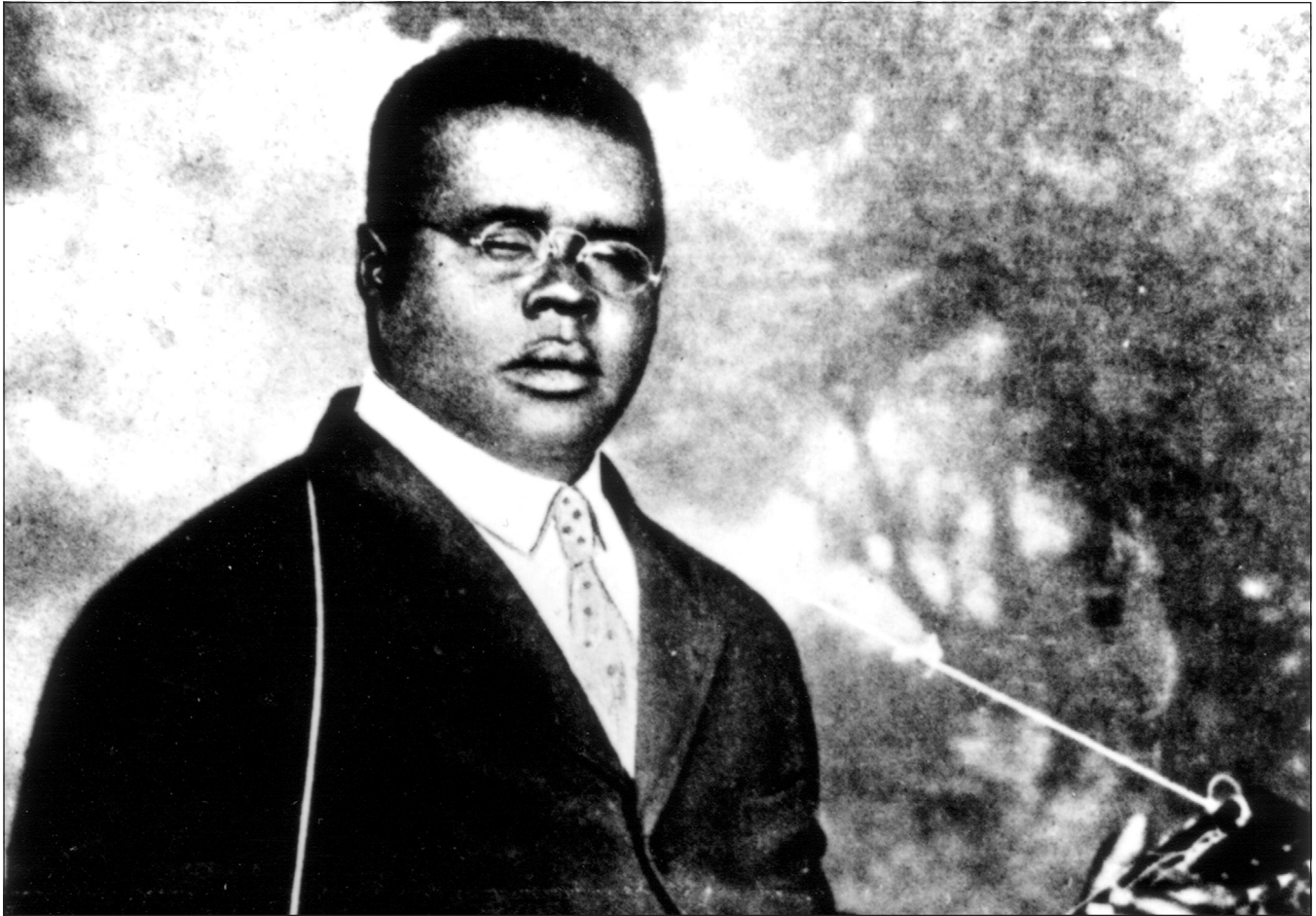


New Songs of Blind Lemon Jefferson

Luigi Monge and David Evans



Blind Lemon Jefferson, ca. 1927, Courtesy Documentary Arts

The main purpose of this essay is to examine newly discovered material by one of the great creative forces in the blues, Blind Lemon Jefferson. We will attempt to explain the material's peculiarities and try to solve certain problems it presents.¹ By placing these new songs in the context of Jefferson's other known music and his blues in particular, as well as within the broader spectrum of American folk music tradition, we will try to show how they add to, confirm, or modify our understanding of Jefferson's life, personality, music, and artistic stature. In particular, we will investigate certain themes in the lyrics of these new songs. One of these is the theme of violent attacks and outbursts, either suffered or perpetrated by the blind singer. Another is the theme of blindness itself. As explained in an earlier article by Monge, the many cryptic visual references in Jefferson's lyrics unveil a psychological preoccupation with his blindness and constitute the sub-theme underlying the whole of his lyrical output.² In order to corroborate this theory, a complete list of Jefferson's visual references in the new songs is provided in the Appendix for statistical comparisons with the results obtained in the earlier article.

Blind Lemon Jefferson was the first important self-accompanied blues singer-guitarist to make recordings.³ Many of his records sold quite well, and he was a great influence on other musicians. Versions of his songs have continued to be performed and recorded to the present day, and his improvisational guitar

style served as a prototype for modern electric lead guitar in the blues. His success also created opportunities for many more self-accompanied artists to make recordings. Jefferson was born in 1893 in Couchman, near Wortham, Texas. As best can be determined, he was blind from birth. However, he soon displayed a remarkable ability to get around and take care of himself. With little or no formal education, he showed an early interest in music and took up guitar playing and singing. By 1912 he was riding trains to Dallas and performing in the Deep Ellum and Central Track area. One of his musical partners in this early period was the influential Texas singer and songwriter Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter).

When the Wortham area experienced an oil boom in the early 1920s, Jefferson performed there for tips from “wildcatters” and “sports.” By 1925, he was back performing in Dallas, where he was discovered by R. T. Ashford, proprietor of a record store and shoeshine parlor. Jefferson traveled to Chicago and made his first recordings in late 1925 or early 1926. Between then and the end of 1929, he recorded about 90 released titles, mostly blues, along with a few spirituals and other types of folksongs.⁴ All of these were made for Paramount Records in Chicago or in Richmond, Indiana, with the exception of one session in Atlanta in March, 1927, for Okeh Records, which resulted in the release of two songs. During this period, Jefferson traveled widely, performing in theatres and other venues. He died under uncertain circumstances in late December, 1929, in Chicago, either from a heart attack or from freezing to death, or perhaps a combination of the two. He is buried in Wortham.

The new material, most of which we present here for the first time, comes from typed and hand written copyright deposits of the Chicago Music Publishing Company at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and includes the following songs: “Laboring Man Blues,” “Elder Green’s in Town,” “English Stop Time,” “I Labor So Far from Home,” “Light House Blues,” “Money Tree Mama Blues,” and “Pineapple Blues.” Besides these, we will also discuss three alternate versions of already known songs, which in two cases bear completely different titles from Jefferson’s previously issued recordings. We became aware of the existence of these copyright deposits through a number of different published sources, as well as our own research in the Library of Congress.⁵ Although the songs under discussion



here most likely were recorded by Jefferson at some point, any such recordings appear to have been lost or destroyed.

The importance of this material goes beyond helping to fill some of the gaps in Jefferson’s discography. In fact, not only does the material

provide additional information about Jefferson’s unissued recordings for Okeh Records, but it also includes previously unknown titles made for Paramount Records. In one of the earliest and most in-depth studies of Jefferson’s artistry, Samuel Charters was the first to publish the music and lyrics of “Elder Green’s in Town” and the music of the instrumental “English Stop Time.”⁶ Since then, record collectors have searched unsuccessfully for possible test pressings of these titles. Because none has been found so far, we assume that recordings of these songs are lost forever. In this article we are now presenting the same material as Charters with some further comments, plus the new songs from all the other available copyright deposits.

At the time of his Okeh sessions, which took place on March 14 and 15, 1927, in Atlanta, Georgia, Jefferson had been recording for Paramount Records for more than a year. He recorded a total of eight songs for Okeh agent Polk Brockman, but only two sides (“Black Snake Moan” b/w “Match Box Blues,” Okeh 8455) were issued, probably because Paramount Records claimed Jefferson as one of its exclusive recording artists and blocked Okeh’s plans to release the other six titles.⁷ Since Chicago Music Publishing Company was Jefferson’s publisher, and, since Jefferson probably had a closer relationship with its owner J. Mayo Williams than with the Paramount Record Company, our speculation is that Jefferson’s temporary switch to Okeh would not have affected his publishing relationship with Chicago Music Publishing Company. Indeed, the two issued Okeh songs are as original as any other blues recorded by Jefferson around this time, but the other five known songs are all in some way “traditional.” Possibly, Polk Brockman tried to get Jefferson to record only “traditional” songs so as to avoid negotiating and paying mechanical royalties to Chicago Music Publishing Company. However, Williams may have forced Okeh to pay these royalties for its two issued sides, perhaps in compliance with an exclusive publishing agreement between Chicago Music and Jefferson. Consequently, it is very likely that Okeh or Brockman assigned these titles to Chicago Music Publishing Company as some sort of settlement in the fallout over Jefferson’s “illegal” Okeh sessions.

Evidently, Okeh was allowed to keep its lone 78 on the market, but the song copyrights had to be assigned to Chicago Music. All this may have caused the other titles to remain unissued, thus allowing Jefferson to re-record one of them for Paramount,

“Easy Rider Blues” (ca. April 1927, Paramount 12474). Jefferson had already recorded “That Black Snake Moan” (ca. November 1926, Paramount 12407), and he would soon re-record “Match Box Blues” twice, both takes of which would be paired with “Easy Rider Blues” on a Paramount record. Whatever the case, Brockman himself appears not to have tried to be the publisher or to claim authorship of any of the songs, although he claimed authorship of many other songs registered in the copyright office around this time that were recorded by artists with whom he was associated.

