

LECTURE 3

Birds of a Feather: The Blues and Country as “Kissing Cousins”



WHAT IS/ARE THE BLUES?

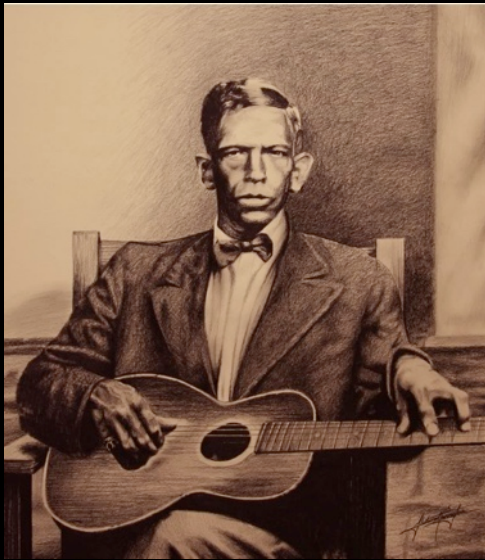
1. Emotion/Feeling “Devil Blues”
 2. A Variety of Secular Folk/Popular Genres
 3. Performance Style
 - use of the “blue note” (African scale)
 - non-Western vocal style (nasal/gritty)
 - sliding and gliding between notes
 - conversational performance style
 4. Strong Influence on Country and Rock and Roll
- 



RURAL BLUES (Country Blues)

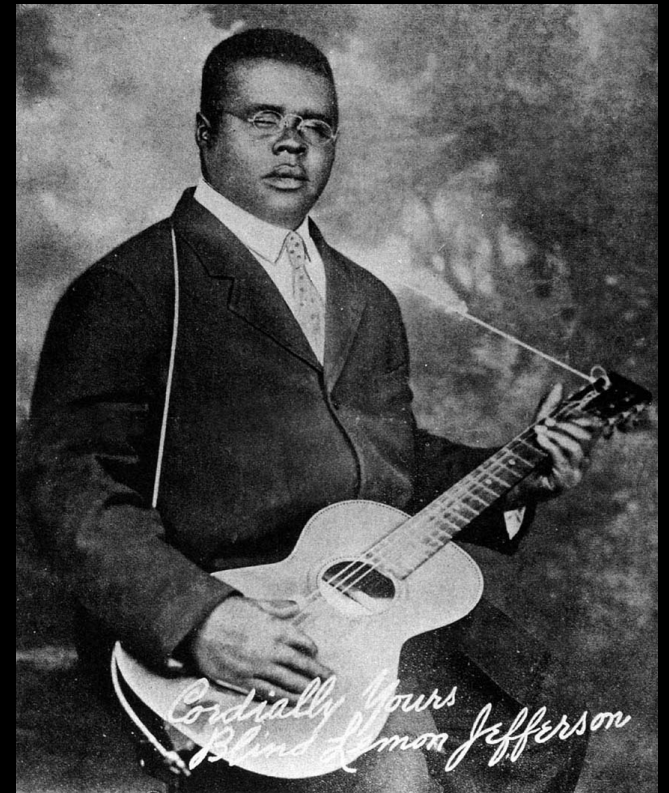
- first performed blues
- began prior to 1900 (c. 1890)
- not recorded until late 1920s-30s
- African-American genre
- based on West African Griot Tradition
- southeastern US
- solo itinerant male musicians
- regional styles: Tex-Arcana Blues, Georgia Barrel-House Blues, Mississippi Delta Blues

Mississippi Delta Bluesmen



Charlie Patton

Sun House



*Cordially Yours
Blind Lemon Jefferson*
Blind Lemon Jefferson

Robert Johnson (1911-1938)

- developed unique bottleneck technique (using a glass bottleneck on neck of guitar to create a vocal-like sliding sound)
- legendary life and death
- major influence on blues and rock guitarists



“Hell Hound on My Trail” (1937)

- **metaphorical imagery**
- **first person experience**
- **alternating spoken and sung text**
- **high nasal voice**
- **interjected moans and hums**
- **call & response - voice and guitar**
- **AAB lyric form (informal)**

