Calt's account of his relationship to blues singer Skip James. Calt describes his gradual initiation to the "real thing" as he was getting into rock and roll, then a "pretentious Beat style" until finally settling for blues, "a special type of music, a music of blacks, a music outside of the mainstream."<sup>14</sup> This view of the blues as the end of a search for a self-styled marginalized (and masculinized)

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<sup>12</sup> Jeff Todd Titon, "Reconstructing the Blues: Reflections on the 1960s Blues Revival" in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 222, 223, 223.

<sup>13</sup> Will Straw, "Seizing Up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture" in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3-16; John Dougan, "Canon Formation and Blues Record Collecting," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 18, no.1 (2006): 40-65.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Calt, *I'd Rather Be the Devil: Skip James and the Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 261, 260.

identity, and embodying notions of authenticity through the racial other, is echoed by the blues connoisseurs who founded *Living Blues* in the spring of 1970.

Consequently, for "white" middle-class blues aficionados, "black" working-class blues gained what Sarah Thornton, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*, has called "subcultural capital" in her study of British electronica fans.<sup>15</sup> Like members of the club scene in the 1990s, blues enthusiasts of the 1960s developed hierarchies of taste which simultaneously resisted and participated in commercialization. What was significant about the blues enthusiasts, however, were their specific claims of racialized and gendered identity which were directly linked to conceptualizations of black masculinity.

### "Blues Freaks"

From its inception in 1969, *Living Blues* was everything but big business. The seven founding editors — Jim O'Neal, Amy van Singel, Paul Garon, Bruce Iglauer, Diane Allmen, Andre Souffront, and Tim Zorn — had met each other through a notice on the wall of Bob Koester's Jazz Record Mart in Chicago. When the first issue came out in the spring of 1970, it was typed, 40 pages long and cost 50 cents. It remained like that for the first five years (except for the cover price, which rose to 60 cents in late 1973), appearing quarterly with individual subscriptions under 1,000 and distribution to about 80 to 100 book and record stores.<sup>16</sup> The magazine, the first in the U.S. devoted solely to blues music, therefore can serve as a symptomatic site where racialized and gendered identity claims were made because the magazine brought together "underground" and "mainstream" discourses and allowed for conversations between the overlapping groups of blues performers, audiences, and the aforementioned "middlemen" or cultural brokers.

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<sup>15</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Peter Narváez, "Living Blues Journal: The Paradoxical Aesthetics of the Blues Revival" in *Transforming Tradition*, 243; Bruce Iglauer, e-mail to the author, January 9, 2006.

*Living Blues* would become slightly more professionalized with the spring issue of 1974, boasting a glossy cover and typeset layout. The magazine began publishing bimonthly the following year but struggled economically. In 1983, the magazine underwent yet another relaunch and became affiliated with the University of Mississippi at Oxford with its circulation climbing slowly to 15,000 in 1991<sup>17</sup> but dropping again after the blues revival of the 1990s subsided. The magazine has recently celebrated its 35th anniversary.

In accordance with the small scale of production, the editors and the readers of *Living Blues* were quite similar, as the founding editors point out. Jim O'Neal describes both producers and consumers as "blues freaks" — "mostly young, white, college students or college-educated people."<sup>18</sup> Bruce Iglauer contends, "the audience looked like us... white people in their late teens and 20s who had discovered blues in the 60s."<sup>19</sup> Despite the seeming homogeneity, O'Neal estimates that about one-fourth or one-third of the subscribers were from Europe, Australia, Canada and Japan, indicating the international impact of blues I discuss in other chapters. And, finally, as O'Neal points out, "we also made it a point to try to appeal to the black audience by putting artists such as Bobby Bland and Little Milton on the cover, and we did have some black readership, but mostly it was white."<sup>20</sup> Iglauer makes the argument that "the average black blues fan was being informed about artists and music from black oriented radio, whereas we white people were much more used to reading liner notes" and, being "reasonably well-educated," were "used to reading for pleasure, whereas a lot of the older black blues fans

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Katherine Aldin, "Standing at the Crossroads: The Blues Today" in *Nothing But the Blues*, 404.

<sup>18</sup> Jim O'Neal, e-mail to the author, February 15, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Iglauer, e-mail.

<sup>20</sup> O'Neal, e-mail.

were from the South and suffered from the poor formal educations available to them."<sup>21</sup> To a certain extent, Chicago's blues culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in particular through live performances on the South Side, offered opportunities for racial mixing, yet the segregation of featured artists (exclusively "black"), and staff members and readers (almost exclusively "white") of *Living Blues* mirrored the way blues was developing in other places around the same time.

Out of the seven founding editors, only four remained after the first five issues — Jim O'Neal, Amy van Singel, Paul Garon, and Bruce Iglauer. Jim O'Neal was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1948 but grew up mostly in Mobile, Alabama. O'Neal studied journalism at Northwestern University in Chicago and received an M.A. in 1974. Presenting himself as merely a blues "fan," O'Neal notes that the founders of *Living Blues* lacked any kind of training in "folklore, ethnomusicology, or oral history."<sup>22</sup> Yet, O'Neal's graduate studies in journalism at a prestigious university made him much less of an amateur than he might like to admit. In an editorial for *Living Blues* after the magazine's move to Mississippi in 1983, O'Neal further emphasizes his personal over his professional engagement with the blues:

It's nice to bring the blues 'home' in many more ways than one, because Oxford was my home in the early 1950s, long before I was old enough to know anything about the blues. (My blues education — hindered, no doubt, by many years spent in the cultural vacuum of Mobile, Alabama — came only after I moved north to Chicago).<sup>23</sup>

In this narrative of conversion, O'Neal finally realizes the relevance of "black" Southern culture after escaping the "cultural vacuum" of "whiteness" and entering "black" spaces

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<sup>21</sup> Iglauer, e-mail.

<sup>22</sup> Jim O'Neal quoted in Peter Guralnick, "Foreword" in *The Voice of the Blues: Classic Interviews from Living Blues Magazine*, ed. Jim O'Neal and Amy van Singel (New York: Routledge, 2002), xvi.

<sup>23</sup> Jim O'Neal, "Editorial," *Living Blues* 57 (Autumn 1983): 3.

in Chicago. However, as many of his "white" contemporaries, O'Neal was initiated (or "converted") to "black" blues through listening to "white" musicians: "I didn't really realize what it was or appreciate it until I learned that the '60s bands I loved, like the Rolling Stones, Yardbirds, and Animals, were all doing songs that were originally done by black American blues singers."<sup>24</sup>

O'Neal remained the principal editor of *Living Blues* until 1987. After stepping down as editor, he continued to be involved in the distribution and dissemination of blues. Between 1988 and 1998, O'Neal ran Rooster Blues Records, the Stackhouse Delta Record Mart and the Stackhouse recording studio in Clarksdale, Mississippi. O'Neal's move to Clarksdale, a major city for pre-war acoustic blues, signaled a flight from the over-commercialized blues tourism of Chicago to a place where blues was supposedly more "authentic." In an editorial as the outgoing editor for *Living Blues*, O'Neal notes, "the blues has found success in Chicago — but as the challenge has been met, for some of us the sense of purpose is gone; the crusade is over. The blues has become another urban business."<sup>25</sup> It is interesting that O'Neal chooses the word "crusade," not just because it underscores the religious connotations of his "conversion" to blues but also because it conflicts with the bystander role the *Living Blues* editors had carved out for themselves in the conception of the magazine. In O'Neal's narrative, Mississippi appears as the undiluted and authenticated alternative to Chicago's tainted blues authenticity: "Rarely, even in the ghetto clubs of Chicago, have I heard music so raw and so free. It is unaffected. It is blues at the source."<sup>26</sup> Only ten years later, O'Neal moved North again — this time to Kansas City. His reasons for leaving his "home" in Mississippi reveal the economic price that comes with blues "authenticity":

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<sup>24</sup> O'Neal, e-mail.

<sup>25</sup> Jim O'Neal, "Editorial: Mississippi Magic," *Living Blues* 76 (July/August 1987): 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

I met a woman who moved from Kansas City to Clarksdale to be an intern at the Delta Blues Museum. We got married, had two children, and decided that the Mississippi Delta was not the best place to raise a family. Educational, health, and recreational opportunities would be better in a more progressive place, and since my wife was from KC, we moved here.<sup>27</sup>

After moving to Kansas City in 1998, O'Neal founded BluEsoterica Archives and Productions and continued to support what he considered "esoteric," underappreciated "black" blues musicians.

