

Week 2 Musical Examples

1. Ma Rainey-*Black Eyed Blues*-Ma Rainey wasn't the first blues singer to make records, but by all rights she probably should have been.

From: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* Shanachie/Yazoo

2. Bessie Smith-*St. Louis Blues*-The first major blues and jazz singer on record and one of the most powerful of all time, Bessie Smith rightly earned the title of "The Empress of the Blues." Even on her first records in 1923, her passionate voice overcame the primitive recording quality of the day and still communicates easily to today's listeners (which is not true of any other singer from that early period).

From: *The Collection* Sony

3. Little Brother Montgomery-*Frisco Hi Ball Blues*-A notable influence to the likes of Sunnyland Slim and Otis Spann, pianist "Little Brother" Montgomery's lengthy career spanned both the earliest years of blues history and the electrified Chicago scene of the 1950s.

From: *Down In Black Bottom: Lowdown Barrelhouse Piano* Shanachie/Yazoo

4. Charley Patton-*Mississippi Bo Weevil Blues*- If the Delta country blues has a convenient source point, it would probably be Charley Patton, its first great star. His hoarse, impassioned singing style, fluid guitar playing, and unrelenting beat made him the original king of the Delta blues.

From: *The Complete Recordings* JSP Records

5. Tommy Johnson-*Lonesome Home Blues*- Next to Son House and Charley Patton, no one was more important to the development of pre-Robert Johnson Delta blues than Tommy Johnson. Armed with a powerful voice that could go from a growl to an eerie falsetto range and a guitar style that had all of the early figures and licks of the Delta style clearly delineated, Johnson only recorded for two years — from 1928 to 1930 — but left behind a body of work that's hard to ignore.

From: *Jackson Blues 1928-1938* Shanachie/Yazoo

6. Willie Brown-*Future Blues*-One of the most influential of the early Delta blues guitarists, Willie Brown was arguably the quintessential accompanist of his era, most notably backing legends including Charley Patton and Son House. Born August 6, 1900 in Clarksdale, Mississippi, Brown was an affecting singer and extraordinary guitarist, but spent the vast majority of his career as a sideman, with his ability to "second" other players much celebrated among his peers.

From: *Chasin That Devil's Music, Searching For The Blues* Cd accompaniment to book, Gayle Dean Wardlow Miller Freeman Books

7-9. Son House-*My Black Mama, Preachin' The Blues, Fo' Clock Blues*- Son House's place, not only in the history of Delta blues, but in the overall history of the music, is a very high one indeed. He was a major innovator of the Delta style, along with his playing partners Charley Patton and Willie Brown. Few listening experiences in the blues are as intense as hearing one of Son House's original 1930s recordings for the Paramount label.

From: *The Roots Of Robert Johnson* Shanachie/Yazoo ; *Son House: The Complete Library of Congress Recordings* Interstate Music Ltd.

10-12. Robert Johnson- *Me and the Devil Blues, Crossroad Blues, They're Red Hot*-If the blues has a truly mythic figure, one whose story hangs over the music the way a Charlie Parker does over jazz or a Hank Williams does over country, it's Robert Johnson, certainly the most celebrated figure in the history of the blues. Of course, his legend is immensely fortified by the fact that Johnson also left behind a small legacy of recordings that are considered the emotional apex of the music itself. These recordings have not only entered the realm of blues standards ("Love in Vain," "Crossroads," "Sweet Home

Chicago," "Stop Breaking Down"), but were adapted by rock & roll artists as diverse as the Rolling Stones, Steve Miller, Led Zeppelin, and Eric Clapton.

From: *The Complete Recordings* Columbia Records

13. Bukkha White-*Shake Em' on Down*- Born sometime in the early 1900's, Bukka White was one of the many talented blues musicians of his time. Originally named Booker T. Washington White, Bukka is said to have been born in Houston, Mississippi, on November 12, 1909 (eyeneer.com). However, Arne Brogger, a friend of Bukka's, recalls Bukka having been born in Aberdeen, Mississippi, in 1902 (Brogger). Another reliable source states that Bukka was born in 1906 (Eley). Although the birth date and birthplace of Bukka White is debatable, his extreme gift for blues is not.

From: *Roots of Rock* Shanachie/Yazoo

14. Skip James-*Devil Got My Woman*- Among the earliest and most influential Delta bluesmen to record, Skip James was the best known proponent of the so-called Bentonia school of blues players, a genre strain invested with as much fanciful scholarly "research" as any. Coupling an oddball guitar tuning set against eerie, falsetto vocals, James's early recordings could make the hair stand up on the back of your neck.

From: *Complete Early Recordings* Shanachie/Yazoo