The only title known to have been recorded by Jefferson which remains untraced in any form is “Stillery Blues” (recorded for Okeh), clearly a song more or less thematically dealing with alcohol. This piece may have been composed by Polk Brockman, who would not have allowed Chicago Music Publishing Company to register it for copyright, or it may be an alternate version of some Paramount title that Jefferson recorded a few months before or after the Okeh session. In the latter case, we can assume that it would probably be similar to one of Jefferson’s earlier (or later) Paramount recordings on the same subject, that is, “Chock House Blues” (ca. May 1926, Paramount 12373) or “Old Rounders Blues” (ca. August 1926, Paramount 12394), neither of which was registered for copyright. A connection with the former title is particularly suggestive if one considers the fact that “chock” is a type of homemade beer. The meaning may easily have extended to a beer house and is very likely a phonetic variant of the currently more common word “juke” or “jook.” However, the title of the song would be inaccurate, as beer is fermented, not distilled.

The melodies printed on the lead sheets discussed here are unreliable indicators of what Jefferson actually sang. On the blues titles at least, the scribe virtually used generic blues melodies. At best, the melodic lines of Jefferson’s real melody and that of the lead sheet might share the same general contour. We are especially inclined to this opinion on the basis of the three blues tunes that we have seen that are versions of known issued recordings. On the other hand, the lead sheets of “Laboring Man

Blues,” “Elder Green’s in Town,” “I Labor So Far from Home,” and “English Stop Time” are likely to be the most valuable for providing insight into Jefferson’s actual melodies. “Light House Blues” might also be accurate to some degree, but the others are probably far from the mark.

Certain peculiarities of the style of notation and similarities in script suggest that all of the lead sheets were prepared by the same scribe for Chicago Music Publishing Company. In the melodies of the blues songs, in general there is no indication of a flatted or “blue” third in the first line, but the third is usually flatted in the second line and in melodic phrases where it follows the fourth degree of the scale (e.g., “Pineapple Blues”). The seventh degree of the scale is written as natural, with no suggestion of a blue note, except in “Laboring Man Blues.” The fact that the lead sheets are all written in the “simple” keys of C and F should not be taken as an indication that Jefferson actually performed the pieces in those keys. This was a normal practice in writing lead sheets.

The same observations on the scribe’s inaccuracy can be made for the transcription of the lyrics. The texts may not have been transcribed exactly, and it is quite possible that some or all of the texts are truncated, although our guess is that “I Labor So Far from Home,” “Light House Blues,” “Too Black Bad,” “It’s Tight Like That,” “Money Tree Mama Blues,” and “Pineapple Blues” are complete. Our presentation of the lyrics here is as in the copyright submissions, which include some evident mistakes. Moreover, there are slight textual discrepancies between the lyric sheet and the lyrics written under the musical notes. Only punctuation has been standardized, adding commas, periods, apostrophes, etc., where needed in order to make the texts more readable. Figure 1 reports all the available recording and publishing data on this group of songs.



“Laboring Man Blues”

It takes a hard working man to set a woman down,

Figure 1: Data on Jefferson’s new songs⁸

Song Title	Author	Rec. Co.	Issue #	Place of Rec.	Matrix Number	Recording Date	Reg. Date	Reg. #
Laboring Man Blues	L. Jefferson	Okeh	unissued	Atlanta, Ga.	probably 80526-B	March 14, 1927	June 15, 1927	E667071
Easy Rider	L. Jefferson	Okeh	unissued	Atlanta, Ga.	probably 80527-B	March 14, 1927	April 5, 1927	E659646
Elder Green’s in Town	L. Jefferson	Okeh	unissued	Atlanta, Ga.	probably 80528-B	March 14, 1927	April 5, 1927	E659647
English Stop Time	L. Jefferson	Okeh	unissued	Atlanta, Ga.	probably 80529-B	March 14, 1927	May 20, 1927	E664771
I Labor So Far from Home	L. Jefferson	Okeh	unissued	Atlanta, Ga.	probably 80536-B	March 15, 1927	May 20, 1927	E664772
Light House Blues	L. Jefferson	Paramount	unissued	Chicago, Il.	* 20035/6/7/8/ or 20072	Sept./Oct. 1927	May 31, 1928	E693046
Too Black Bad	L. Jefferson	Paramount	unissued	Chicago, Il.	* 20382/3	February 1928	June 21, 1928	E693572
It’s Tight Like That	L. Jefferson	Paramount	unissued	Chicago, Il.	* 20748/52/53 or 20817	July or Aug. 1928	Oct. 18, 1928	E U.S. Unpub. 388
Money Tree Mama Blues	L. Jefferson	Paramount	unissued	Chicago, Il.	* 20748/52/53 or 20817	July or Aug. 1928	Oct. 18, 1928	E U.S. Unpub. 389
Pineapple Blues	L. Jefferson	Paramount	unissued	Chicago, Il.	* 20748/52/53 or 20817	July or Aug. 1928	Oct. 18, 1928	E U.S. Unpub. 392

* presumably

It takes a hard working man to set a woman down.

*A man loves to roustabout can't set you down,
A man loves to roustabout can't set you down.*

*If you can't do the shiveree,
You ain't got no business 'round here dipping in with me.*

*Takes a hard laboring man to give you all you need,
Takes a hard laboring man to give you all you need.*

*A man loves to gamble, can't set you down,
A man loves to gamble, can't set you down.*

*If your darling sugar quits you, what the world of that,
If you know what to do, you can gain her back.*

*The girl that I love and who I crave to see,
Is far 'cross the sea when (sic) I can't see.*

*I ain't got nobody in this town,
I ain't got nobody in this town.*

The text of "Laboring Man Blues" has been printed as 8 couplets (some of them AA, others AB), rather than 4 quatrains as in the lead sheet, so that it will conform to the melody. This is a two-line proto-blues. We know of no other tune quite like it, although it strikes us as having a strongly traditional flavor. The instrumental introduction appears to be derived from the second line of the melody. There are no breaks in the melody for guitar responses, which suggests that the lead sheet is inaccurate in this respect.

From the textual point of view, in the transcription we can note minor inconsistencies between the page of text and the page with music. The music transcription has "Now I ain't got nobody, nobody in this town," while the lyric transcription has "I ain't got nobody in this town." More important is the modified reprise of the subtle visual reference that Jefferson sang in his "Wartime Blues" (ca. November 1926, Paramount 12425), "Well, the girl I love and the one I crave to see/Well, she's living in Memphis, and the fool won't write to me," which is here disappointingly rendered (or perhaps only poorly transcribed) as "The girl that I love and who I crave to see/Is far 'cross the sea when (sic) I can't see."

From the linguistic point of view, it is interesting to note the

Laboring Man Blues

1. Takes a
8. Now I

1. 2.

use of the word "shiveree." Paul Oliver uses the more common spelling "shivaree" and explains that these were "Mexican bands and mariachi groups who played in South Texas. They were also known as 'shivaree' bands, their name being a corruption of *charivari* by which Italian groups that played on homemade instruments were once known."⁹ In fact, only French dictionaries report this word, which is used with the same denotative meaning it has today in the American South, that is, a rowdy celebration or party, often following a wedding.¹⁰ In light of the mutual influence of Mexican and African-American music in the Southwest, especially during the first quarter of the twentieth century in Texas, it is not surprising that Jefferson encountered this expression and that it was part of his vocabulary.¹¹ In fact, Jefferson was born in and traveled extensively throughout Texas. The "shivaree" custom is known all over the United States and Canada, but it does seem to be especially common in the Lone Star State. In the context of this song, however, Jefferson more likely refers to a kind of dance or music, or even sexual activity, thus extending the word's meaning further, as also happens in words such as "zydeco," "jook," "rag," "boogie," "shimmy," "strut," "jump," etc., which are used to signify a type of music, a type of dance, a music/dance place, or event. In the case of "shivaree" the dance meaning might have been suggested by the similar sound of the word "shiver." Other occurrences of the word "shivaree" in the blues used with a similar meaning are in Earl McDonald's Original Louisville Jug Band's "Rocking Chair Blues" (March 30, 1927, Columbia 14226-D), Lillian Glinn's "Brown Skin Blues" (December 2, 1927, Columbia 14275-D), Robert Wilkins's "Alabama Blues" (ca. September 23, 1929, Brunswick 7205), Edward Thompson's "Showers of Rain Blues" (ca. October 23, 1929, Paramount 13018) and Blind Willie McTell's "East St. Louis Blues (Fare You Well)" (September 21, 1933, Vocalion unissued; JEMF 106).



"Easy Rider"

*Oh, tell me where my easy rider's gone,
The woman I love drove me away from home.*

*Easy rider died on the road,
I'm broke and hungry, got nowhere to go.*

*There's coming a time when a woman won't need no man,
Hush your mouth, woman, and don't be raising sand.*

This song could be either from the Okeh recording session in March, 1927, or an alternate take of the Paramount recording of "Easy Rider Blues." Since the latter is thought to have been recorded in April, and since the date of registration of the new song is April 5, it is more likely that the lead sheet is transcribed from the unissued Okeh recording.

The first full measure of stanza 1 opens with a half note that would be better written as two quarter notes. There are also two alternative notes at the beginning of measure 10, perhaps an

attempt to indicate melodic variation. The lead sheet has two identical versions of the last two measures, each containing two joined whole notes. The melody of the lead sheet is a considerably distorted version of the melody that Jefferson sings on the released version of “Easy Rider Blues,” preserving only the overall range of an octave and the generally descending contour of the lines. It lacks Jefferson’s characteristic syncopation and his metrical extensions at the ends of his lines, and it does not indicate his singing of blue notes at the third and seventh degrees of his melody. The instrumental introduction of the lead sheet is obviously derived from the third line of the vocal melody. Jefferson played guitar in G position of standard tuning on the issued version of “Easy Rider Blues,” although the lead sheet was written in the key of C. A transcription of his singing in the issued “Easy Rider Blues” has been transposed to C for ease of comparison.

Although the scribe’s transcription of this song is sketchy, it is safe to assume that this tune had a text similar in length, content, and

Easy Rider

1 Oh, tell me where my
3. There's coming a time when a

eas - y ri - der's gone. woman won't need no man. Tell me where my eas - y ri - der's gone. man. Coming a time when a woman won't need no man.