Jim O'Neal and Amy van Singel met through their passion for blues music. Van Singel was born in Chicago in 1949 and, like O'Neal, went to Northwestern University, majoring in English. O'Neal and van Singel married in 1970 and got divorced in 1987, their marriage paralleling their involvement with *Living Blues*. Like many other blues fans of the 1960s, van Singel was listening to "British Invasion" bands like the Rolling Stones and the Kinks before getting into blues: "I did some follow-up and discovered what I considered the 'creators' of the blues and abruptly quit listening to rock radio."<sup>28</sup> Van Singel explains why she got into blues by saying,

I was fascinated with exploring a totally foreign culture, right in the United States, and of course the whole civil rights thing was going on while I was growing up. I intensely disliked what I considered rip-off musicians getting fame and credit for what was truly America's own music, and I wanted to get them proper recognition.<sup>29</sup>

Van Singel's fascination with the racial other, equally "foreign" and "American," is striking, as is her apparent repudiation of British musicians like Eric Clapton tainting the purity of the blues. Van Singel had a college radio show on blues on WNUR in Chicago and later hosted "Atomic Mama's Wang-Dang-Doodle Blues Show" on WNIB and

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<sup>27</sup> O'Neal, e-mail.

<sup>28</sup> Amy van Singel, e-mail to the author, April 14, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Amy van Singel quoted in Sonya Senkowsky, "Q&A: Blues Author's Road to Recognition Leads from Fandom to Lincoln Center," *AlaskaWriters Homestead*, 2004, <http://www.alaskawriters.com/vansingel.html> (accessed January 14, 2006).

WXFM. As the co-editor for *Living Blues* for many years, van Singel contributed many articles and was also the magazine's premier photographer. Amy van Singel underscores the masculinization of the blues in the 1960s:

As a woman, I did perceive that the blues scene was dominated by men. [...] I may have been the only "active" woman in the blues scene back then ... there were girlfriends & wives, of course, that would go out to the South and West Side ghettos to listen to the blues [...]. I always perceived that the blues biz was VERY tough, and it was tough enough just to be a woman!<sup>30</sup>

In a recent interview, van Singel complains about having to hold down "day jobs" while her husband worked for the magazine full-time. She describes receiving the Deems Taylor Award of the American Society for Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) for co-editing *The Voice of the Blues*, a book with interviews from *Living Blues*, in 2003 by stating, "it was a VERY BIG DEAL for me to get some recognition, because Jim (...) had gotten most of it all along."<sup>31</sup> The masculinization of the blues was also evident in the artists covered by *Living Blues*. Peter Narváez notes that from *Living Blues*' first 78 issues, only five featured women on the cover.<sup>32</sup> Van Singel eventually moved to Alaska where she is again working as a host for a blues radio show, this time on KNBA.

Another significant founding editor for *Living Blues* was Bruce Iglauer. He was born in 1947 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, moved to Cincinnati when he was eleven and majored in theater at Lawrence College in Wisconsin, where he also hosted a blues radio show. He moved to Chicago in January of 1970 and worked as a shipping clerk for Bob Koester at the Jazz Record Mart. Iglauer's description of how he became interested in blues is worth quoting at length:

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<sup>30</sup> Van Singel, e-mail.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See Narváez, "*Living Blues* Journal."



I found blues mostly through folk music. Most of my white blues fan friends found blues through English or U.S. blues/rock artists. I would say that perhaps the main difference would be that blues was more exotic, more "foreign" and perhaps more intense and emotional than the folk or rock of that period. The fact that it was a black music form probably turned off some white people, even if only subconsciously ("what can this black person be saying that would be relevant to me?"). From my point of view, the blackness of blues in the context of the civil rights movement made it attractive to me... I was intrigued by things black. But mostly I found the direct, intense emotions and the first person approach of the blues made it seem more honest, less pretentious and more "real" than folk or rock. I think a lot of my white blues fan friends felt the same way.<sup>33</sup>

Like van Singel, Iglauer emphasizes the "foreign" (or "exotic") appeal of blues for the young "white" aficionados and equates blackness with intense emotions, honesty and "realness." What Iglauer and the other editors of *Living Blues* were looking for was a way to compensate for the perceived spiritual lack of their own "whiteness" by associating with authenticated "black" blues culture. That the "blackness" of the music "probably turned off some white people" only made it more appealing as a form of subcultural capital. In 1971, Bruce Iglauer founded Alligator Records, which has become the world's biggest independent blues label with releases by blues notables like Koko Taylor, Albert Collins, Johnny Winter, and Buddy Guy.

The fourth important founding editor of *Living Blues* was Paul Garon, who was born in 1942 in Louisville, Kentucky and received a B.S. in sociology at the University of Louisville. Like the other editors, he "discovered" blues after listening to other, presumably less "pure," music, in his case rock and roll. As Garon recalls, being slightly older than the other editors, he was "brought aboard so the magazine would have a pre-war expert."<sup>34</sup> Garon became the articulate political spokesperson for the magazine, contributing analytical articles about blues and eventually drawing what he saw as

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<sup>33</sup> Iglauer, e-mail.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Garon, e-mail to the author, January 9, 2006.

connections between surrealism and blues. Garon's controversial approach to blues as an exclusively black working-class music, as well as his forays into surrealism, culminated in two editorials, a "blues and surrealism" supplement and the publication of *Blues and the Poetic Spirit* in the mid-1970s. Garon became an active member of the "Race Traitor" movement in the 1990s, which also involved "whiteness" scholars David Roediger and Noel Ignatiev. Today, Paul Garon and his wife Beth run Beasley Books, a Chicago bookstore specializing in rarities.

### The Mission of *Living Blues*

Instead of a lengthy editorial, the inaugural issue of *Living Blues* merely contained a few introductory words by the editors: "Blues speaks for itself. We do not intend to explain, define, or confine the blues. We believe that the blues is a living tradition, and we hope to present some insights into this tradition."<sup>35</sup> One might wonder why, if blues spoke for itself, there was the need for a magazine about blues. One might also wonder why the editors state that they did not want to define blues, yet do so from the outset, not only by arguing for a *living* tradition, but also by exclusively featuring "black" artists. What *Living Blues* actually set out to do becomes clearer when looking at statements made by the editors in later years. As Jim O'Neal has repeatedly pointed out, *Living Blues* was a direct response to the British blues magazines *Blues Unlimited* and *Blues World*. In O'Neal's words, "we felt we were able to give a more close-up and personal view of the artists since we were living in Chicago."<sup>36</sup> In his foreword for a

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<sup>35</sup> Editors of *Living Blues*, "Editorial," *Living Blues* 1 (Spring 1970): 1. To further emphasize that *Living Blues* was not just about the past, the editors added a few words in the third issue: "We believe that the blues is a living tradition. We hope to present some insights into the current manifestations, as well as the traditions, of the blues." Editors of *Living Blues*, "Editorial," *Living Blues* 3 (Autumn 1971): 1.

<sup>36</sup> O'Neal, e-mail.

recent collection of *Living Blues* interviews, Peter Guralnick indirectly criticizes the British blues magazines when he argues that *Living Blues* in its early days was

a gauntlet thrown down in the face not just of mainstream culture but of the kind of blues scholarship that treated the music like stamp-collecting or lepidoptery, subject to none of the ambiguities or confusions of real life and real people whose hard-won insights and expertise were, ultimately, its bedrock.<sup>37</sup>

Amy van Singel talks about subscribing to *Blues Unlimited* and being thrown off by the discographies and record auctions listed in the paper: "I wanted to hear about the MUSIC and the creators of the music, not just statistics."<sup>38</sup> In their involvement with the magazine, the *Living Blues* editors were attempting to break out of the bourgeois collector-fan world as they saw it represented by the British blues magazines' "museumification" of the music, but, as I argue in this chapter, they were all the while constructing it anew.

An important aspect of *Living Blues*' mission was already apparent in the magazine's title — in Jim O'Neal's words, the *Living Blues* staff wanted

to show that blues was still a living tradition in the African-American community, to give credit to the blues artists whose work was the foundation of rock 'n' roll, and to give a voice to the blues artists to tell their own stories. We would hear people (including one of the prominent British authorities, who is a good friend of mine) say that the blues was dead and we didn't think that was the case. It's still the same way today.<sup>39</sup>

Despite O'Neal's emphasis on blues as a living tradition, Bruce Iglauer reportedly said at one of the first meetings of *Living Blues*' editorial staff, "Well, we'll all do this for about five years, and by that time everybody will have read the magazine and learned

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<sup>37</sup> Guralnick, "Foreword," vii-viii.

<sup>38</sup> Van Singel quoted in Senkowsky, "Q&A."