I got to keep movin',
I got to keep movin'
Blues fallin' down like
hail
Blues fallin' down like
hail

Umm mmm mmm
Blues fallin' down like
hail
Blues fallin' down like
hail

And the days keeps on
worryin' me,
There's a hellhound on my
trail
Hellhound on my trail,
Hellhound on my trail

If today was
Christmas Eve
If today was
Christmas Eve

And tomorrow
Christmas Day
*Oh, wouldn't we have a
time baby?*

All I would need my little
sweet rider
Just, to pass the time away
Huh huh, to pass the time
away

If you sprinkled hot
foot powder
Hm, around my door
All around my door

If you sprinkled hot foot
powder
Around your daddy's
door, hmm hmm mmm

It keep me with ramblin'
mind, rider
Every ole place I go
Every ole place I go

I can tell the wind is
risin'
The leaves tremblin'
on the tree
Tremblin' on the tree

I can tell the wind is
risin'
The leaves tremblin' on
the tree
Hmm hmm hmm mmm

All I need's my little sweet
woman
To keep my company
Hmm hmm hey hey
My company

“Hell Hound on My Trail” - 1937



CLASSIC BLUES

- first recorded blues
- urban North
- women performers
- accompanied by band/small group
- switch from private entertainment to public performance
- standardization of 12-bar harmonic/temporal blues form



W.C. HANDY (1873-1958)

- “Father of the Blues”
- formally-trained African American musician from Florence, AL
- pursued career as cornetist and conductor
- saw commercial potential of the blues
- first published blues “Memphis Blues” (1912)



“St. Louis Blues”



- written by W.C. Handy in c. 1909 published in 1914
- recorded by Bessie Smith in 1925
- accompanied by Louis Armstrong
- reed organ accompaniment
- blend of blues, ragtime, & TPA styles
- smoother vocal style than country blues
- use of “blue note” on word “sun”
- three different sections
 - 12-bar blues [AAB lyric form]
 - 16-bar “tango” (Spanish tinge)
 - different 12-bar blues with new melody

“St. Louis Blues”



RACE RECORDS

- early 20th century recordings by African Americans aimed at white audiences
- mostly TPA, coon & ragtime songs