Now the wo - man I love drove me a - way from home. Now you hush your mouth and don't be rais - in' sand.

structure to the Paramount version, which contains eight stanzas. This hypothesis is strengthened by two factors: 1) the issued and unissued songs basically present the same succession of strophes, the surviving three stanzas in the lead sheet corresponding to the first three in the issued version in spite of the text’s lack of any chronological story-line; 2) if it had not been a full recording, it would not have been submitted for copyright. Apart from a spelling problem (“comeing” [sic]), we notice the presence of “Now” and “Now you” respectively before “The woman I love” (first stanza) and “Hush your mouth” (third stanza), as well as the omission of “woman” in the musical transcription. These elements are not found in the lyric portion of the lead sheet.

“Easy Rider [Blues]” is one of many blues songs occurring in both black and white tradition beginning in the 1920s that contain the phrase “easy rider” or “see see, rider” along with other traditional verses. Jefferson’s melody and lyrics are rather different from most other versions. Jefferson’s song remains more or less non-thematic in text and reflects his early method of composing lyrics by combining traditional verses.¹² This approach often manifests itself through an apparently illogical narrative sequence of stanzas, which can be understood more clearly as associative and/or contrastive juxtapositions. As in the complete issued song, this fragment deals with abandonment/separation from different points of view. The first couplet describes the bluesman who

is searching for his woman at the station after their argument and his being driven away from home. The second couplet is probably the last in the logical sequence of events and summarizes the tragic facts that have occurred, i.e., the woman’s death on the road and Jefferson’s loneliness and homelessness. The third couplet reprises in dialogic form the couple’s altercation preceding the woman’s escape from home as it is recalled by the bluesman. This is the stanza putting an end to the quarrel and causing the woman to leave.

The highly visual content typical of Jefferson’s lyrics cannot be detected in the text only because the two visual references in the issued version of the song (“She left me this morning with a face that’s covered with frowns” and “fair brown”) are absent due to the truncation.



“Elder Green’s in Town”

*Elder Green’s in town, Elder Green’s in town,
He’s got it printed all over his old automobile, he’s Alabama bound.*

*Don’t worry me, don’t worry me [again],
When I get drunk and all down and out, don’t worry me.*

*I’ve got a high brown, and she’s long and tall,
Lawd, lawd, lawd, lawd, boys, she’ll make a panther squall.*

*Elder Green don’t care, Elder Green don’t care,
He’s gonna tear down the old Church of God and build a barrelhouse there.*

If we analyze the melody of “Elder Green’s in Town”, we immediately realize it is close to the standard melody of “Alabama Bound.” This could indicate either a more-or-less accurate transcription of Jefferson singing a traditional tune or simply the fact that the scribe had the standard melody in mind and imposed it on Jefferson’s singing. It appears to be a variant of a New Orleans melody that has migrated northward up the Mississippi River Valley and westward to Texas. It first shows up as “I’m Alabama Bound” published in New Orleans in 1909, credited to a white theatre pianist named Robert Hoffman.¹³ The tune can be viewed as a version of an AAB blues with the first two lines compressed in length, but retaining the convention of starting each line respectively with a suggestion of the tonic, subdominant, and dominant harmonies (I, IV and V). Blind Boone used the melody also in 1909 as one of the strains in his “Boone’s Rag Medley no. 2.”¹⁴ New Orleans pianist Jelly Roll Morton claimed to have created the tune in Mobile, Alabama, in 1905, but this probably has as much accuracy as his claim to have invented jazz in 1902.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it suggests an early acquaintance with this tune by a New Orleans musician. Morton called it “Don’t You Leave Me Here,” and it is a well known tune under this title.¹⁶

Early versions of “Don’t You Leave Me Here,” or, in some cases,

Elder Green's in Town

Blind Lemon Jefferson, "Elder Green's in Town", ca. April 1927

entitled more simply "Don't Leave Me Here," were recorded by Monette Moore (February 25, 1927, Victor 20653), Laura Smith (ca. March 1927, Banner 1977), Papa Harvey Hull (April 3, 1927, Gennett 6106 or Black Patti 8002), Henry Thomas (ca. October 7, 1929, Vocalion 1443), Washboard Sam [Robert Brown] (March 14, 1938, Bluebird B7501), and Merline Johnson (July 7, 1938, Vocalion 04331), most of them differing textually from one another. Other songs using this tune are Hattie Hudson's "Black Hand Blues" (December 6, 1927, Columbia 14279-D), Henry Thomas's "Don't Ease Me In" (June 13, 1928, Vocalion 1197), Cow Cow Davenport's "Don't You Loud Mouth Me" (May 12, 1938, Decca 7486), and Blue Lu Barker's (August 11, 1938, Decca 7506) and Merline Johnson's (October 4, 1938, Vocalion 04455) "Don't You Make Me High." More distantly related are the tunes of "Baby Please Don't Go," first recorded by Mississippi blues guitarist Big Joe Williams (October 31, 1935, Bluebird B6200), Alabama singer Vera Hall's "Another Man Done Gone" (October 31, 1940, Library of Congress 4049-A-4 and 4049-B-1, issued on *Archive of American Folk Song* 16), Natchez, Mississippi, bluesman Baby Doo's [Leonard Caston] "I'm Gonna Walk Your Log" (June 4, 1940, Decca 7773) and Cat-Iron's [William Carradine] "I'm Goin' to Walk Your Log" (1958, Folkways FA 2389). In these four pieces, the tune is usually in a pentatonic blues scale and does not suggest harmonic changes. Themes of violence and incarceration are prominent, but many versions mention New Orleans, linking the tune to its likely place of origin.

The figure of Elder Green, or some other reprobate preacher or church member, appears in a number of recorded versions of "Alabama Bound," such as those of Papa Charlie Jackson of New Orleans ("I'm Alabama Bound," ca. May 1925, Paramount 12289), Pete Harris of Texas (May 1934, Library of Congress unissued 78-B-3; Flyright SDM 265), Leadbelly of Texas/Louisiana (March 1, 1935, Library of Congress unissued [49-B]; Document DLP 602, and later versions), and Mance Lipscomb of Texas (1961, Reprise R2012 and RS 6404, 1964; Arhoolie 1077). Elder Green also appeared in early printed versions of "Alabama Bound" collected by Newman White in Alabama and Will H. Thomas and Gates Thomas in Texas.¹⁷ Mississippi bluesman Charley Patton recorded the only version of this tune with Elder Green in the title ("Elder

Greene Blues," ca. October 1929, Paramount 12972), which exists in two alternate takes. Its text mentions New Orleans. John Work published "Ol' Elder Brown's," essentially the same song with a change of color in the surname.¹⁸ It mentions the city of Shreveport, Louisiana. Work probably collected his version near Nashville, Tennessee. Natchez, Mississippi, blues guitarist Cat-Iron (William Carradine) recorded a "Jimmy Bell" in 1958 (Folkways FA 2389), which is also part of this complex, with its tune shorn of any suggestions of harmonic changes. Another related tune describing an unnamed preacher of questionable virtue is "The Preacher Got Drunk and Laid Down His Bible" (February 17, 1928, Brunswick 259) by the Tennessee Ramblers, a white string band.

Unlike Patton's longer versions of the song, Jefferson's text mentions Elder Green in only two of its four stanzas. Both of these are unique to Jefferson's text and are not found in any other known versions. The first of these stanzas clearly links his song to the better known "Alabama Bound" title. His last stanza provides a possible clue to Elder Green's denominational affiliation, if the word "church" is meant to be capitalized. The Church of God would have been a pentecostal or "sanctified" church, possibly the Church of God in Christ, where ministers are often called "Elder."¹⁹ Pentecostals are typically known for their highly emotional style of worship and singing and the incorporation of secular instruments, tunes, and styles into their music. The Pentecostal movement gained adherents rapidly following the Azusa Street Revival of 1906-07 in Los Angeles, particularly among black migrants to cities and in industrial and mining communities. Many of those who remained in older denominations or lived more secular lives ridiculed the "saints" or "holy rollers" and circulated rumors and reports of unholy doings in their services and of unscrupulous pastors.²⁰ Such reports could easily have coalesced around a possibly fictional, composite character known as Elder Green around 1909 when the "Alabama Bound" tune was popularized and the Pentecostal movement was in its initial phase of growth.

The stanzas about Elder Green/Elder Brown/Jimmy Bell give these songs, to some degree, the quality of a narrative folk ballad. This person is consistently depicted as a ladies' man, drinker, rambler, hustler, hypocrite, and all-around devilish fellow. The verses that describe him in these terms are always, however, mixed with other first-person verses with similar themes, suggesting a strong identification between the singer and the reprobate preacher. The verses about Elder Green, like blues verses in most cases, develop no chronological story-line but are instead merely a series of vignettes that could be sung in any order and illustrate Elder Green's character. Many folk ballads that originated in the African-American tradition around the beginning of the twentieth century, such as "Railroad Bill," "Stagolee," and "Casey Jones," display these characteristics—lack of a chronological story-line or a fractured chronology, and mixture of third-person and first-person verses. These characteristics, which have been noted in overviews of this material by such scholars as G. Malcolm Laws, Jr., and Paul Oliver, suggest that the story-line is often of minor

importance to singers and their audiences and that the interest lies instead in depictions of character and dramatic moments.²¹ The obvious identification of the singers with the characters and events of their songs, as well as the frequent use of a three-line form in these songs, led D. K. Wilgus to coin the term “blues ballad” to describe them.²² It should be noted that many of these “blues ballads” also circulate in Anglo-American folksong tradition, and some probably originated there.

From the more strictly textual viewpoint, it should first be noted that the term “old” in the second line of the first stanza was not present in Charters’s earlier printing of this song.²³ The reason for such a minor difference is irrelevant from the interpretive viewpoint and is very likely due to a mistake. In the second stanza we have printed the word “again” in brackets, because it is probably another mistake made by the scribe, who might have inadvertently introduced it to indicate a repetition of the verbal phrase “Don’t worry me,” similar to the repetitions in stanzas one and four. Our speculation is strengthened by the fact that this is the only unrhymed stanza in the song and one of the few in the vast corpus of related songs. Unfortunately, the musical transcription contains the words of only the first and fourth stanzas and not the second.

The references “He’s got it printed all over his old automobile, he’s Alabama bound” and the stronger descriptive “I’ve got a high brown, and she’s long and tall” confirm Jefferson’s tendency to visualize in his lyrics.