<sup>39</sup> O'Neal, e-mail. With "one of the prominent British authorities," Jim O'Neal is most likely referencing Paul Oliver, whom Amy van Singel criticized in *Living Blues* 1, no.2 (Summer 1970) for ignoring any blues productions after 1955.

everything they'll need to know about blues, and that'll be it."<sup>40</sup> The main goal of the magazine, then, was not so much to cover current developments of a music loosely defined as "blues" (which could have involved writing about James Brown or Eric Clapton) but to *preserve* a musical tradition that was most vital between the 1930s and the 1950s — music that has been defined as Delta and Chicago blues. More interested in history and categorization than living culture, this mission does not vary significantly from the "lepidoptery" of *Blues Unlimited* and *Blues World*, after all.

In his article on *Living Blues*, Peter Narváez calls the magazine's editors and writers "enthusiastic bystanders," who, despite their wish not to interfere with "black" blues culture became elitists of the 1960s blues revival by virtue of their authoritative writings.<sup>41</sup> Since *Living Blues'* editors were very particular about which music to include in the magazine, they were setting out to do what they had disavowed of — namely, defining and confining the blues. Nowhere was this as apparent as in the "blacks only" policy for the magazine's coverage — although Jim O'Neal offers a valid explanation:

While I and some of the other staff members actually learned a lot about blues through the white musicians, we felt that they were already well covered in the larger magazines and newspapers, and on the radio, whereas it was difficult for the black artists to receive the same kind of recognition (or money).<sup>42</sup>

The racial purism of *Living Blues* might have worked as strategic essentialism to some degree, but the fact that it was promoted and carried out by an exclusively "white" cast of characters raises some important questions about who gets to legitimize "blackness" in this space — questions that I will pick up in a later part of this chapter.

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<sup>40</sup> Bruce Iglauer quoted in Guralnick, "Foreword," viii-ix.

<sup>41</sup> Narváez, "*Living Blues* Journal," 247.

<sup>42</sup> O'Neal, e-mail.

### Inside Living Blues

It took *Living Blues* a few issues to develop a concept the magazine then followed for many years, a concept that was clearly aimed at the consumption and documentation rather than the production or analysis of blues. While the first three issues had some instructions on blues piano techniques and three articles of blues interpretation — Jim O'Neal on blues and war, Paul Garon on blues and drugs and on blues as a rebellion against sexual repression — in the issues that followed the readers were discouraged from actively participating in blues as either musicians or interpreters. Instead, the magazine meticulously documented blues through interviews, discographies, record, concert and book reviews, and portraits of blues performers, venues and regional scenes. The roles for "black" and "white" people were firmly established: "black" people were playing the blues, "white" people were recording it for posterity.

Although the *Living Blues* editors were aiming at *documenting* instead of *analyzing* the blues, their implicit confinement to blues as music played only by "blacks" made the title for the magazine seem ironic. In 1970, if there was a living blues tradition, it had become increasingly "white," so what the magazine focused on could well have been called "dying blues." In the first two issues alone, there were five obituaries for blues musicians who had just passed away — Magic Sam, Earl Hooker, Lonnie Johnson, Otis Spann, and Kid Thomas — and the interviews and record reviews featured mostly artists that were older and had been more successful between the 1930s and the 1950s. From reading the early issues of *Living Blues*, it becomes apparent that the editors and contributors were trying to discover younger "black" blues musicians, but, with the exception of Luther Allison and Albert Collins, were unable to locate them, in part because of their narrow definition of "blues." For instance, in Bruce Iglauer's review of Larry Johnson's *Fast and Funky*, he criticizes Johnson for having a "folksinger's, not a bluesman's approach. Or, as one friend of mine said, he could be a skilled white imitator."

Iglauer concludes, "I'm afraid that Larry Johnson is not the young bluesman we've all been waiting for."<sup>43</sup>

Already in the earliest issues of *Living Blues*, there is a sense of nostalgia for the heyday of "black" blues. In an article on the relocation of the Chicago blues club Pepper's Lounge from 43rd and Vincennes four miles North to 13th and Michigan in April of 1971, Jim O'Neal bemoans the loss of the "ample dance floor, the L-shaped bar, the smelly washrooms (*sic*)" and the "loose, jiving, dancing, drinking atmosphere," all of which had been markers of "blackness" and authenticity.<sup>44</sup> Eventually, O'Neal seems to have found what he considered to be authentic blues not in the Chicago clubs but in the rural South. In 1972, O'Neal reviewed a performance of Houston Stackhouse and Joe Willie Wilkins at Robinson's Cafe in Hughes, Arkansas. In his description, O'Neal bestows subcultural capital on rural Southern blues musicians and venues that the "whitened" blues of B.B. King and Chicago cannot offer anymore:

There's a looseness, a freedom out in the country — freedom from the restraint, the sophistication, the fear, the street gangs of the city; freedom to let loose; and in this case even a freedom in the music — freedom from the compulsion to play Top 40 soul tunes, freedom in the blues from the influence of B.B. King. Dozens of Chicago blues guitarists strive to sound like B.B.; Joe Willie Wilkins and Houston Stackhouse don't have to.<sup>45</sup>

O'Neal's romanticization of Wilkins' and Stackhouse's "primitive" or "pre-modern" blues reflects his regressive historical search to find "pure" sounds. Incidentally, B.B. King rarely appeared on the pages of *Living Blues*. Jim O'Neal would eventually become dissatisfied with what he viewed as the increasingly commercialized Chicago blues scene and moved to Clarksdale, Mississippi.

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<sup>43</sup> Bruce Iglauer, "Larry Johnson, *Fast and Funky*," *Living Blues* 3 (Autumn 1970): 35-36, 36.

<sup>44</sup> Jim O'Neal, "Pepper's Lounge," *Living Blues* 5 (Summer 1971): 30-35, 31.

<sup>45</sup> Jim O'Neal, "Live Blues," *Living Blues* 9 (Summer 1972): 28-31, 28.

The nostalgia apparent in some of the content of *Living Blues* occasionally mixes with the editors expressing dissatisfaction about the then current blues audiences and their musical taste. The main concern of the editors was the lack of support for what they considered "real" blues by both "black" and "white" audiences. Repeatedly, the contributors of the magazine unflatteringly describe "soul blues" and "R&B" as successful among "black" audiences, yet compromised musical genres. Only traditional forms of blues found the approval of the *Living Blues* staff, which ignored or criticized changing tastes among "black" audiences. In an article about the Detroit Free Blues Festival, Bruce Iglauer comments on some younger children getting excited about Washboard Willie's performance: "Apparently a lot of black kids didn't know that they're not supposed to like the blues."<sup>46</sup> By saying this, Iglauer offers some hope that the changes in blues along racial lines might still be reversed — the young "black" children appear as naturalized bearers of the blues tradition who are yet unfazed by the "whitening" of the blues.

The implicit critique of "white" audiences in *Living Blues* appears in continuous attacks on folk and rock fans who cannot distinguish "authentic" from "inauthentic" blues — which, again, are directly linked to racial categories. The British blues bands epitomized the fakeness of "white" blues in the magazine, shown when Gary von Tesch described how he had to sit through "an over-long set by an unbearably shitty English group whose name I won't even mention" before getting to see Albert and Freddie King play.<sup>47</sup> When Junior Wells and Buddy Guy toured through Europe with the Rolling Stones in 1970, *Living Blues* noted, "it's about time the white imitators gave some attention to the people who gave them the real thing."<sup>48</sup> The "hipper than thou" attitude

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<sup>46</sup> Bruce Iglauer, "Detroit Blues." *Living Blues* 3 (Autumn 1970): 4-8, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Gary von Tesch, "Albert Freddy King," *Living Blues* 6 (Autumn 1971): 37.

<sup>48</sup> "Blues News," *Living Blues* 2 (Summer 1970): n.p.

of the *Living Blues* staff, which was based on the informed knowledge of "black" culture by "white" bystanders, occasionally drew criticism in the letters to the editor. Apparently, the readers of *Living Blues* magazine did not necessarily make the same distinctions along racial lines as the editors. However, this conflict did not escalate until 1973.

Probably the most important feature of *Living Blues* was (and still is) its lengthy interviews, some of which have recently been published in book form.<sup>49</sup> The earlier *Living Blues* interviews, like other features of the magazine, are attempts by the editors to document "black" blues and to piece together an objective blues "history," solicit information on "lost" musicians and check on "facts" by asking short, matter-of-fact questions like "When did you get to Chicago?" or "Is there a particular barrelhouse style of music?" The interviewers stick to a rather narrow definition of blues, so that an interview with Thomas Dorsey is solely devoted to his earlier career as a blues musician and completely ignores the gospel music for which he became famous. In their attempts to revitalize "black" blues, the interviewers repeatedly ask why the music has become less popular among "black" audiences.