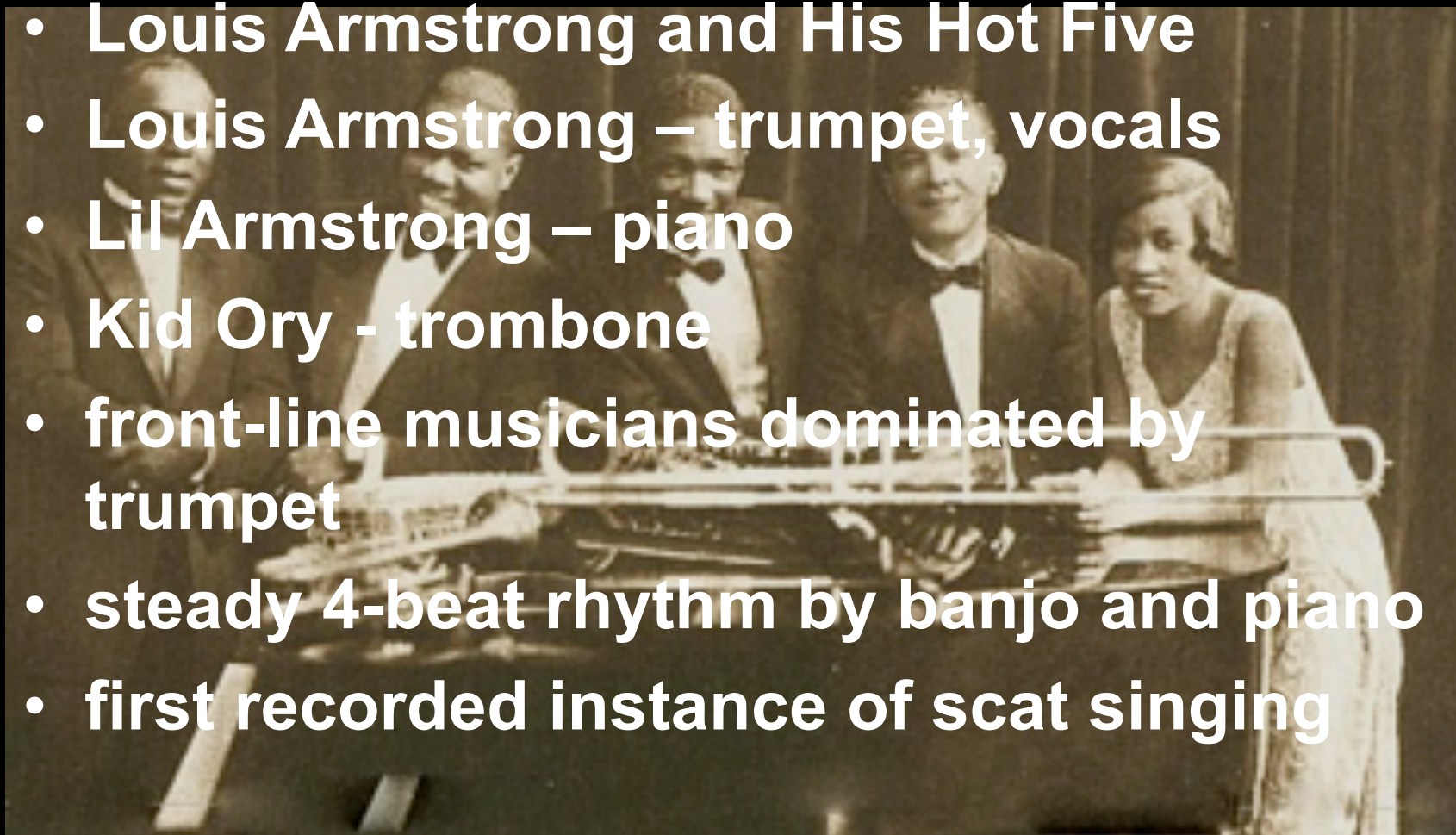
RACE RECORDS

A vintage advertisement for 'Race Records' is shown in the background. It features a woman on the left and a man on the right playing a guitar. The text 'RACE RECORDS' is prominently displayed in the upper center. At the bottom, it says 'ELECTRICALLY RECORDED' and 'They are all Phonographs'.

- “race music” first applied by Ralph Peer, Okeh talent scout
- term “race” used as positive identifier
- included a wide variety of styles [blues, jazz, gospel choirs, vocal quartets, string bands, jug and washboard bands]
- early use of mobile recording technology
- Black Swan [1st black-owned record company] 1921, NY
- Paramount Records [Wisconsin Chair Company]
- Columbia Records 1923
- Vacalion/Brunswick 1926
- Victor Company 1927

“Heebie Jeebies” (1926)

- Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five
- Louis Armstrong – trumpet, vocals
- Lil Armstrong – piano
- Kid Ory - trombone
- front-line musicians dominated by trumpet
- steady 4-beat rhythm by banjo and piano
- first recorded instance of scat singing



“Heebie Jeebies” (1926)



HILLBILLY RECORDS

- first generation of southern artists
- developed out of folk songs from British Isles
- created in 1923 by Ralph Peer while searching for race record talent
- recorded new types of music
- targeting new audiences
- amateur musicians
- radio critical to popularity (WSB Atlanta, WBAP Ft. Worth, WLS Chicago, WSM Nashville, KWKH Shreveport)
- “barn dance” & “hayride” variety shows
- movement from rural areas to cities in East & mid-West

HILLBILLY PIONEERS

Country Music Dichotomy: conflict between country and the city, home and migration, past and present tradition in a period of rapid change

TRADITION – Carter Family

- love songs
- good old days
- ballads and hymns
- family, hearth, and home

CHANGE – Jimmie Rodgers

- drifter
- broken love
- distance from home/loved ones
- (also blues themes)



CARTER FAMILY (Clinch Mt. Virginia)