“English Stop Time”

Jefferson’s only known purely instrumental tune, “English Stop Time,” is in the style of ragtime guitar display pieces such as “Buck Dance,” “Candy Man,” and “Coonjine.” (Jefferson’s own “Hot Dogs” [ca. June 1927, Paramount 12493] has a tune related to that of “Candy Man.”) These ragtime tunes are normally performed in the key of C on the guitar and feature elaborate and syncopated right-hand picking with simple left-hand alternation of the primary positions of the tonic, subdominant, and dominant seventh chords (I, IV, V⁷). The left hand seldom ventures above the third fret of the guitar. Thus these pieces sound difficult and impressive to the non-musician but are actually fairly

English Stop Time



easy to play. (An outstanding guitarist like Jefferson, of course, typically adds variations that truly are difficult.)

David Evans recorded two versions of “Stop Time” that are similar to one another. The first was from Babe Stovall on August 14, 1966, and the second from Eli Owens on July 24, 1970. Both had grown up near Tylertown, Mississippi, in the south central part of the state and were living in New Orleans and Bogalusa, Louisiana, respectively at the time of their recordings. A similar tune, with

The advertisement is for Paramount Records, featuring Blind Lemon Jefferson's "Penitentiary Blues". The top part of the ad shows an illustration of a prison building with a sign that reads "Blind Lemon's Penitentiary Blues" and "by Blind Lemon Jefferson". Below the illustration is a list of records for sale, including "Blind Lemon's Penitentiary Blues and Long Lastin' Lovin'", "Bone Orchard Blues and Western Union Blues", "Low Down Mississippi Bottom and Tom Cat Blues", "Finny Woods Money Mama and Low Down Molo Blues", "Ma's in the Jailhouse Now and Southern Rag", "Frisco Leaving Birmingham and The Escaped Convict", "Pay Day Daddy Blues and Etzadie's Polky Blues", "Blues The World Forgot (Part 1) and Blues The World Forgot (Part 2)", "Ezekiel Preached to the Dry Bones and He Locked the Lion's Jaw", "His Eye is on the Sparrow and I Wouldn't Mind Dying if Dying Was Ash", "Nortola Jubilee Quartette", "Ash Tray Blues and No Need of Kneelin' on the Blind", "Rumbilin' and Rumbilin' Boon Constrictor Blues and Detroit Bound", and "Blues The World Forgot (Part 2)". The ad also includes a coupon for requesting records, with the text "SEND NO MONEY!!" and "I'll try to get you the records you want, send us the coupon below. Pay postman 75 cents for each record, plus small C. O. D. fee when he delivers records. We pay postage on shipments of two or more records." The bottom of the ad features the Paramount logo and the slogan "The Popular Race Record".

Advertisement for Penitentiary Blues, Courtesy Documentary Arts

piano and possibly two guitars—one of them played in the slide style—was recorded in Chicago on February 6, 1936, by Bumble Bee Slim (Amos Easton) and Memphis Minnie (Lizzie Douglas) and titled “New Orleans Stop Time” (Vocalion 03197). Memphis Minnie was born in Algiers, Louisiana, across the Mississippi River from New Orleans. The tune played by these musicians thus may have been originally a localized instrumental showpiece of the New Orleans area. It features sudden syncopations and pauses in the playing, perhaps intended to suggest or even accompany tap dancing. These pauses undoubtedly contribute to the tune’s title. A “Stock-Time” was recorded from an unknown guitarist at the Georgia State Penitentiary in Milledgeville on December 15, 1934,

by John A. and Alan Lomax (AFS 260B-1), containing the sound of tap dancing. The recording by Bumble Bee Slim and Memphis Minnie also contains a simulation of this sound.

Jefferson's tune is altogether different from the other versions, although it also contains suggestions of alternation of the three basic chords in the key of C and a suggestion of pauses. It has three distinct musical themes, although the third combines elements of the first two. It is possible, of course, that the lead sheet is a poor attempt at rendering Jefferson's guitar playing. It certainly is a simplified version of his tune, whatever that may have been, containing only a basic melody line without bass notes or harmonies. Jefferson, however, might have changed or personalized the more typical traditional tune as heard in the recordings discussed above. His use of the word "English" in the title suggests that his tune is some sort of special variant.



"I Labor So Far from Home"

*Old man went the other day his loving wife to see,
What did he see but someone's boots where his boots ought to be.
Wife, oh wife, dear loving wife, come quickly and tell to me,
Who's (sic) boots are these lying under my bed where my boots
ought to be.*

*You old fool, blind fool, old man, can't you see?
That's nothing but a coffee pot my mother sent to me.
Ten thousand miles I've traveled, ten thousand more [miles] I go,
I never saw a coffee pot with boot heels on before.*

*Old man went the other night his loving wife to see,
What should he see but someone's horse where his horse ought to be.
Oh, wife, oh wife, dear loving wife, come quickly and tell to me,
Whose horse is this hitched in my rack where my horse ought to be.
You old fool, blind fool, old man, can't you see?
That's nothing but a milk cow that my mother sent to me.
Ten thousand miles I've traveled, ten thousand more I go,
I never saw a milk cow with a saddle on before.*

*Old man went the other night his loving wife to see,
What should he see but someone's coat where his coat ought to be.
Wife, oh wife, dear loving wife, come quickly and tell to me,
Whose coat is this hanging on my rack where my coat ought to be.
Old fool, blind fool, old man, can't you see?
That's nothing but a blanket my mother sent to me.
Ten thousand miles I've traveled, ten thousand more I go,
I never saw a blanket with coat sleeves on before.*

*Old man went the other night his loving wife to see,
What should he see but some old man lying where he ought to be.
Oh wife, oh wife, dear loving wife, come quickly and tell to me,
What man is this lying in my bed where I ought to be.
You old fool, blind fool, old man can't you see?
That's nothing by (sic) a baby my mother sent to me.
Ten thousand miles I've traveled, ten thousand more I go,
I never saw a baby with whiskers on before.*

There is extensive literature on the background of Jefferson's "I Labor So Far from Home," because the origins of this song go back to an old European ballad. In fact, this is a version of Child no. 274, "Our Goodman," which was analyzed over a century ago by Francis James Child in his extensive compilation of English and Scottish ballads.²⁴ Therefore, what was already noted by scholars John Minton and Paul Oliver for another African-American version, Coley Jones's "Drunkard's Special" (December 6, 1929, Columbia 14489-D), is also true for Jefferson's version, which was recorded nearly two years earlier.²⁵ Oliver summarizes the ballad's history as follows: "A troubadour song which was popular in Europe, translated into German and published in Germany as a broadside in the late eighteenth century, it was known as 'Le Jaloux' in France and as 'Our Goodman' (Gudeman) or 'The Merry Cuckold' and 'The Kind Wife' in Britain."²⁶

In addition to Child's early commentary, British and North American versions of this international ballad type have been extensively studied by Coffin and Renwick, and Bronson.²⁷ It appears actually to be much better known in North America than in Great Britain. Jefferson's version seems to fall into textual Type A in which the deceptions take place on the same night, although Jefferson's phrase "the other night" is ambiguous and could refer to successive nights (Type C).²⁸ Jefferson's telling of the story in the third person is typical of many older versions of this ballad. His tune is quite unique and does not match any of the eight tune groups identified by Bronson, although it shares with Group F the characteristic of the second line ending on the supertonic.

The last section of the song—the man's response to his wife's deception—contains some metrical irregularities in the melody, and the section immediately before it seems to have two alternative endings. (It is presented here as in the copyright submission.) Jefferson frequently performed such irregular measures in his blues, but they seem odd in a traditional song such as this, stemming from the Anglo-American ballad tradition. Quite possibly, the scribe had some difficulty understanding Jefferson's rhythm, as the final section of the tune, as written, does not sing very well. Another awkward spot is the series of eighth notes for "nothing but a coffee pot my," which would sound better as two measures of quarter notes. The text accompanying the melody in the lead sheet has the next to last line as "Ten thousand miles I traveled, ten thousand miles I go."

From the textual point of view, the entire piece evidently turns on "seeing" and "travel." As for the former theme, the fact that it is found in a traditional folk ballad makes it even more interesting, because the blind performer actually *chose* this piece from the tradition and adapted it to his sensitivity. Of course, he may have performed it to please Polk Brockman. Since this Okeh agent's main interest was hillbilly music and, consequently, he liked the "old time" aspect of black music the best, it is likely that he tried to steer some of his artists in that direction. Besides being consistent with our already discussed speculation about Brockman's possible attempt not to pay mechanical royalties, this would further explain why Jefferson swung to the traditional side of his repertoire for the

Okeh session. Whatever the case, especially considering all the possible implications in the song's thematic development, it is not surprising that it appealed to Jefferson, and we can only regret that it is not available on record. As far as the theme of "travel" is concerned, it is certainly not new in Jefferson's lyrics. It is enough to refer to classics such as "Long Lonesome Blues" (ca. March 1926, Paramount 12354, two takes; ca. May 1926, Paramount 12354, one take), "Dry Southern Blues" (ca. March 1926, Paramount 12347), "Match Box Blues" (March 14, 1927, Okeh 8455; ca. April 1927, Paramount 12474, two takes), and "Sunshine Special" (ca. October 1927, Paramount 12593). The widespread use of the theme of travel in Jefferson's blues "signals its importance as an expression of feelings shared by much of the population of the black belt," and for Jefferson "physical mobility is equated with individual freedom."²⁹ Because traveling is one of those "activities requiring eye-body coordination,"³⁰ its function acquires a broader sense and does not merely confine itself to being "a mordant and individualistic response to the social malaise,"³¹ but is also revelatory of a *personal* pathological distress.

Juxtaposing this text to the rest of Jefferson's lyrical production, we immediately notice that it is so deeply imbued with visual references that it stands out even in his very visually-oriented repertoire. In fact, the texture of the lyric, the density of words and implications connected to sight and their interaction prompt us to say that, in this song, for the first and only time in Jefferson's repertoire we can speak of an *explicit* blindness subtext. Its development runs parallel to the main subject of the song, that of cuckoldry. Yet, blinding and castration (the psychological effect of cuckolding) are often associated in a Freudian sense. It is true, of course, that such a mutual—and from time to time almost symbiotic—relationship is already inherent in the traditional ballad and therefore does not directly reflect Jefferson's instinctive way of dealing with blindness when composing a song.