Jim O'Neal and Amy van Singel, who conducted most of the early interviews, rarely discuss the actual music but interviews conducted by other staff members occasionally do address musical technique. The main focus of the interviews, however, is to provide oral histories of the blues. For instance, Jim O'Neal explains the value of a lengthy interview with the virtually unknown Houston Stackhouse by saying he can offer "perhaps as definite a history of that era of the Delta blues milieu as any one man could have told."<sup>50</sup> One should note, however, that the interviews were shaped by the questions chosen by the interviewers, by their transcriptions and by the willingness of the

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<sup>49</sup> O'Neal and van Singel, *The Voice*.

<sup>50</sup> O'Neal, "Introduction," *The Voice*, 70.



interviewees to disclose information. O'Neal notes that, "some artists used interviews for self-aggrandizement or sometimes, they might later admit, for their own amusement, and concocted distorted versions of blues history and their influence in it."<sup>51</sup> The resistance to written culture and the academization of the blues by some of the musicians interviewed for the magazine should not be underestimated. What O'Neal labels "concocted distorted versions of blues history" oftentimes might have been legitimate attempts by blues musicians to develop an alternative history to that of the "white" blues aficionado.

The content of *Living Blues* magazine showed a clear distinction between its "white" authors and readers and the "black" artists it discussed. The attempt to document the living history of "black" blues was complicated by the reshaping of blues in terms of racial categories, a reshaping the editors of the magazine were very much part of but resisting at the same time. Ultimately, instead of documenting a living tradition, *Living Blues* was reinventing a racially pure past of the blues as an authenticated (and, one might add, masculinized) site of subcultural capital. While the distribution of *Living Blues* was limited, one can see similar tendencies in other publications dealing with blues music from the same era such as *Blues Unlimited*, *Sing Out!* and *Rolling Stone*. In order to allow for a more diverse spectrum of blues reception, I will briefly discuss some of these other publications in the following section.

#### Blues Coverage in Other Publications

*Living Blues* was the first U.S. publication to exclusively feature blues artists, but the genre had been covered by other publications in the 1960s. Looking at other publications can help to expand an analysis of how the racial politics of blues played out

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<sup>51</sup> O'Neal, *The Voice*, xvii. This view is further expanded upon in Barry Lee Pearson, *"Sounds So Good to Me": The Bluesmen's Story* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

among blues audiences. There are many commonalities in the way "white" discourses discussed "black" music but there are also distinctive differences that have to do with the specific audiences addressed by individual publications. I will discuss the British magazine *Blues Unlimited* as well as two U.S. journals devoted to music that at least peripherally included blues: *Sing Out!* (devoted to folk) and *Rolling Stone* (devoted to rock). All of the publications that prominently featured blues were not specifically targeted towards "black" audiences, and, with the decline of interest in blues among "black" audiences, it should not come as a surprise that there was very little coverage of blues in "black" magazines like *Ebony* and *Jet*.<sup>52</sup>

*Blues Unlimited* was founded in 1963 in Sussex by Mike Leadbitter and Simon Napier as the official journal for the Blues Appreciation Society. It was published monthly, first with a circulation of 250, which would rise to 750.<sup>53</sup> Mike Leadbitter remained editor until his death in 1974 and, with Neil Slaven, also edited the seminal discographical work *Blues Records 1943-66*, which appeared in 1968. From the beginning, *Blues Unlimited's* mission was to give U.S. blues artists the credit they did not get in their home country. Like the other British blues magazine of the 1960s, Bob Groom's *Blues World* (founded in 1965), *Blues Unlimited* emphasized record collecting but also featured some live reviews. As noted earlier, the editors of *Living Blues* built on the tradition of the British blues magazines but felt closer to what they perceived as a living blues scene in Chicago. Yet, one is hard pressed to find major differences between *Living Blues* and its British counterparts, as the British magazines were featuring the same exclusively "black" artists (*Blues Unlimited* made an exception for album reviews)

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<sup>52</sup> For instance, between 1967 and 1969, only two articles in *Ebony* focused on blues music. Targeted towards a readership aspiring to be middle-class, magazines like *Ebony* and *Jet* treated blues as a novelty and do not represent a "black" insider perspective on blues.

<sup>53</sup> Mike Leadbitter, ed., *Nothing But the Blues: An Illustrated Documentary* (London: Hanover Books, 1971), 1.

and, despite their proximity to the British blues revival, displayed an equally negative attitude towards "white" blues artists. British blues performers like John Mayall, Ten Years After and Fleetwood Mac were featured in the general-interest music weekly *Melody Maker* but only occasionally scoffed at by the blues purists who ran *Blues Unlimited* and *Blues World*. For instance, *Blues Unlimited* describes Eric Clapton's Yardbirds as "appalling and amateurish" in creating "a frenzy of disjointed unmusical noise" and concludes, "these fellows were not just pale imitators — they were bad."<sup>54</sup> Young British blues fans did not fare any better and in one article get labeled "delinquent imbeciles" and "idiotic youths."<sup>55</sup> Overall, the authentication of blues as the music of African American males is virtually the same in the British blues publications as it is in *Living Blues*.

In addition to the British blues magazines, a few music journals in the U.S. featured articles on blues in the 1960s. *Sing Out!* had begun publication in May of 1950 with a circulation of about 500, climbing to 1,000 in 1960 and, with the explosion of the folk revival, to 20,000 in 1965.<sup>56</sup> Decisions about which artists and song transcriptions would be featured were made not so much along racial lines as according to whether the music qualified as "folk" or not. *Sing Out!* featured mostly blues artists playing in the pre-war acoustic tradition like Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, Skip James, and Mississippi John Hurt. They also featured "white" country blues revivalists like Dave van Ronk, but hardly any electric Chicago blues. Yet, while the blues preferred by the *Sing Out!* staff was markedly different from the music featured in *Living Blues*, debates about "race" and "blackness" on the pages of *Sing Out!* in the early 1950s foreshadowed those

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<sup>54</sup> Simon A. Napier, "Back in Our Own Back Yard-Birds," *Blues Unlimited* 13 (July 1964): 8.

<sup>55</sup> John J. Broven, "Chuck Berry at Hammersmith," *Blues Unlimited* 13 (July 1964): 7.

<sup>56</sup> Pete Seeger, "A Challenge to Our Readers," *Sing Out!* 16, no.1 (Feb./March 1966): 2.

of *Living Blues* in the mid-1970s (and, as I will argue later, those of *Guitar Player* magazine in the early 1990s). In October of 1951, Fred Moore, a member of the executive board of "People's Artists," negatively reviewed the "stiff" rendition of "Easy Rider Blues" by the "all-white group" the Weavers (which included Pete Seeger) and concluded:

It is my opinion that such a group may study and present fairly accurately many of the songs of the American Negro, but they will lack the ability to get across the content, intention and deep feeling of the songs precisely because they have no direct connection with Negroes in a performance capacity.<sup>57</sup>

In March of 1952, Waldemar Hille, editor of the *People's Songbook*, defended the Weavers in a letter to *Sing Out!* by stating, "there are many shades, grades, qualities of blues, all of which seem to have legitimate and acceptable places in the hearts of many people."<sup>58</sup> By using the word "shades," Hille only thinly veiled his reference to "race" in speaking for the Weavers. The debate whether "white" people can legitimately play the blues was taken up by *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1968 and again by *Living Blues* in 1973. *Sing Out!*, however, became less concerned with the blues. After a relaunch in 1966 and influenced by Bob Dylan's tumultuous appearance at the Newport Folk Festival a year earlier, they began to incorporate pop music including positive reviews of albums by the Beatles and the Byrds. After 1969, *Sing Out!* returned to its older definition of "folk" music, yet with hardly any acoustic blues players being around anymore, the magazine ceased to feature articles on blues artists.

*Rolling Stone* started its production as a biweekly magazine in November of 1967. As in *Sing Out!*, both "black" and "white" blues artists were featured, which in the case of *Rolling Stone* meant younger "white" blues rock figures like Eric Clapton, Paul

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<sup>57</sup> Fred Moore, "Record Review: Decca Issues Folk Song Album with the Weavers," *Sing Out!* 2, no. 4 (October 1951): 6.

<sup>58</sup> Waldemar Hille, letter to the editor, *Sing Out!* 2, no.9 (March 1952): 14.