- **A.P. (Alvin Pleasant “Doc” Carter**
- **Sara Carter (AP’s wife) lead vocals, played autoharp/guitar**
- **Maybelle Carter (AP’s sister-in-law)**
 - **developed influential guitar accompaniment style**
 - **“Carter pickin’”**
- **varied repertoire (Anglo-American folk, Gospel hymns, TPA)**
- **recorded over 300 songs between 1927 and 1941**
- **emphasis on family and home**
- **laid foundation for subsequent and contemporary moralistic country image into 21st century**
- **collected songs from both southern black and white traditions**
- **published all of the songs they recorded with the Southern Music Co. owned by R. Peer**

“Wildwood Flower” c. 1940

- **hit song by the Carter Family in 1928**



- **reprise by the Carter Sisters – Maybelle and daughters June, Anita, Helen**

“Wildwood Flower” c. 1940



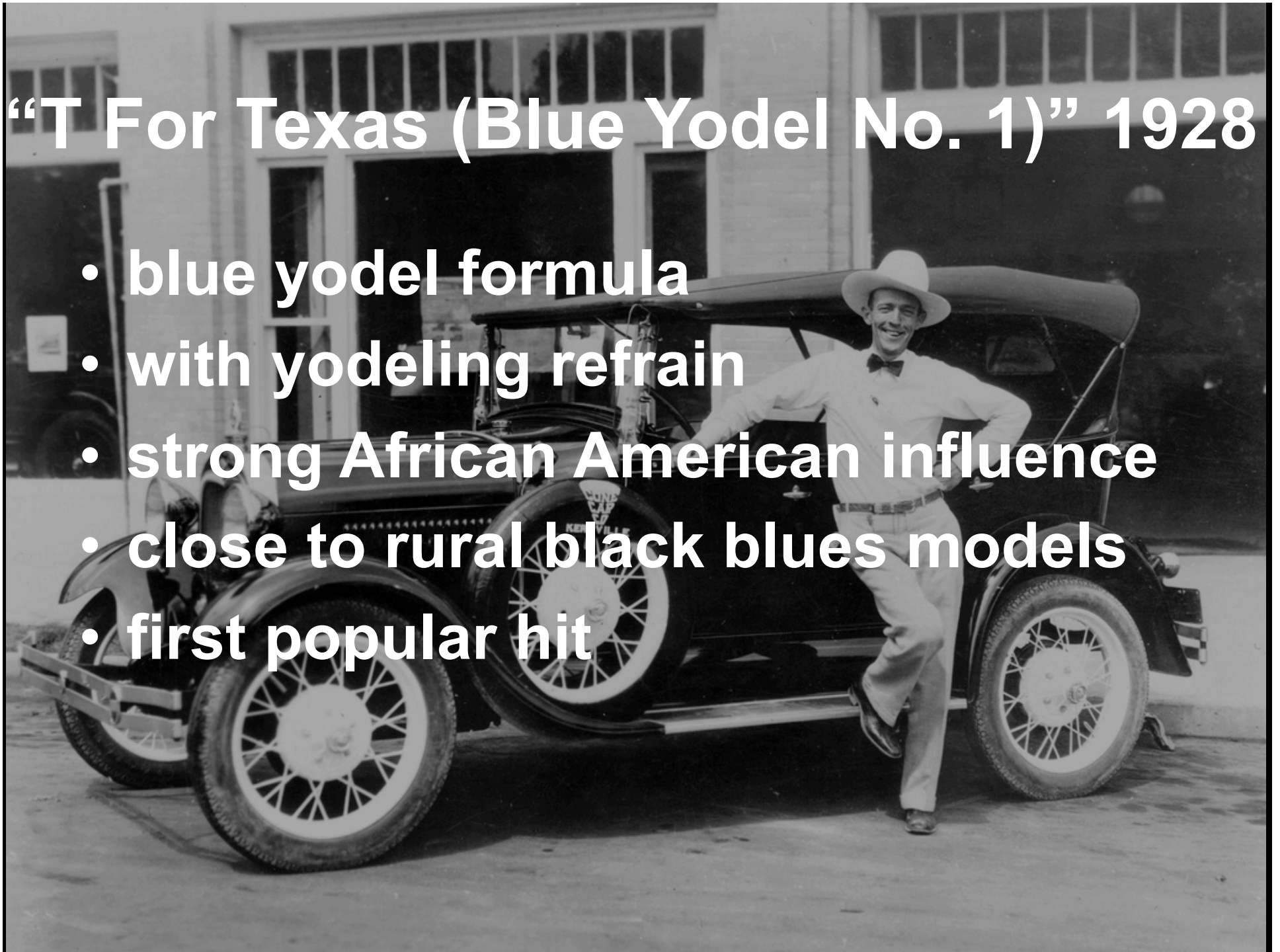
JIMMIE RODGERS



- **“Father of Country Music”**
- **familiarity with wide range of popular styles**
- **African American musical influence**
- **blue yodels – adaptation of Af-Am blues and blues performance styles**
- **musical chameleon (Singing Brakeman, Hillbilly, and Country Gentleman [origin of Western image])**
- **introduced Hawaiian steel guitar to country**
- **recorded with jazz and Hawaiian musicians**
- **also popular abroad (e.g. Africa)**

“T For Texas (Blue Yodel No. 1)” 1928

- blue yodel formula
- with yodeling refrain
- strong African American influence
- close to rural black blues models
- first popular hit



“T For Texas (Blue Yodel No. 1)” 1928



HILLBILLY MUSIC INDUSTRY (1935-1945)

- continued growth
- migration of white southerners to urban centers
- increasing interest in country music among new urban audiences
- spurred by national radio broadcasts
- expansion of Hillbilly music during the war due to:
 - formation of BMI [Broadcast Music Inc.] in 1940
 - popularity of hillbilly themes of patriotism, morality, God-fearing-ness, and sentiment

Roy Claxton Acuff

- most popular hillbilly singer of the swing era
- formed the Crazy Tennesseans in 1935
- joined Grand Old Opry in 1938
- traditionalist singing old times songs with acoustic folk instrumentation [guitar, fiddle, banjo, dobro]
- sincere heart-felt style,