In general, in his other lyrics, Jefferson unconsciously tends to disguise and/or scatter visual references, so that "[R]eiterated hints at vision within the same piece seem to have a moderate impact on the main subject of the song, and no overall cumulative effect allowing one to speak of a real thematicism is ever reached, even in the most image-studded depictions."³² But in this song fuzzy images are focused, and sparse references are brought together to form a consistent unity. Although not a blues, it is still a secular song. We are far from "the rather inflexible—though sometimes very powerful—explicit thematic unity of some gospel songs" where visually impaired evangelists face their "sightlessness matter-of-factly, addressing God directly and lamenting" their "irretrievable condition" through straightforward mentions of blindness.³³ Jefferson's bold selection of this song for inclusion in his repertoire is mitigated, however, by his choice of narration in the third person. This gives him the option of consciously distancing himself from the "old man" protagonist of the ballad.

The appeal of this song to blues singers, who often deal with themes of sexual cheating and deception, is easy to understand.

But what is relevant here is the special irony it has for a blind singer, demonstrating that even sighted people can be "blind." Virtually all versions of this ballad state that the cuckolded man is "blind" or "cannot see" in a metaphorical sense. As best we can determine, Jefferson is the only blind singer of this ballad in the English language, although many singers who contributed versions to folklorists remain unidentified and normally the singer's ability or inability to see is not mentioned.

Apart from Coley Jones's "Drunkard's Special," other American black versions of this ballad that we have been able to examine are a North Carolina text from 1917 recited by Maude Stockton,³⁴ Lottie Kimbrough's [Beaman] "Cabbage Head Blues" (ca. mid-1926, Meritt 2201), Percy Ridge's "The Western Cowboy" (April 10, 1934, AFS 200 B-1; Rounder 11661-1821-2; a composite folksong containing verses from Child no. 274), Harry Jackson's "The Western Cowboy" (probably April 1939; another similar composite folksong), Mitchell Helton's [alias Egg Mouth] "Blind Fool" (probably April 1939), Will Starks's "Our Good Man" (August 9, 1942, AFS 6652-A-1), Tom Archia's "Cabbage Head - Part 1" and "Cabbage Head - Part 2" (July 1948, Aristocrat 803, vocalist "Doc" Jo Jo Adams), Sonny Boy Williamson's [Aleck Miller] "Wake Up Baby" (March 27, 1958, Checker 894), Johnny Q. Nuts's [John Knutz] untitled text (1960, collected by Mack McCormick), Professor Longhair's [Roy Byrd] "Cabbagehead" (September 1971, Rounder CD 2057), Lazy Bill Lucas's "Cabbage Head" (May 13, 1973, Philo 1007; apparently based mostly on Sonny Boy Williamson's version with further influence from Jo Jo Adams) and Buddy Scott's "Wake Up Baby" (1992, Gitanes 517 515-2; a modernized version of the same title recorded by Sonny Boy Williamson).³⁵ Jefferson himself used the theme of this ballad in a more personalized form in his "Cat Man Blues" (September 24, 1929, Paramount 12921):

*When I come home last night I heard a noise; asked my wife,
"What was that?"*

*When I come home last night I heard a noise; asked my wife,
"What was that?"*

*She said, "Don't be so suspicious, that wasn't a thing but a
cat."*

*I been all through the world, I've taken all kinds of chance,
I been all over the world, taken all kinds of chance,
I've never seen a cat come home in a pair of pants.*

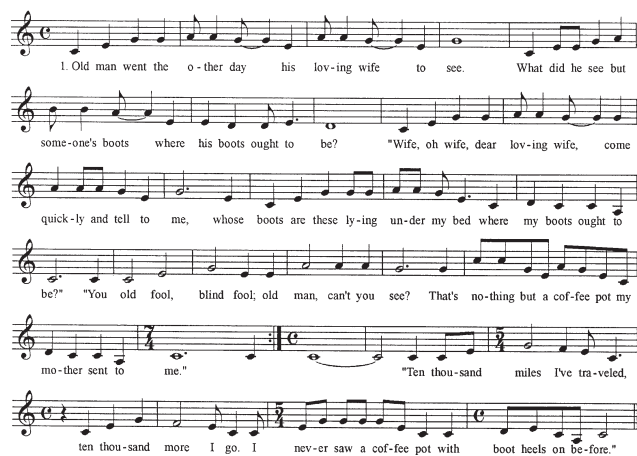
"Cat Man Blues" was recorded later in variant form by Blind Boy Fuller (April 29, 1936, ARC unissued [take 1]; ARC 7-01-56 or Vocalion 03134 [take 2]).

If one compares Jefferson's "I Labor So Far from Home" with each of the other African-American texts deriving from the European ballad, one can notice great differences in both structure and choice of words, as well as the tunes and arrangements. In the case of Coley Jones, these dissimilarities are surprising, considering that he was from and worked in Dallas, where Jefferson was very active starting from 1912.³⁶ Textually, it is particularly interesting

Figure 2: Key words or phrases in the African-American versions of the ballad "Our Goodman."

Vocalist	Song Title	a) mans perception	b) womans counter-identification	c) incongruity
<i>Maude Stockton</i>	The Adulteress	dat tied out dar dat on de floor dat hangin' up dat in de bed	milch-cow churn strainer baby	saddle heel-tops brim mustache
<i>Lottie Beaman</i>	Cabbage Head Blues	head foot	cabbage head sweet potatoes	moustache toenails
<i>Blind Lemon Jefferson</i>	I Labor So Far from Home	boots horse coat old man	coffee pot milk cow blanket baby	boot heels saddle coat sleeves whiskers
<i>Coley Jones</i>	Drunkard's Special	mule coat head	milk cow bed quilt cabbage head	saddle pockets hair
<i>Percy Ridge</i>	The Western Cowboy	horse boots head	milk cow milk churn baby	saddle spurs [not stated]
<i>Harry Jackson</i>	The Western Cowboy	hoss [sic] head	milk-cow new-born baby	saddle and bridle wear[ing] boots and spurs
<i>Mitchell Helton</i> (<i>alias Egg Mouth</i>)	Blind Fool	head hat	cabbage head frying pan	moustache [not stated]
<i>"Doc" Jo Jo Adams</i> (<i>Tom Archia's vocalist</i>)	Cabbage Head - Part 1 Cabbage Head - Part 2	hat feet sticking in the shoes head thing in the thing	coffee pot empty pair of shoes cabbage head rolling pin	hat band feets hair rolling pin with a voutieoreenic
<i>Sonny Boy Williamson</i> (<i>Aleck Miller</i>)	Wake Up Baby	mule hat coat	milk cow washpan blanket	saddle hat band two sleeves in them (sic)
<i>Johnny Q. Nuts</i> (<i>John Knutz</i>)	untitled	[not stated] [not stated] hot-che-babba in	cabbage pair of house shoes baseball bat	with two ears with corns with two golf balls
<i>Professor Longhair</i>	Cabbagehead	horse hat fellow same old fellow in bed	milk cow old cabbage shadow next-door neighbor's little baby	saddle hat band stumbled over a shadow 5.6 foot baby
<i>Lazy Bill Lucas</i>	Cabbage Head	mule hat coat head	milkcow washpan blanket cabbage head	saddle hatband two sleeves in them (sic) mustache
<i>Buddy Scott</i>	Wake Up Baby	car head mule	tricycle cabbage milk cow	four wheels hair saddle

I Labor So Far From Home



1. Old man went the o-ther day his lov-ing wife to see. What did he see but
some-one's boots where his boots ought to be? *Wife, oh wife, dear lov-ing wife, come
quick-ly and tell to me, whose boots are these ly-ing un-der my bed where my boots ought to
be?" *You old fool, blind fool, old man, can't you see? That's no-thing but a cof-fee pot my
mo-ther sent to me." *Ten thou-sand miles I've tra-veled,
ten thou-sand more I go. I nev-er saw a cof-fee pot with boot heels on be-fore."

Blind Lemon Jefferson, "I Labor So Far from Home", ca. May 1927

to compare the three interconnected key words or phrases delineating the deception in each stanza, that is, a) the person, animal, part of the body or object perceived by the husband as extraneous; b) his wife's counter-identification; c) the term or expression revealing the incongruity in her objection (See Fig. 2).

Stockton's, Jefferson's, Ridge's, Jackson's and Williamson's are the only black versions analyzed in this study that do not use the "cabbage" image in any of the stanzas. Professor Longhair's, Percy Ridge's, and Harry Jackson's first stanzas present the same string of words ("horse"-milk cow"-saddle") as Jefferson's second stanza, while Jones, Williamson, Lucas and Scott prefer "mule" to "horse," and Maude Stockton simply refers to the animal as "dat tied out dar." The first identification in Jefferson's third stanza ("coat") is also found in Jones's second and Williamson's and Lucas's third stanza respectively. With the exception of the lexeme "beard," which does occur in some versions by white singers,³⁷ a large portion of the semantic field of hairiness is covered, from Stockton's, Beaman's, Helton's, and Lucas's "moustache" through Jones's, Archia's, and Scott's "hair" to Jefferson's "whiskers."

What strikes one immediately in comparing this text with the ones compiled by Child is Jefferson's ability to manipulate a centuries-old composition without marring the content. The refrain on the cuckold's blindness and his travel experience and all the interacting key expressions in Jefferson's "I Labor So Far from Home" can also be detected in the other available versions. Yet, the string of three images in each of Jefferson's four stanzas is very seldom exactly the same as in any of the fifty-eight versions transcribed by Bronson.³⁸ Only in two cases (transcriptions no. 32 and 58) is the series of objects denoting the husband's metaphorical blindness ("boots"-coffee pot"-boot heels") identical to the one in Jefferson's first stanza. In "Six Nights Drunk" the singers Emmet Bankston and Red Henderson used a string of references similar to Jefferson's but recorded their song for Okeh (45292) in 1928, that is, about one year after Jefferson recorded his own version for the same label.³⁹ The

triad "horse"-milk cow"-saddle" in Jefferson's second stanza is the most recurrent in Anglo-American and African-American versions. The two key words "coat" and "blanket" in Jefferson's third stanza are also somewhat common, but the same string can be found only in Bronson's transcriptions 8 and 39. The sequence "old man"-baby"-whiskers" in Jefferson's last stanza is reprised in Bronson's transcription no. 5, and, with slight variations, in transcriptions no. 16 and 50.