Butterfield and Mike Bloomfield as well as older "black" blues artists who had become popular with the counterculture, such as B.B. King, Albert King, Howlin' Wolf, and Muddy Waters. Although less segregationist than *Living Blues*, questions of legitimacy and racial politics arose early on in the history of the magazine after a lengthy interview with Jewish blues guitar player Mike Bloomfield in which he presented himself as an insider to "spade" blues culture despite his "whiteness."<sup>59</sup> Jazz critic Ralph Gleason wrote a retort under the title "Stop this Shuck, Mike Bloomfield," in which he stated that, "no matter how long he lives and how good he plays, Mike Bloomfield will never be a spade," because "it simply does not rub off." Gleason praised the hippie rock scene in San Francisco, whose musicians, in contrast to Chicago blues players like Bloomfield and Paul Butterfield, he saw firmly rooted in their racialized identity: "The white sons of middle class America who are in this thing are not ashamed of being white." Gleason even went so far as to accuse Bloomfield of betraying his Jewish heritage when he said some "white" blues players "keep insisting that the name of their game is chitlins and collard greens and it's actually chicken soup, baby, chicken soup."<sup>60</sup> In the following issue of *Rolling Stone*, Nick Gravenites, singer of Bloomfield's and Butterfield's band Electric Flag, wrote yet another editorial, appropriately titled "Stop this Shuck, Ralph Gleason." Gravenites called Gleason "racist" and went on to say, "Mike is from Chicago and [...] Chicago has over one million Black Americans living there and [...] it is virtually impossible to live in the city and not become a little Black in your heart and soul. It's not so unnatural to play blues in Chicago." Although he was attacking Gleason, Gravenites maintained not only conceptualizations of the natural ability to play "black" music, he

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<sup>59</sup> Jann Wenner, "The Rolling Stone Interview: Mike Bloomfield," *Rolling Stone* 1, no. 8 (April 6, 1968): 11-14.

<sup>60</sup> Ralph J. Gleason, "Perspectives: Stop this Shuck, Mike Bloomfield," *Rolling Stone* 1, no.10 (May 11, 1968): 10.

also maintained hierarchies of taste when he stated that, "Mike doesn't cop out to teen-boppers," who, in Gravenites view, apparently lacked Bloomfield's subcultural capital.<sup>61</sup> Many letters to the editor followed.

The debates concerning the racial politics and legitimacy of "white" blues artists in *Blues Unlimited*, *Sing Out!* and *Rolling Stone* show how pivotal these politics are for understanding blues music reception in the 1960s. Although these magazines differed from *Living Blues* in their location (*Blues Unlimited* being from Britain, *Sing Out!* from New York City and *Rolling Stone* from San Francisco) and premier musical affiliation (folk for *Sing Out!*, rock for *Rolling Stone*), they ultimately projected similar concepts of blues as a naturalized "black" male space largely controlled by "white" male gatekeepers. Debates about authenticity and racial purity escalated on the pages of *Sing Out!* in 1951 and on the pages of *Rolling Stone* in 1968. Much more so than the racially integrated *Sing Out!* and *Rolling Stone*, *Living Blues* had made an implicit political statement by exclusively writing about "black" artists. Finally, in 1973, these politics were made explicit and discussed openly on the pages of the magazine.

#### The Racial Politics of *Living Blues*

In the first three years of its existence, *Living Blues* did not make its "blacks only" policy explicit. For the editors, "blues" and "black" were synonymous, as Paul Garon's answer to the question why the magazine did not feature "white" artists reveals: "We didn't have a 'reason' per se because none of us thought that what the white performers were doing counted as blues. We had set out to document an African American tradition so why would we cover whites?... that was our thinking."<sup>62</sup> While Garon simply takes

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<sup>61</sup> Nick Gravenites, "Perspectives: Stop this Shuck, Ralph Gleason," *Rolling Stone* 2, no.1 (May 25, 1968): 17.

<sup>62</sup> Garon, e-mail.

blues' inherent blackness for granted, Bruce Iglauer gives a more detailed description of why *Living Blues* limited its coverage to "black" blues artists:

There were very few top quality white blues musicians, but even those then (and now) who were good players did not approach blues in the same way as the black musicians because they had learned the music primarily from records rather than as a folk tradition (or from hearing and participating in the traditional way black people sing, which is different from the way white people sing). [...] There are virtually no white people who grew up in the blues culture.<sup>63</sup>

Iglauer distinguishes between black blues, which he sees evolving out of a participatory folk tradition or culture, and white blues, which he sees as a derivative form because musical knowledge is passed on through recordings rather than live performances. He also makes a distinction between white and black singing styles (without further explaining the acoustic differences). However, Iglauer's distinctions are difficult to maintain: acoustic distinctions between black and white sounds are as arbitrary as racial classifications, and "black" blues musicians had already begun to learn their trade through listening to recordings as early as the 1930s. Furthermore, as Philip Auslander has argued, the distinction between "live" and "recorded" sounds is ideological more than musicological.<sup>64</sup>

Bruce Iglauer's shaky differentiations between black and white blues were never explicitly stated on the pages of *Living Blues*; Paul Garon, however, would finally become the political spokesperson for the magazine and articulate the official reasoning behind its racialized content in two editorials. The first of Paul Garon's editorials appeared in the spring issue of 1973 after dismissive comments by Amy van Singel about "white" bands performing at the Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival 1972 had prompted a

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<sup>63</sup> Iglauer, e-mail.

<sup>64</sup> Philip Auslander, "Liveness: Performance and the Anxiety of Simulation" in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, 85-91.

debate on the letters to the editor pages of *Living Blues*. In his defense of the magazine's "blacks only" policy, Garon wrote:

LIVING BLUES does not accept an acoustic definition of the blues. We feel that the blues is a black American working-class music that developed in response to numerous determinants; that these determining factors were in a real sense specific to the black working-class is borne out by the fact that it was they, and they alone, who produced the blues. [...] Deprived of its historical base by the white performers, the blues, as purveyed by whites, is no longer the blues, and thus is not the concern of LIVING BLUES.<sup>65</sup>

Unlike Bruce Iglauer in his distinction between different racialized sounds, Garon avoided an acoustic definition of blues and attempted to view the music in its historical context but remained vague about the "determining factors" that had produced the genre. Garon's definition of blues as "black American working class" provided a striking contrast to the racialized identity of the staff and readership of *Living Blues* and even the blues audiences in the early 1970s at large, a contrast that was left unaccounted for by the editorial. In their position as cultural brokers, the editors of *Living Blues* were purveying the blues as much as the "white performers" targeted by Garon's critique.

In its essence, then, the distinction between blues and non-blues Paul Garon made in the *Living Blues* editorial was based less on historical than on racial constituents. In the second editorial on the magazine's racial politics for the summer issue of 1973, Garon offered the following analogy: "A magazine dealing with Eskimo art would hardly be tempted to devote space to reproductions of Eskimo sculpture turned out by white suburbanites, regardless of the *quality* of the suburbanite product."<sup>66</sup> The fallacy of Garon's analogy is not only that the cross-pollination between "black" and "white" musical cultures in the U.S. has been much more substantial than the intersections between "Eskimo" and "white" visual art but also in the problematic way Garon neatly

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<sup>65</sup> Paul Garon, "Editorial," *Living Blues* 12 (Spring 1973): 4.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Garon, "Editorial," *Living Blues* 13 (Summer 1973): 3, emphasis in the original.



separated "pure" indigenous cultures from the "derivative" forces at work in "white" culture. The strong emphasis on racial categories made by Garon was taken up by the subtitle *Living Blues* introduced in the autumn issue of 1973: "A Journal of the Black American Blues Tradition." Varying responses to Garon's editorials were subsequently printed on the letters to the editor pages of *Living Blues*, ranging from support of Garon's arguments to worries about the future of acoustic blues if one excluded "white" performers, the tradition at this point being almost exclusively carried out by musicians banned from the pages of the magazine.

Another direct response to Paul Garon's editorials appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* of August 19, 1973, in which jazz critic Harriet Choice pointed out what she saw as glaring contradictions of *Living Blues*' racial politics:

How can an all-white staff put out such a magazine as *Living Blues*? And why are there no black writers on the staff? [...] And tho [*sic*] they print interviews with black bluesmen 'verbatim,' wouldn't a black writer ask different questions of, and get different answers from, a black musician?<sup>67</sup>

While Choice was not radically calling into question the racialized perception of blues represented by Paul Garon's editorials (Choice was also neatly separating "white" from "black" in her description of writers and musicians), she did reveal some of *Living Blues*' contradictory editorial practices. Choice went on to say that although she did not approve of the editorials, after interviewing Paul Garon, Jim O'Neal and Amy van Singel, she found a more convincing argument in their statement that *Living Blues* was covering music that was neglected by both "black" and "white" publications. Indeed, one is hard-pressed to find fault with *Living Blues*' choice and capacity to give musicians exposure who were ignored by other music magazines. Rather, it is the way these musicians were picked according to racial categories that I find objectionable.