- heartfelt vocal delivery
- Acuff and Rose Music Publishers, 1942



Roy Claxton Acuff

- **“Great Speckled Bird” (1938)**
- **use of dobro resonator slide guitar**
- **heartfelt performance style**
- **often cried during performance**
- **dressed as hillbilly**
- **nasal vocal quality and emphasized rural accent**
- **strong Gospel message based on Jeremiah 12:9**
- **crossover hit**



Roy Claxton Acuff



RACE RECORDS AND HILLBILLY MUSIC

- **both musics from American South**
- **derived from existing folk genres**
- **developed into new “urban” styles**
- **parallel development**
- **creation of syncretic African American and Anglo American hybrids**
- **crossover from margins to mainstream**

Singing Cowboys

- placed the old west in the imagination of the public through dime novels, silent then sound films
- songs associated with movement, independence, and the future
- based in Los Angeles
- “hated” by Nashville establishment





Gene Autry

- began career as hillbilly singer in the vein of Jimmy Rodgers
- starred western films and serials
- with Sons of the Pioneers (Bill Nolan, Leonard Slye [aka Roy Rogers])
- may be best known for his classic version of “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer”

“Back in the Saddle Again” (1939)



- Gene Autry's theme song
- crooning TPA vocal style with country instruments
- twin fiddles
- bass fiddle
- accordion
- dobro played in sliding style

“Back in the Saddle Again” (1939)





Sons of the Pioneers

- **“Tumbling Tumble Weeds” (1949)**
- **influenced by Mills Brothers harmonies**
- **featuring Bill Nolan on lead vocal**
- **stranded-in-the-desert-thirsty-imagery**
- **contrasted with programmatic “coolness”**

Sons of the Pioneers



COUNTRY & WESTERN

- **post-WWII name for Hillbilly music**
- **rapid spread of country due to radio**
- **popularity among servicemen in WWII**
- **large US audience in urban areas**
- **emergence of new styles**
 - **bluegrass**
 - **country crooners**
 - **honky tonk**

BLUEGRASS

- named after **Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys**
- hillbilly vocal style and harmony
- high falsetto harmony on top
- chop chord mandolin “backbeat”
- virtuoso banjo five-finger banjo style
- very fast tempi