"Light House Blues"

*Michigan water [sure tastes like], Michigan water sure tastes like
Cherry wine,
It drinks so good it keeps me drinking all the time.*

*I love my gal, I love my gal, tell the whole wide world I do,
I'm just a fool about that woman and I don't care what she do.*

*This ain't my home, this ain't my home, I've got a lighthouse on the
sea,
I wonder do my rider ever think of me.*

*I'm worried today, I'm worried today, I'm worried all the time,
She's a high brown mama, can't keep her off my mind.*

*I laid down last night, laid down last night, talking out my head,
I got a letter this morning that the girl I love was dead.*

*If I die in Texas, if I die in Texas, mama, don't wear no black,
'Cause just as soon as I'm down, my ghost will come sneaking back.*

We are now dealing with Jefferson's Paramount recordings, which textually and musically tend to be less traditional than his Okeh recordings.

The wide melodic range of Jefferson's song, an octave and a fifth, is not uncommon for his blues. The specific melody, however, is not close to that of any of Jefferson's other recordings. The only other song in which he uses internal repetition in the first line is "Bad Luck Blues" (ca. December 1926, Paramount 12443). The printed lyrics were not placed beneath the melody in the lead sheet, and they do not precisely match the melody. This explains why the phrase "sure tastes like" in the first line of stanza one has been put in brackets. It is very unlikely that Jefferson sang it, as it is inconsistent with the structure of the other stanzas. Following a four-and-a-half bar instrumental introduction (apparently extracted and adapted from Jefferson's final four-and-a-half bars of vocal melody and perhaps some of his guitar work), there is a twelve-bar melody. This appears to be a composite of the melodic variations that Jefferson sang in his recording of the song, although we cannot be certain of this. Obviously, the first line of text in Jefferson's stanzas was sung again to form the second line of the tune (measures 5-8) but without the internal repetition found in the first line. The two-note harmonies in measures 1, 2, 6, and 9 probably are attempts to represent variants of the melody used in

Light House Blues



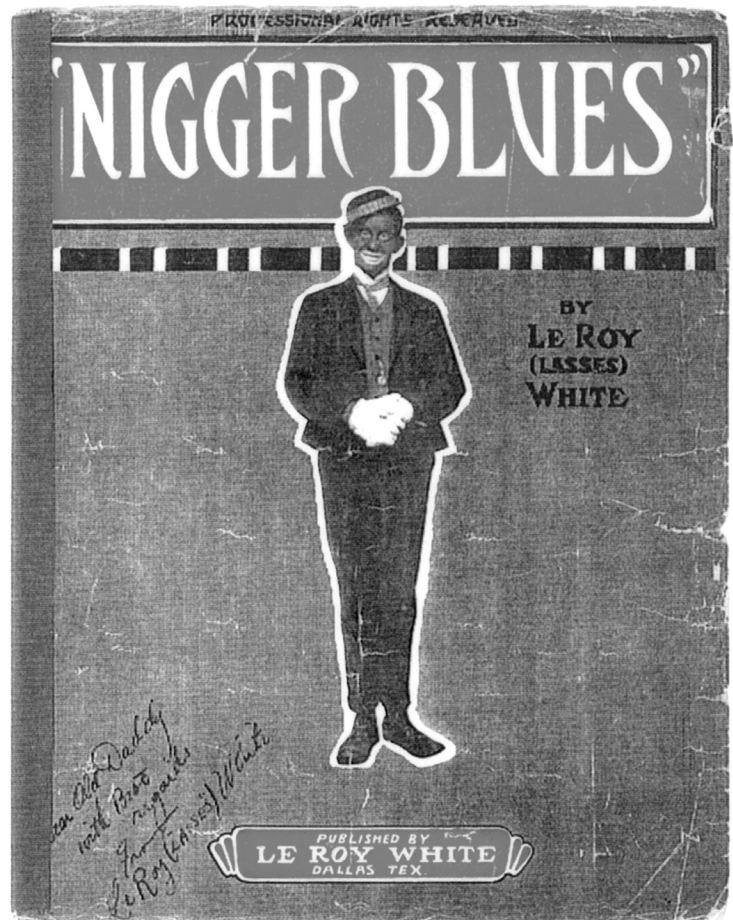
some stanzas. In the original lead sheet the first note of the third full measure of the introduction, low C, is written as a whole note. This is almost certainly an error and has been changed to a quarter note in order to give the normal four beats to the measure instead of seven. The last measure of the piece lacks the final quarter rest, which has been supplied here.

Contrary to what one might first assume, "Light House Blues" is not a version of "Michigan Water Blues," which was composed by Clarence Williams in 1923 and recorded by Sara Martin (ca. April 9, 1923, Okeh 8060), Alberta Hunter (May 1923, Paramount 12036), Viola McCoy (May 24, 1923, Columbia A3921), Hannah Sylvester (ca. late May 1923, Pathé Actuelle 021005), and Lena Wilson (August 9, 1923, Vocalion 14651, two versions). The first line of text in Jefferson's song, including the internal repetition, is indeed similar to the first line of "Michigan Water Blues," but Jefferson's melody is essentially different, being considerably more wide-ranging, and his text is otherwise different from Williams's composition. Like Williams's text, however, it is comprised of blues lyric commonplaces with no overall thematic unity.

In fact, in addition to its textual relationship in the first stanza to "Michigan Water Blues," Jefferson's "Light House Blues" is related textually and musically to an even older song, "The Negro Blues"/"Nigger Blues" by Leroy "Lasses" White of Dallas.⁴⁰ White registered his tune with a set of fifteen three-line stanzas for copyright on November 9, 1912, under the former title. In 1913, a shortened version of the piece was published under the latter infelicitous title, containing only six stanzas, five of which are close variants of stanzas in the longer version and one of which is new. All of the stanzas contain the internal repetition in the first line.⁴¹ White was a blackface minstrel who made some recordings in the 1920s and 1930s and appeared on the Grand Ole Opry. In 1912, however, his copyright application noted that he was associated with the Happy Hour Theatre in Dallas, and the publisher of the 1913 version was Bush & Gerts of Dallas. The address of the Happy Hour Theatre in the 1912 *Dallas City Directory* was 1520

Main Street.⁴² The Dalton Brothers are listed as the proprietors of this building, and they also ran the Orpheum Theatre across the street at 1521-3 Main. This is just east of Akard and not far from the old Union Depot where Jefferson used to perform around 1912. Apparently, Jefferson was often seen playing at the corner of Elm and Central, only a block or two away. As an itinerant vaudeville performer, Leroy White would undoubtedly have been in and out of Union Depot many times and would have had the opportunity to encounter Jefferson. Since he was interested in "Negro character" material, it is very likely that he would listen to performers like him.

Besides the use of internal repetition in the first line, White's tune and Jefferson's have their last five notes in common ("drinking all the time" in Jefferson's tune). Otherwise, the tunes are dissimilar. More interesting, however, are the lyric correspondences. The first line of Jefferson's third stanza is a variant of the first line of the eleventh stanza of "The Negro Blues," and Jefferson's entire sixth stanza is a variant of the ninth stanza of "The Negro Blues."⁴³ A variant of Jefferson's sixth stanza also occurs in a recording by Lasses [White] & Honey, "Alabammy Bound" (April 23, 1935, Bluebird B6742), a song which is part of the same folksong complex as Jefferson's "Elder Green's in Town" discussed earlier. Jefferson's third stanza, however, does not appear in the published "Nigger Blues," only



in the unpublished “The Negro Blues.” Moreover, the eighth line in the text of “The Negro Blues” (“I cried last night, also the night before”) is also found in variant form in the fourth stanza of Jefferson’s “Booger Rooger Blues” (“I cried all night and all that night before”), a blues recorded by Jefferson ca. December 1926 (Paramount 12425).

All of this suggests the interesting possibility that Leroy White may have learned “The Negro Blues” from none other than Jefferson, or at least from some intermediate source in Jefferson’s musical circle. It is clearly also possible that Jefferson heard White or some intermediary sing the long unpublished version. Whatever the case, the ultimate origin of these verses in African-American tradition is almost certain. Abbott and Seroff state the following about White’s song: “Obviously Lasses White did not *compose* these floating verses; for the most part, at least, he had to have *overheard* them, ‘collected’ them in the streets and vaudeville theatres of Dallas’s emerging African American entertainment community. The title of the song identifies, in generic fashion, the original source of the words and music.”⁴⁴

Leadbelly’s two versions of “Fort Worth and Dallas Blues” (January 24, 1935, ARC unissued, issued on Columbia CK46776; February 1935, Library of Congress unissued, issued on Rounder 1097), which he attributed to Jefferson from around the 1912 period, contain a variant of the last line of stanza four of Jefferson’s “Light House Blues.”⁴⁵ This fact adds weight to the hypothesis that Jefferson was singing some version of “Light House Blues” as early as 1912. The textual and musical similarities among “Light House Blues,” “Nigger Blues,” and “Michigan Water Blues” may have caused Jefferson’s recording to remain unissued.

Despite the fact that the first stanza is derived from Clarence Williams’s composition, and two more stanzas are in some way related to Leroy “Lasses” White’s “The Negro Blues,” this song epitomizes a typically Jeffersonian combination of traditional verses. Moreover, most of the images/themes in “Light House Blues” had already been used or would be used by Jefferson in his issued recordings, the only exception being the use of the term “light house” in the third stanza. Altogether, the second strophe reprises three of Jefferson’s verses. Two were later employed in his last two issued songs, “Mama, I love you, tell the whole round world I do” from “The Cheaters Spell” (September 24, 1929, Paramount 12933) and “Cause I’m a fool about that woman, don’t want nobody else” from “Bootin’ Me ‘Bout” (September 24, 1929, Paramount 12946). The phrase “Papa don’t care what you do” had been used by Jefferson in “Long Lonesome Blues” (ca. March 1926, Paramount 12354, two takes; ca. May 1926, Paramount 12354, one take). The fourth stanza is an extension of the line “I am worried about my mama, I can’t keep her off my mind” in “That Black Snake Moan no. 2” (ca. March 1929, Paramount 12756). The fifth mixes the first hemistich of the introductory stanza in “Lemon’s Worried Blues” (“I laid down last night with Lemon’s lowdown worried blues,” ca. February 1928, Paramount 12622) with the second hemistich of the final verse of “Old Rounders Blues” (“I got to dreaming so, I was talking all out of my head,” ca. August 1926, Paramount 12394). This

composite rhymes with a slight variant of the line closing “Gone Dead on You Blues” (ca. October 1927, Paramount 12578), “I got a letter this morning, my pigmeat mama was dead.”