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<sup>67</sup> Harriet Choice, "Jazz By Choice; All About Blues: No Whites on a Black Background," *Chicago Tribune* (August 19, 1973): E12.

Paul Garon made his main contribution to blues scholarship two years after the controversial editorials. In both his book *Blues and the Poetic Spirit* (published in 1975) and in a special supplement for *Living Blues* (in the January/February issue of 1976), Garon connected his earlier claims that blues was a "black working class" music with his contention that blues is closely linked to surrealist thought. Garon describes blues as a secularized musical form that, like surrealism, operates as a rebellion against the repression of imagination and sexuality.<sup>68</sup> What is quite ironic about this comparison is that the leading surrealist thinkers quoted by Garon — such as André Breton — were European and not affiliated with the "black working class" in any way. Despite this contradiction, there is an even stronger indictment of white blues in the "Surrealism & Blues" supplement for *Living Blues* than in Garon's previous editorials:

We reaffirm here our unalterable hostility to so-called "white" blues, in which we see nothing more than a cowardly, racist attempt to appropriate black music for ends wholly inimical to its living essence. "White" blues is the abject sport of dilettantes who, out for a fast buck, rely on the deplorable fact that many whites will listen to black music only if it is "interpreted" by whites. In declaring here, once again, our aversion to this and all other variations of imperialist plunder, we reaffirm at the same time our deep fraternal respect and admiration for the blues' true social source of inspiration: the black working men and women of this country, who have proved themselves time and again to be the heart and nervous system of every mass revolutionary endeavor.<sup>69</sup>

In this diatribe, the "Surrealist Movement" takes on a polemic and quite personal tone that differs from the way Garon attempted to historically contextualize *Living Blues'* racial politics in the editorials discussed earlier. The categorical rejection of white blues

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<sup>68</sup> As Paul Garon has pointed out to me, the supplement on surrealism and the blues was a group statement that was not written by him but reflected his reasoning. Paul Garon, e-mail to the author, April 12, 2006. Jon Michael Spencer strongly disagrees with Garon's assessment of blues as a secularized cultural form and argues for what he sees as the essentially religious nature of blues. See Jon Michael Spencer, *Blues and Evil* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).

<sup>69</sup> Surrealist Movement, "Surrealism & Blues," *Living Blues* 25 (January/February 1976): 19.

is the same, but where Garon had previously simply denied its existence, white blues now became anti-revolutionary, racist, and "imperialist plunder." The connections between blues and surrealism as Paul Garon and the Surrealist Movement presented them were not shared unanimously by other members of *Living Blues'* editorial board. Bruce Iglauer notes that,

As far as Paul's meditations on surrealism, I will be the first to say that I had a very tough time getting through them. [...] I think that the other editors would agree. But Paul was part of the editorial board and this was important for him to express. He had earned the space.<sup>70</sup>

The supplement prompted two letters to the editor which disagreed strongly with its contents, and *Living Blues* did not follow up on either surrealism or an explicit discussion of racial politics although the magazine has retained its "blacks only" policy until the present day.<sup>71</sup>

When blues was slowly losing its commercial appeal in the later 1970s and 1980s, the discussion of the music's racial politics seemed to become less pressing. Yet, with the major resurgence of blues in the early 1990s, the controversy flared up again, this time on the pages of *Guitar Player* magazine. In a guest editorial from 1990, blues historian and composer Lawrence Hoffman claimed that, "blues is the profound and glorious musical expression of the triumphant survival of the black race in America." Hoffman went on to argue that, like in jazz, "white" blues musicians were merely "copyists" and "killing the language" of blues.<sup>72</sup> This position, quite similar to the one articulated by Paul Garon in

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<sup>70</sup> Bruce Iglauer, e-mail to the author, April 18, 2006.

<sup>71</sup> There are a few exceptions. Occasionally, *Living Blues* prints short reviews of blues albums by "white" artists. The magazine also accepts advertisements for "white" performers, of which there are plenty, indicating that the readership might be less purist than the editorial policies of *Living Blues* suggest.

<sup>72</sup> Lawrence Hoffman, "Guest Editorial: At the Crossroads," *Guitar Player* 24, no.8 (August 1990): 18.

*Living Blues*, led to a flood of letters, which, according to the editors of *Guitar Player*, were 99 percent negative. Readers claimed they had earned the right to sing the blues even if they were not "black" — because they were Native American, Jewish, or working class and they held a strong resentment against what many viewed as Hoffman's ivory tower mentality. In another guest editorial "in defense of bluesmen of all color," music journalist Dan Forte noted the frequency of interracial musical exchanges which also included "black" musicians being influenced by "whites." Forte concluded that, "blues, like all music, is at least as much a personal statement as it is a social or economic one."<sup>73</sup> While it is difficult to make generalizations about the way blues has been racialized, the debates in both *Living Blues* in 1973 and *Guitar Player* in 1990 show how blues has been continuously negotiated in terms of "blackness" and "whiteness" since the 1960s.

After the publication of *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*, Paul Garon remained silent on the topic for eighteen years but, inspired by the *Guitar Player* editorials and letters to the editor, he decided to write a guest editorial for *Living Blues* in 1993 in which he attempted to justify the magazine's unchanged "blacks only" policy. Garon restated the arguments put forth twenty years earlier in claiming that, "for us, the blues is defined *culturally* and not *acoustically*," and that, "*black culture is an inseparable part of the blues* to which the magazine has dedicated its existence." Garon further contended that *Living Blues* was making an anti-racist intervention by supporting "working class African American" blues.<sup>74</sup> Two years later, Paul Garon became involved with the "Race Traitor" movement, in which "whiteness" scholars like David Roediger and Noel

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<sup>73</sup> Dan Forte, "Guest Editorial: In Defense of Bluesmen of All Color," *Guitar Player* 24, no.10 (October 1990): 14.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Garon, "Speak My Mind," *Living Blues* 111 (May/June 1993): 53, emphasis in the original.

Ignatiev, in conjunction with non-academic writers from various backgrounds, set out to "abolish the white race."<sup>75</sup> Garon published an article about "White Blues" in both the *Race Traitor* journal and in *Blues World* in which he revisited the debates in *Living Blues* and *Guitar Player* and called his argumentation for blues as exclusively black working-class "supremely clear and natural" and appeared surprised that some *Living Blues* readers had cancelled their subscriptions.<sup>76</sup> In the afterword to the second edition of *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*, (published in 1996) Garon bemoaned the lack of political commitment in the blues revival of the 1990s and repeated his accusations that "defenders of white blues" were ultimately racist by "blinding themselves to the complexity of racial issues and the anti-black racism that still fuels American life."<sup>77</sup> Reiterating his contradictory theory of "race" and history, Garon stated that, "what is uniquely black about the blues is a system of reference based on shared experience, in the past and in the present; it is a cultural matter, not a racial or biological one," yet Garon's conceptualization of "culture" was ultimately based on biological definitions of "race," hence, for Garon, "race-specificity is what the blues is all about."<sup>78</sup>

Paul Garon's claims about the racial politics of blues, which represent the way *Living Blues* has justified its editorial policies, have been criticized by many blues scholars over the years. Most of the criticisms have been directed at Garon's — and *Living Blues'* — unwillingness to acknowledge changes in the racialized perception of blues music since the 1960s. Carl Boggs and Ray Pratt agree with Garon that blues has

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<sup>75</sup> Editors of *Race Traitor*, "Abolish the White Race: By All Means Necessary," *Race Traitor* 1 (Winter 1993), <http://www.racetractor.org> (accessed January 17, 2007).

<sup>76</sup> Paul Garon, "White Blues," *Race Traitor* 4 (Winter 1995), <http://racetractor.org/blues.html> (accessed January 17, 2007).