L to R: Bessie Lee Mauldin, Bill Monroe, Joe Stuart, Del McCoury, and Bill Keith, taken at the Brown County Jamboree Barn, 1963. Photo by Jim Peva

“It’s Mighty Dark to Travel”



HONKY TONK

- rough and tumble working class bar with live music (Blood Buckets)
- post-war (WWII) country music style
- juke joint – similar bar with juke box
- loud enough to be heard above din
- articulated problems and pleasures of audience
- introduced electric steel guitar and drum set to country
- rural accent nasal vocal style

HONKY TONK



HANK WILLIAMS (1923-1953)

- “Father of Honky Tonk”
- born in rural Alabama
- grew up in Montgomery
- influenced by black street musician “Teetot”
- bucked the wholesome image of country music
- “rambunctious” performing style
- kicked out of G.O.O.



“Hey Good Lookin’”



POSTWAR Rhythm and Blues

- updated name for race records
- racially-oriented music category beginning in late 1940s
- contributed to breakdown of ethnic barriers in pop music in the 1950s
- broad crossover appeal
- catch-all for variety of African-American styles:
 - blues – urban electric
 - jump
 - R&B vocal/
 - Gospel-influenced styles
 - Doo Wop

JUMP BANDS (post WWII)

- **scaled-down big band**
- **electric guitar**
- **drum set**
- **blues-based**
- **catchy lyrics**
- **novelty themes**
- **smooth vocal quality**
- **slick marketing**
- **‘boogie woogie’ dance groove**

Albert Ammons & Pete Johnson



Louis Jordan and His Timpani Five

- post-WWII Jump Band
- swing rhythm
- blues-based
- urban slang and metaphor
- boogie-woogie bass & piano
- producer/composer Milt Gabler @ Decca Records



“Caledonia”



Wynonie Harris

- **Kansas City blues shouter**
- **“Good Rockin’ Tonight” 1947**
- **backed by jump band**
- **boogie-woogie bass**
- **hard swing**
- **saxophone**
- **early lyric reference to “Rock and Roll”**



“Good Rockin’ Tonight” 1947



CHICAGO ELECTRIC BAR BLUES



- **CHESS RECORDS**
- **Chicago Indie (independent) Record Label**
- **Phil and Leonard Chess – Polish immigrants**
- **tapped into Af-Am urban blues scene**
- **Muddy Waters – electric slide guitar**
- **Willie Dixon – bass/composer**
- **Etta James – soulful blues singer**
- **Howlin' Wolf – grainy vocal style**
- **Little Walter - harmonica**
- **Chuck Berry – rock 'n' roll in mid-50s**

Muddy Waters (1915-1983)

- born McKinley Morganfield
- Rolling Fork, Mississippi
- moved to Chicago in early 40s
- adapted Mississippi Delta Blues to electric guitar
- bottle-neck slide

“I’m Your Hoochie Coochie Man” (1954)

- lyrics by Willie Dixon
- 12-bar blues form
- references sexual prowess and African charms



“I’m Your Hoochie Coochie Man” 1954



FEMALE R&B - Ruth Brown

- “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean”
1953
 - #1 on R&B Charts for five weeks
 - #23 on pop charts
 - blending of blues and TPA derived forms
 - jump band accompaniment
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FEMALE R&B - Ruth Brown



LIEBER AND STOLLER



Jerry Leiber (lyricist)

Mike Stoller (composer)