If we include the final hemistich (“my ghost will come sneaking back”), we have a text replete with no less than five scattered (and apparently inconsistent) covert references to sight. Quite unusual among them is the first occurrence “This ain’t my home, this ain’t my home, I’ve got a light house on the sea” in the stanza giving the title to the song. This verse was sung in slightly changed form (“My home ain’t here, it’s in the lighthouse on the sea”) by the Southern Blues Singers to open and close their otherwise different composition bearing the same title (April 1, 1929, Gennett 6828 or Varsity 6043). Roger Garnett also recorded a “Lighthouse Blues” on May 23, 1939, for the Library of Congress (2677-A-2), but the song has not yet been issued on CD. More conventional references to sight are the descriptive “She’s a high brown mama” and Jefferson’s recurrent hints at reading (“I got a letter this morning”) and colors (“If I die in Texas, mama don’t wear no black”). The final depiction of the “ghost,” a relatively uncommon appearance in country blues lyrics,⁴⁶ has much more visual strength than its only other occurrence in Jefferson, the colloquial “Not a ghost of a show” (“Hot Dogs” [ca. June 1927, Paramount 12493]).



“Too Black Bad”

*I wonder why my partner sits around looking so sad,
He made (sic) a girl last night, if he quits her it’ll be too black
bad.*

*She’s a well made woman and cunning as a squirrel,
But when she starts to loving, man, she’s out this world.*

*She’s a dark brownskin, color of chocolate drop,
She’s got this old fashioned loving, boys, it just won’t stop.*

*When I first met this woman, I thought I’d made a hit,
But when she started to loving me, man, it just won’t quit.*

*I met her at a sociable, she acted just like a crook,
But when it came to loving, man, it ain’t in the book.*

Even from a superficial reading of the text, it is evident that “Too Black Bad” is either a bad transcription or an unissued alternate take of “Long Lastin’ Lovin’” (Paramount 12666), which is reported as having been recorded around March 1928.⁴⁷ The fact that the Library of Congress only holds a registered copyright for “Too Black Bad” does not help clarify the issue. On the one hand, it may favor the hypothesis that this is a faulty transcription of the issued take wrongly yet understandably registered with the song’s original title. On the other hand, it supports the hypothesis of an alternate take in that the entry is in any case “Too Black Bad” and not “Long Lastin’ Lovin’.” As a matter of fact, if we take into account that some of Jefferson’s extant recorded songs

are not filed for copyright, it is to be noted that the flipside of “Long Lastin’ Lovin,’” “Blind Lemon’s Penitentiary Blues” (ca. February 1928), is also not registered for copyright. Moreover, the substantial differences between the two lyrics—however unreliable Chicago Music Publishing Company’s scribe may have been—would again make us lean toward the hypothesis that “Too Black Bad” is an unissued alternate take. We can reasonably assume that, if this is an unissued take, it was very likely recorded at the same session as the issued one or at the one before it (ca. February 1928), as proposed by Swinton.⁴⁸

Too Black Bad



We can affirm without any doubt that “Too Black Bad” is not a version or cover of Madlyn Davis’s recording of the same title. In fact, the latter was recorded a few months later (ca. October 1928, Paramount 12703) and registered for copyright under the same title with words and music by Madlyn Davis on December 29, 1928, as E unpub. 2352 by Chicago Music Publishing Company. No composer credit appears on the Paramount record label for Madlyn Davis’s song.⁴⁹ Textually and musically it has no relationship to Jefferson’s piece, except for the use of the slang phrase “too black bad,” which is the key phrase in the Davis song but only a seemingly incidental phrase in Jefferson’s blues.⁵⁰ Upon closer examination, however, Jefferson’s use of “too black bad” is far from being casual, as each of the five stanzas of his song presents a current “hip” slang expression as its final phrase. Analyzing the song as a whole, one can go so far as to say that the whole point of Jefferson’s composition is to introduce these five idiomatic expressions, two of which, not accidentally, contain visualizations (“too black bad,” “in the book”), and four of which rhyme with very visually-oriented similes or images (“looking so sad,” “cunning as a squirrel,” “color of chocolate drop,” “she acted just like a crook”).

One would be mistaken to consider Jefferson as too naive to conceive such a complex and well-constructed idea. Throughout his career Jefferson repeatedly proved to be linguistically attentive.⁵¹ Although the title “Long Lastin’ Lovin’,” which was probably imposed by Paramount Records, conveys the song’s overall meaning, it does not suggest the hip phraseology that was meant to be immortalized, beginning from Jefferson’s original song title itself. In any case, the phrase giving the title to the song may be the reason Jefferson’s “Too Black Bad” was not issued, and the title

of the issued record was changed when he recorded an alternate take probably a few weeks later. In a way, this also strengthens the hypothesis that Jefferson’s “Too Black Bad” is the transcription of an unissued alternate take of “Long Lastin’ Lovin’.”

The tune of this piece, like that of “Light House Blues,” is written without any lyrics beneath the notes, and likewise it appears to be a composite tune approximating Jefferson’s melodic phrasing. It does not exactly fit any of the printed stanzas. The first line of each stanza is obviously meant to be repeated in order to make this a typical twelve-bar AAB blues. The final measure of the song in the lead sheet contains a half-note C joined to a quarter-note C followed by D. S. This has been normalized here by the use of symbols for repetition of the twelve-bar melody and the alternative ending of the final stanza.

“Long Lastin’ Lovin’” is performed with the guitar in the A position of standard tuning and has a vocal range of a flat tenth from low F sharp to high A. “Too Black Bad” has a more limited range from the tonic to the sixth above it. The transcribed melody of the first stanza of “Long Lastin’ Lovin’” has been transposed here to the key of C for ease of comparison.

We cannot, of course, know what the scribe for Chicago

Long Lastin' Lovin'

Musical notation for the song "Long Lastin' Lovin'" in 4/4 time. It consists of four staves of music with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: "I won-der why my part-ner is sit-ting a - round look-ing sad. Won-der why my part-ner sit-ting a - round look-ing sad. I mean, that wo-man, if she quit me, it's gon-na be too black bad. She's a fair". The notation includes triplets and a double bar line at the end.

Music Publishing Company actually heard as the basis for his transcribed lead sheet. However, we know that in all other cases where Jefferson recorded alternate versions of the same song, he played in the same key each time. On some of his blues comprised of traditional verses, such as “Match Box Blues” and “Long Lonesome Blues,” he could display considerable variation in his lyrics, melody, and guitar part, although the latter always remained in the same key and tuning. On his more textually thematic and original blues such as this piece, however, his recorded versions of the same song display only minor variations. Consequently, there is a high likelihood that the actual melody and guitar part of “Too Black Bad” were much like those of the released version of the song titled “Long Lastin’ Lovin’.” It is not unusual for a lead sheet to have the melody transposed to a simple key such as C. All of the tunes presented here were submitted in the key of C except for “It’s Tight Like That,” which is in F, a key with only one flat in the key signature. However, the scribe

has offered an extremely simplified, in fact distorted, version of Jefferson's melody that ignores all the subtleties of his singing style and his metrical extensions. His melodic range of an octave and a third is compressed to a sixth, there are no spaces for his guitar fills, there is no sense of his melodic syncopation or rhythmic flexibility, and only the barest indication of his use of melodic "blue notes." If these differences are any indication, we should exercise considerable caution in viewing the other lead sheets as representations of the melodies that Jefferson actually sang and should view them instead merely as simplified melodic contours with possibly compressed ranges.

Jefferson's text presents a number of stylistically and linguistically significant variants. The most important are probably those in the final verse of the first stanza and in the whole fourth stanza. In the former, the phrase "He made (sic) a girl last night" may either have been the scribe's mistake for "met" or Jefferson's own mistake and therefore one more reason for not issuing the take. In the latter, we have the inconsequential conjunction "but." It should also be noted that these inconsistencies are not present in "Long Lastin' Lovin'." What remains basically unchanged, instead, is Jefferson's typical use of a very visual language. The visual references in "Too Black Bad" are almost the same as the ones in "Long Lastin' Lovin'," where a final spoken phrase including the colloquial expression "too black bad" is added.



"It's Tight Like That"

*Rats are bad in my kitchen, and I've lost my Maltese cat,
Gonna make up with my baby, man, it's tight like that.*

*I'm gonna start walking, gonna walk the shoes off my feet,
Been thinking about my mama, Lawd, that woman she is sweet.*

*I ain't got no suitcase, just got a bottle of gin,
Got to stay drunk to keep warm, 'cause my clothes are too thin.*

*Long lonesome freight train went past me a-flying,
But I was thinking about my baby and I didn't pay it no mind.*

*When you got a home and a car and a little Maltese cat,
And a good doing brownskin, man, it's tight like that.*

Most of the general observations made for "Too Black Bad" are valid for "It's Tight Like That." This song is also either a bad transcription or an unissued alternate take of one of Jefferson's issued performances, in this case "Maltese Cat Blues" (ca. August 1928, Paramount 12712). Again, we cannot be certain which is the case. No entry for "Maltese Cat Blues" is filed at the Library of Congress copyright office, but its flip side ("D B Blues," recorded at the same session) was registered on October 18, 1928, the same date as "It's Tight Like That." As in the case of "Too Black Bad," however, the dissimilarities between the transcriptions of "It's Tight Like That" and "Maltese Cat Blues," the fact that the entry at the Library of Congress copyright office is titled

only as "It's Tight Like That" (and not as "Maltese Cat Blues"), and the various possible reasons for not issuing the song indicate that this is probably an alternate take recorded at the 1928 July or August session and not a bad transcription of the issued one.