<sup>77</sup> Paul Garon, *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*, second edition (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1996), 193.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

subversive potential, which they translate into an antagonism to capitalist ideology through orality, yet, with the changes along racial lines in blues music, they do not see this potential as contemporary. Instead, they want to broaden Garon's trajectory to include "white blues," whose "revolutionary" potential they want to encourage.<sup>79</sup> Francis Davis, in contrast, remains overall skeptical of "white blues" but also disagrees with Garon's emphasis on the continued relevance of "black blues" and argues that hip-hop has replaced blues as contemporary "black folk music."<sup>80</sup> Peter Narváez, in his assessment of *Living Blues*, illustrates what he sees as the bankruptcy of the "blacks only" policy by the fact that the magazine ignored respected "white" blues performers like Johnny Winter and Paul Butterfield but ran a title story on the "black" blues guitarist Robert Cray in 1987. Despite his "blackness," Cray is from a middle-class military family and, according to Narváez, "first learned blues not in juke joints or from records by Robert Johnson and Blind Blake, but rather from recordings by Eric Clapton of the Cream and Jimi Hendrix."<sup>81</sup>

While these scholars criticize that the racial politics of Paul Garon and *Living Blues* have become questionable with the changing racial dynamics of blues music in the 1970s and beyond, I argue that they reflect a problematic conceptualization of blues *from the outset*, as blues was not a purely "black" music to begin with. My own critique of *Living Blues'* racial politics, then, is not so much a critique of the journal's failure to adapt to historical change, as it is a critique of the racialized conceptualization of blues which had informed the mission and content of the magazine present in its earliest issues. As I

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<sup>79</sup> Carl Boggs and Ray Pratt, "The Blues Tradition: Poetic Revolt or Cultural Impasse?" in *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives*, ed. Donald Lazere (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 279-292.

<sup>80</sup> Francis Davis, *The History of the Blues* (New York: Hyperion, 1995).

<sup>81</sup> Narváez, "*Living Blues Journal*," 253. The title story about Robert Cray appeared in *Living Blues* 73 (January/February 1987).

have shown, *Living Blues*' racialized conceptualization has repeatedly been made explicit by Paul Garon but has also been challenged by other blues scholars and by the readers of the magazine.

### Conclusion

*Living Blues*, a fairly small publication serving a niche market, can serve as an example for tendencies in blues discourses since the 1960s to maintain and justify a clear distinction between an authenticated "black" and a derivative "white" performance of the music. I have illustrated how the racialization of blues took place in the content of the magazine as well as how it was explicitly articulated by the editorial staff, in particular by former editor Paul Garon. Furthermore, I have shown how the racialization of blues promoted by *Living Blues* prompted a discussion of racial politics that is symptomatic for debates surrounding "race" and authenticity in blues music since the 1960s on a larger scale. Similar, if somewhat differently focused, debates have taken place on the pages of *Sing Out!*, *Rolling Stone* and *Guitar Player*. I have argued that the policy of *Living Blues* to limit the definition of blues to "black working class" did not so much *become* problematic over time with significant changes taking place in the production and reception of blues, but that this policy had been problematic from the outset because it relied on a definition of blues that completely disregarded blues' interracial history.

In formulating and carrying out their "blacks only" policy, the editors of *Living Blues* did not only ignore the history of blues prior to the advent of the recording history and the segregation of sound, they also created a conflict between the racial markers they attributed to the music and their own racialized subject positions. This conflict was never fully acknowledged by Paul Garon, who acted as the spokesperson for articulating *Living Blues*' racial politics. The focus of this chapter has been on the way struggles over "race" and authenticity have played out among the largely "white" staff and readership of *Living Blues* (and among "white" audiences in general). My analysis of *Living Blues*' cultural

work in the early 1970s focused on the way "blackness" functioned as a contested signifier of subcultural capital for the largely "white" producers and consumers of the magazine. I also touched on the way the authentication of blues in the magazine and elsewhere was connected to a masculinization of the genre when I described the formation of blues connoisseurship in the 1960s and linked the authentication of blues to the segregation of sound in the early 20th century. I argue that *Living Blues* made an attempt to resegregate the blues in response to the significant changes of the 1960s that had led to the racially ambiguous (and "commercialized") music of B.B. King and Eric Clapton, among others.

I interpret this resegregation of the blues through a nostalgic construction of history as an indirect attempt to unmake desegregating impulses brought about by the Civil Rights Movement. Instead of acknowledging challenges to their nostalgic construction of blues by then-current musical and political articulations of blackness, the editors of *Living Blues* upheld a narrow and essentialist view that authenticated blues by placing it outside of their own racialized bodies. Interestingly, the historiography of blues music from the 1970s onward did not vary greatly from the discussions about racial politics as they appeared in *Living Blues*. Stagnant as a musical genre, blues became the continued nostalgic yet contested celebration of blackness by "white" performers, cultural brokers, and fans.



## CONCLUSION

When Republican George H. W. Bush was inaugurated as the 41st U.S. president in January of 1989, the festivities ended with a nearly four-hour long rhythm and blues show at the Washington Convention Center. The idea of Bush's campaign manager Lee Atwater, the concert featured seasoned blues musicians like Willie Dixon, Albert Collins, Koko Taylor and Stevie Ray Vaughan, Atwater himself, and even, during a brief jam session, the newly elected president playing an electric guitar with the words "the prez" inscribed on it. The *New York Times* reported that the evening, despite its title "Celebration for Young Americans," featured music that was "not widely popular among young whites or blacks" and that the crowd was reminiscent of a "country-club prom, with tuxedos and strapless dresses and little gold or pearl earrings (on the women, that is)."<sup>1</sup> Yet, there was Lee Atwater, wearing sunglasses and playing the blues for the Republican Party of the United States.

The employment of blues music at George Bush, Sr.'s inaugural gala dramatically illustrates the strengthening of a conservative blues formation after the 1960s. As I have argued throughout my dissertation, the 1960s saw a reconfiguration of blues from "black" to "white" in its production and reception while remaining deeply connected with constructions of an authentic blackness (as in the marketing of "black" audiences on B.B. King's records to "white" consumers). At the American Folk Blues Festival and in the British Blues Movement, the music crossed national boundaries, and at the Newport Folk Festival, blues and other forms of "black" music were featured as agents of cross-racial communication and civil rights. However, in the long run the increased "whitening" of blues did not lead to a more flexible but rather a more rigid conceptualization of the genre

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<sup>1</sup> John Rockwell, "Atwater's Other Hat: Stealing an Inaugural Show," *New York Times* (23 January 1989), C19.

and a commercially driven, nostalgic celebration of an invented past informed by essentialist notions of "race" and gender.

My analysis of the racial politics of blues music in the 1960s connects and comments on three areas of scholarship: blues studies, social histories of the 1960s, and critical race studies (in particular those concerned with "whiteness"). To blues studies, I contribute an interrogation of the rarely discussed "whitening" of the music in the 1960s, which involved the transformation from blues to rock (and the masculinization of blues in the process), the preservation of "folk blues" styles and the impact of European blues fans, musicians and promoters. My critical assessment of ideological formations connected to blues music is in conversation with other current studies of the genre. To some degree, this assessment is an exercise in countering countercultural movements and therefore an intervention in social histories of the 1960s, which generally highlight the decade's "progressive" movements and their conservative "backlash." My focus on "white" blues audiences, performers and cultural brokers also adds to the scholarship on "whiteness" by maintaining that, despite trends that indicate otherwise, there still is demand to study hegemony-constituting forces.<sup>2</sup>

Although I have not made it explicit in every chapter, there is an important connection between the racial politics of blues music in the 1960s and the struggle for civil rights by "blacks" in the U.S. In the years I concentrate on — roughly 1955 to 1975 — there were significant changes in the conceptualization of blues music. As I have argued, these changes were directly related to the crucial events of the Civil Rights Movement occurring in the same time span — the integration of schools in the wake of

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<sup>2</sup> Robin Kelley wrote in 1992, "For all of us who are [...] concerned [...] with making agency central to the study of popular culture, the defeats, constraints, and, more generally, the reproduction of hegemony ought to be just as important as the power of audiences to invest mass-produced cultural forms with oppositional meanings." Robin Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Folk,'" *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992): 1400-1408; 1408.

Brown vs. Board of Education, lunch-counter sit-ins and marches, the Watts riots, the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, to name just a few — as "whites" began to embrace a safe and nostalgic notion of blackness which actual "blacks" were increasingly moving away from. One can argue that in the more than three decades that have passed since 1975, the changes that have occurred in the conceptualization of blues music and in the struggle for civil rights in the U.S. have been much less powerful. As post-Civil-Rights generations were faced with the continued oppression of U.S. "blacks," blues music remained a symbolic marker of "whites" putting "blacks" in their place through a reinvention of a non-threatening past. The intricacies of more subtle but pervasive parameters of "black" oppression since 1975 and the way these parameters were reflected in blues music remain a worthy topic of investigation.