songwriting team

fondness for R&B

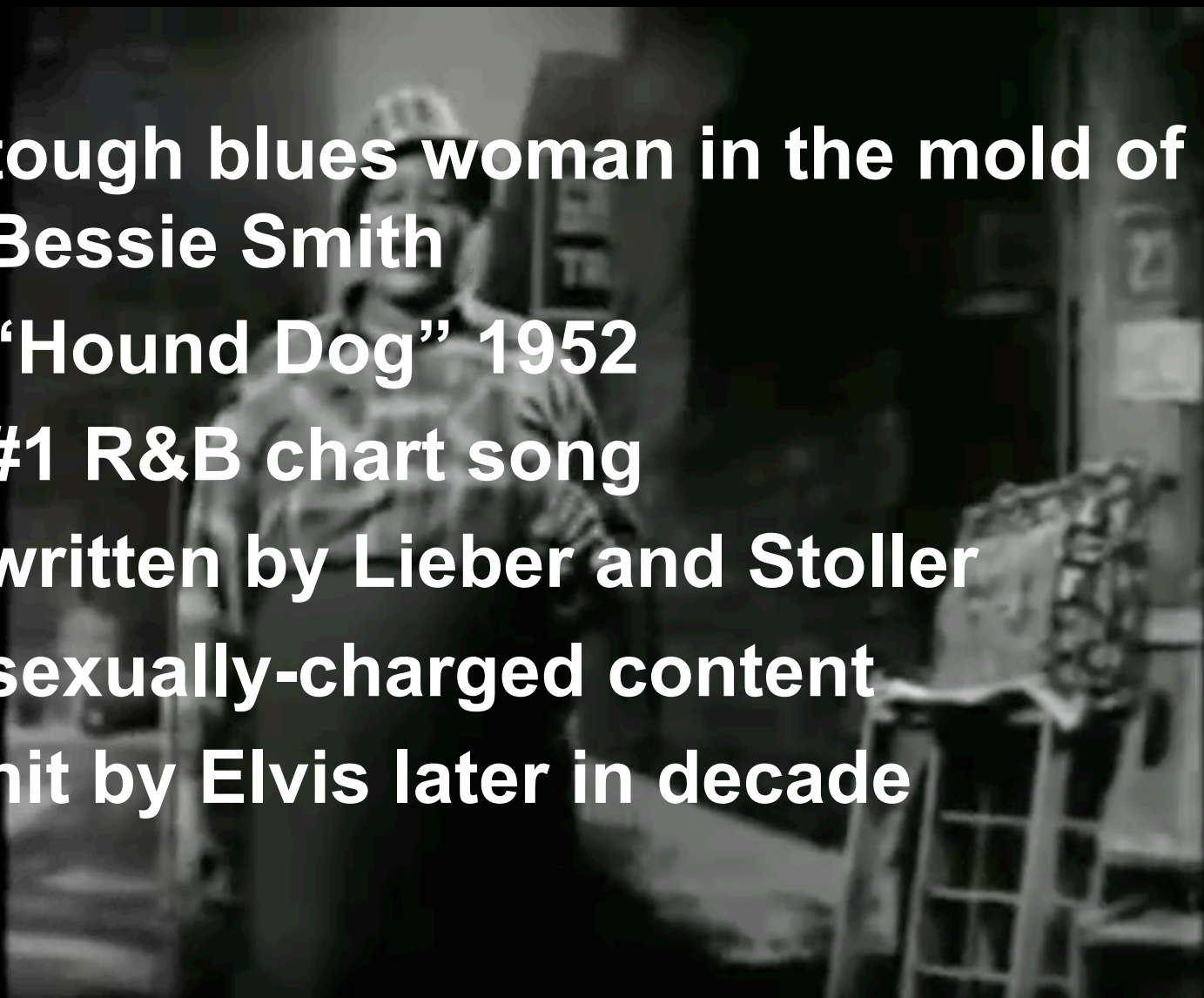
created the Coasters

wrote hits for the Drifters

carried success into the 60s

Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton

- tough blues woman in the mold of Bessie Smith
- “Hound Dog” 1952
- #1 R&B chart song
- written by Lieber and Stoller
- sexually-charged content
- hit by Elvis later in decade



“Hound Dog” 1952



1957

DOO-WOP

PAUL
WILSON

NATE
NELSON

TERRY
JOHNSON

TOMMY
HUNT

Gospel-based vocal style

- male
- early 1950s
- close vocal harmony
- four/five singers of same race
- lead voice (tenor)
- vocal backup singers
- “bird groups” (Robins, Ravens, Penguins, Flamingos, Orioles)

The FLAMINGOS



The Orioles

- Sonny Till lead singer
- Doo-Wop ballad style
- Gospel vocal approach
- pioneered cool approach to stage mannerisms
- “Crying In the Chapel” 1953
- originally a Country song
- one of the 1st R&B to pop crossovers (#1 R&B - #11 pop)

“Crying In the Chapel” 1953