Because of the relative dearth of rigorous scholarship on the blues, particularly blues after World War II, my study points to many directions of further research. In order to open up discussions about the racial politics of blues, I felt it most useful at this point to focus on five interconnected case studies, rather than one narrowly defined topic. Each of my case studies could very well have been a dissertation topic in its own right. In particular, a more thorough research of primary sources for each of my five subtopics would help to gain a more substantiated understanding of the processes at work in the racialization of blues than I was able to reach.<sup>3</sup> Because I concentrated on particular performers, cultural brokers and events, which I then used as representative examples, I was only able to make brief references to other, related subtopics that deserve more

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Kellett, a Ph.D. student of history at the University of Maryland, is currently undertaking research for a comprehensive study of the British Blues Movement. As far as I know, there are no research projects on the other understudied subtopics of my dissertation in the making — blues publications, the connections between blues and psychedelic rock, the role of blues within the folk revival of the 1960s, and the impact of the American Folk Blues Festival on European countries besides Great Britain.

critical attention. Obviously, there were many more "black" and "white" performers who contributed to the racial politics of blues in the 1960s: Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, who released commercially successful psychedelic blues albums in the late 1960s, Bobby "Blue" Bland, whose soul blues remained popular among "black" audiences, Janis Joplin, who complicates the notions of the masculinization of blues I have discussed, and "white negroes" such as Mick Jagger and Johnny Winter, whose blues takes a more self-assertive approach than that of Eric Clapton.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the American Folk Blues Festival and the Newport Folk Festival, a number of other festivals prominently featured blues artists in the 1960s, in particular the monumental Ann Arbor Blues Festival of which there is very little documentation. My chapter on *Living Blues* magazine only briefly discusses other blues publications from the 1960s like *Blues Unlimited* and *Blues World*, which also deserve further attention. Finally, blues audiences in the 1960s remain an elusive subject of inquiry, which I was able to touch on repeatedly but not comprehensively.

The main focus of my analysis of blues music is on "race" and processes of racialization but I have also noted the multiple intersections of "race" and other factors in the ideological construction of blues music like gender, class, nation, age, and region. Examples included the editorial politics of *Living Blues*, which defined blues as "black" male working-class despite the fact that the editors were exclusively "white" middle-class, the generational divide between the "rediscovered" rural blues artists and their mostly urban "rediscoverers" and audiences at the Newport Folk Festival, and Horst Lippmann's and Fritz Rau's legitimization of jazz and blues through drawing on Germany's Nazi past. The foregrounding of each of the intersected markers of identity which come to play in the ideological construction of blues has the potential of yielding

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<sup>4</sup> For the term "white negro," see chapter II, in particular pp. 47-49.

interesting results. For instance, a stronger focus on region within the United States could complicate my analysis of the "whitening" of blues in the 1960s by discussing the alignment of Southern "whites" and "blacks" through blues music (as in the music of the Allman Brothers and others).<sup>5</sup> This is also true for the comparative study of blues and other genres of popular music linked to a "black" tradition.<sup>6</sup> I have noted folk, rock, jazz and soul as important in this regard but the appropriation of "black" music by "white" people also plays a vital role in the history and historiography of spirituals, funk, and hip hop, to name just the most obvious examples.<sup>7</sup> Finally, a further development of the transnational approach of my analysis of the American Folk Blues Festival and the British Blues Movement by looking at how audiences outside of Western Europe and the U.S. make meaning of the blues could support or even challenge the arguments I have made about the ideological construction of the music.<sup>8</sup>

My analysis of blues music's racial politics in the 1960s is an attempt to seriously question the reception and definition of blues in recent years. In order to qualify my criticism of current conceptualizations of the blues, it would be vital to look at some of

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<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Eric D. Johnson for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>6</sup> Elijah Wald has begun to show how blues (in this case the music of Robert Johnson) did not exist as a singular and clearly defined genre even in the 1930s but only thrived in its lively exchange with country music and Tin Pan Alley pop hits. See Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> The appropriation of "black" music by "white" people has been the concern of many scholars from Leroi Jones' *Blues People* over Nelson George's *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* to Todd Boyd's *The New H.N.I.C.* Yet, only recently have scholars begun to study the ontological complexities involved in this process, an excellent example being Jon Cruz's study of spirituals. See Leroi Jones, *Blues People* (New York: William Morrow, 1963); Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); Todd Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.: The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Jon Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> A promising start for this type of research is Michael Urban, *Russia Gets the Blues: Music, Culture, and Community in Unsettled Times* (Ithaca, NJ: Cornell University Press, 2004).

the major developments in terms of blues' stratification and commodification over the last three decades, in particular the blues revival of the 1990s, which to some degree has continued into the present. Blues musicians kept touring throughout the 1970s and 1980s and films like *Blues Brothers* (1980) and *Crossroads* (1986) adapted blues for a larger audience. The reissue of Robert Johnson's *Complete Recordings* in 1990 and the release of John Lee Hooker's comeback album *The Healer* in 1991 as well as "white" Texan blues guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan's highly publicized death in a plane crash in 1990 signaled the beginning of a full-fledged and commercially fueled blues revival. The institutionalization of blues continued through the founding of blues societies and blues museums, a series of commemorative stamps by the U.S. postal service in 1994 featuring Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Bessie Smith and others, and eventually the declaration of 2004 as the "year of the blues." Millions flocked to hear blues performed at the Chicago Blues Festival or at smaller clubs like B.B. King's in Memphis (founded in 1991) or Buddy Guy's Legends in Chicago (founded in 1989) or listened to the growing number of newly recorded blues albums and reissues. The blues revival of the 1990s involved, at least in part, the same, now aging "white" audiences that had become interested in the blues in the 1960s. These audiences deserve further attention as do blues audiences in places outside the U.S. and Western Europe like Japan.<sup>9</sup> Debates about blues authenticity continued in the 1990s, in particular with the increasing profitability of blues tourism in Chicago, Memphis and the Mississippi Delta and the success of "white"

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<sup>9</sup> It might also be worthwhile to write about "black" blues audiences which still exist but by now have become a subculture enshrouded in constructions of authenticity by "white" scholars, musicians and audiences. Except as musicians (and a fairly small number of aging fans), "blacks" have rarely participated in blues scenes of the 1990s revival. In an article for *Ebony* from 1997, Joy Bennett Kinnon states that the music that had once held much cultural significance for "blacks" has almost entirely lost its "black" audiences and has become a form of entertainment for "white" people in the U.S. and Europe. Joy Bennett Kinnon, "Are Whites Taking or Are Blacks Giving Away the Blues?," *Ebony* 52.11 (September 1997), 86-90.

Southerner Isaac Tigris' chain of "million dollar juke joints," the House of Blues.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, the blues revival has lived on in the PBS documentary series *Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues: A Musical Journey* (2003) with features by Scorsese himself, Clint Eastwood, Wim Wenders and others, and in the Hollywood movie *Black Snake Moan* (2006) featuring Samuel L. Jackson as aging blues singer.<sup>11</sup>

Lee Atwater's playing the blues with Albert Collins at George Bush Sr.'s inaugural gala may have kicked off the full realization of the conservative blues culture of the 1990s, a conservative blues culture that had evolved through the racial politics of the 1960s. It is quite ironic that blues with its long history of being an agent of liberation for oppressed minorities and women had become the music at a party celebrating the highest member of the white male power structure. There are many ironies in the history of the blues and its racial underpinnings, and blues musicians have expressed these ironies quite frequently, but somebody is yet to write the "Lee Atwater Blues."

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Lieberfeld, "Million-Dollar Juke-Joint: Commodifying Blues Culture," *African American Review* 29.2 (Summer 1995), 217-221; Robert Nicholson, *Mississippi: The Blues Today!* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999); David Grazian, *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Stephen A. King, "Blues Tourism in the Mississippi Delta: The Functions of Blues Festivals," *Popular Music and Society* 27.4 (2004), 455-475; Steve Cheseborough, *Blues Traveling: The Holy Sites of Delta Blues* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> All but one of the seven films of Scorsese's series as well as *Black Snake Moan* were directed by "white" males (the one exception being a "black" male) and, one can argue, are more revealing about "white" desires than the "black" music they feature. Consider this quote by Martin Scorsese, for instance: "Rock & roll seemed to just come to us, on the radio and in the record stores. It became *our* music, a very important way of defining ourselves and separating from our parents. But then we uncovered another, deeper level, the history behind rock and R&B, the music *behind* our music. All roads led to the source, which was the blues." Martin Scorsese quoted in *Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues: A Musical Journey*, ed. Peter Guralnick (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 6.

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