As was the case with Madlyn Davis's "Too Black Bad," the copyright registration date of Jefferson's "It's Tight Like That" enables us to assert that he also recorded this title before anybody else. The title "It's Tight Like That" is historically associated with Tampa Red (Hudson Whittaker) and Georgia Tom (Thomas A. Dorsey).⁵² In fact, Tampa Red's first two unissued Vocalion takes bearing this title were recorded on September 19, 1928, and October 8, 1928, respectively, while the first issued one was recorded a couple of weeks later (October 24, Vocalion 1216). It is musically and textually entirely different from Jefferson's song. State Street Music Pub. registered "It's Tight Like That" on October 29, 1928, as E unpub. 1852 and again on November 21, 1928, as E unpub. 1448, both in the name of Hudson Whittaker and Thomas A. Dorsey (Georgia Tom). It was very likely registered twice due to different arrangements. A piano and ukulele arrangement was registered by Melrose Bros. on December 10 and December 15 as E Pub. 1867. The merely incidental use of the lyric phrase in Jefferson's piece may again have been the reason the record company decided not to issue



Photo courtesy of David Evans, The University of Memphis

It's Tight Like That

Blind Lemon Jefferson, "It's Tight Like That", ca. October 1928

"It's Tight Like That."⁵³

Whether at the same session or at a later date, when Jefferson recorded "It's Tight Like That" again, he (or more likely the record company) changed its title to "Maltese Cat Blues," thus avoiding any possible confusion. It is possible that Tampa Red

and Davis heard these phrases from Jefferson's records, but it is equally possible that they were in common use at the time. Our guess is that Tampa Red and Davis did not appropriate these phrases after hearing Jefferson use them. They were simply part of the up-to-date slang that "hip" people were using and that all of these artists had the idea to employ in songs. It is difficult to say whether it was Jefferson himself who provided these titles, suggesting perhaps that the songs were his own treatment of the popular phrases at that time. But Jefferson probably was among the first (if not the first) to use these phrases on record, and certainly many people were listening to his records in that period. Other subsequent pre-war versions of the Tampa Red piece bearing the same title were recorded by Clara Smith (January 26, 1929, Columbia 14398-D), the Southern Blues Singers (April 1, 1929, Gennett 6828), and Slim Barton (ca. May 1929, QRS R7081). Rev. Emmett Dickinson in "Sermon on Tight Like That" (ca. November 1929, Paramount 12925), Rev. A. W. Nix in "It Was Tight Like That" (ca. February 18, 1930, Vocalion 1505), and Rev. J. M. Gates in "These Hard Times Are Tight Like That" (December 12, 1930, Okeh 8850) recorded topical sermons containing this phrase.

The melody of the lead sheet of Jefferson's song seems to be a composite designed to suggest the varying number of syllables in the different stanzas. The final measure contains a three-quarter note on low F. This has been normalized here as in the previous piece. This is the only lead sheet discussed here written in the key of F. We have retained the B flat in the key signature, as found in the lead sheet, even though this note never actually occurs in the melody. "Maltese Cat Blues," on the other hand, is performed with the guitar in the C position of standard tuning, tuned up to C sharp. In the last line of stanza 1 the lead sheet has "gal and" beneath the melody and "baby" in the textual transcription. The notes for "my" and "gal" are tied in the lead sheet. The first line of each stanza is obviously meant to be repeated in order to make this a typical twelve-bar AAB blues. The same observations made about "Too Black Bad" in comparison to "Long Lastin' Lovin'" apply to this song in comparison to "Maltese Cat Blues."

The text of "Maltese Cat Blues" is more cohesive than that of "It's Tight Like That," but the notable stylistic and linguistic variations are few. Unless it was not transcribed on the lead sheet on purpose, only in the issued take do we find the addition of the introductory spoken phrase ("Say, man, I went out gay-cattin' last night, and my gal, she threw a party for me. Ooh, gee, it was tight like that!"), which is closely connected to the third line in the first tercet and to the last verse of the blues. In the first stanza, we also have a change of adjective: "rats" are defined as "mean" in "Maltese Cat Blues" but they are "bad" in "It's Tight Like That," the same word used for "mosquitoes" in Jefferson's "Mosquito Moan" (September 24, 1929, Paramount 12899). Supposing that the transcription of "It's Tight Like That" is accurate, the only descriptive visual reference is reprised almost identically ("And a good doing brownskin" versus "And a good dark brownskin"). The addition of the word "car" in "It's Tight Like That" is also to be noted as an indirect visual reference, as one has to be able to see in order to drive.

<http://ecommons.txstate.edu/jtmh/vol3/iss2/3>



"Money Tree Mama Blues"

*I've got my trunk all packed, but I ain't got no place to go,
Somebody stole my money tree, and, Lawd, it's worryin' me so.*

*I had a good gal, and I thought I was really in right,
I let her have her way too much, somebody stole my money tree last night.*

*Some joker has confided my brown into leaving me,
Some other man is shaking down my money tree.*

*She sure was a good gal, could get money anywhere,
Sometimes she'd come home to me with money sticking in her hair.*

*As long as I had this woman, I didn't know what it was to be broke,
But somebody stole my money tree, and believe me it ain't no joke.*

*I'm going to buy an ax, and search all over this town,
When I find that woman, I'm gonna chop my money tree down.*

"Money Tree Mama Blues" is an original song bearing more than one of Jefferson's typical compositional, thematic, and linguistic characteristics. Alice Moore's "Money Tree Man" (May 22, 1936, Decca 7227)—the only pre-war composition with a similar title—has no textual or musical resemblance with this piece. On the basis of its registration date (October 18, 1928) and registration number (E U.S. unpub. 389), one may suppose that "Money Tree Mama Blues" was recorded in July or August of the same year, together with seven more titles ranging from E U.S. unpub. 384 to 391. This song may not have been issued due to some technical problems and/or performance mistakes or for some other obscure reason.

The lead sheet of the music presents no particular problems, except for the fact that Jefferson undoubtedly did not hold the final syllables of his lines as long as indicated there. The lead sheet is regularized to an even twelve bars, yet we know that Jefferson usually extended his stanzas to more than twelve measures.⁵⁴ The contour of the melody in the lead sheet resembles one that Jefferson used in a number of his blues, e.g., "Lectric Chair

Money Tree Mama Blues

The musical notation consists of three staves of music in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The melody is written on a single line. The lyrics are placed below the notes. The first line of music corresponds to the first line of the lyrics: "I've got my trunk all packed, and I ain't got no place to go." The second line of music corresponds to the second line: "Um, got no place to go. Some-bo-dy stole my mon-cy tree, and,". The third line of music corresponds to the third line: "Lawd, it wor-ries me so." The melody is regularized to a 12-measure structure, with a final note on low F.

Blind Lemon Jefferson, "Money Tree Mama Blues", ca. October 1928

Blues” (ca. February 1928, Paramount 12608). From the musical portion of the lead sheet we learn that in his performance Jefferson substituted an extended hummed note for the first phrase of line 2 of his first stanza. This practice also occurred in his “Bad Luck Blues” (ca. December 1926, Paramount 12443), “Rising High Water Blues” (ca. May 1927, Paramount 12487), “Teddy Bear Blues” (ca. June 1927, Paramount 12487, two takes), “Christmas Eve Blues” (ca. August 1928, Paramount 12692), “Sad News Blues” (ca. July 1928 and ca. January 1929, Paramount 12728, two versions), “Big Night Blues” (ca. March 1929 and ca. August 1929, Paramount 12801, two versions), and “Long Distance Moan” (September 24, 1929, Paramount 12852).

We can conclude that the melody of “Money Tree Mama Blues” as written on the lead sheet is very likely a simplified version of what Jefferson actually sang, since it resembles other recorded melodies by him. We cannot be certain that he actually performed this piece in the key of C, as indicated in the lead sheet, since transcription in the “simple” key of C may well have been part of the simplifying process. The lyric portion of the lead sheet contains two discrepancies in stanza 1 with the lyrics as printed in the musical portion (not counting the fact that the musical portion also reveals the lyrically truncated second line). In the musical portion, “and” is found in place of “but” in line 1, and “it worries me so” is found in place of “it’s worryin’ me so” in the final line. These discrepancies are consistent with the general pattern of carelessness evident in the lead sheets.

From the textual point of view, the special focus of “Money Tree Mama Blues” lies in the final stanza, where the theme of personal revenge emerges preemptorily, yet almost inevitably, from the recurrent treatment of unfaithfulness and abandonment. As we shall see in the conclusion, the spectacular image of a blind man swinging an ax is outstanding not only in itself, but also in light of Jefferson’s currently available lyrical output as a whole. Altogether, the song presents four visual references. The first is the passing weak mention of the woman’s skin color (“my brown”), while the next is the weak but very original “money sticking in her hair.” It is true that this depiction can be perceived by feel as well as by sight, but the chronological and psychological precedence of the latter is evident, especially in the context of Jefferson’s woman coming back home and in view of his ambivalent rapport with blindness. Enhanced by the very visual co-text surrounding them are the two conventional images included in the last strophe (“search all over this town” and “When I find that woman”).



“Pineapple Blues”

*So much bomb throwing, what’s a man to do?
Somebody blew my house up, must have been on account of you.*

*I can’t swear to it, but I think it’s my old use (sic) to be,
She’s mad ‘cause I quit her, and she’s throwing pineapples at me.*

*I got a note from her the day before yesterday,
She said she’d blow my house up if I didn’t send my other woman*

*I started out this morning, found a pineapple at my door,
This place ain’t safe and I can’t stay here no more.*

*I’m going to that woman waving a white flag for a truce,
Lawd, I wonder who in the world let that wild woman a-loose.*

“Pineapple Blues” is another Jefferson literary masterpiece. Like his other compositions of the same period, it is extremely well constructed and original. As we noted for “Money Tree Mama Blues,” perhaps this song was not issued, because there were technical problems and/or performance mistakes or for some other reason.

Measure 9 of the melody is printed here as written in the lead sheet, although it probably should be written as a series of eight eighth notes. The text printed with the melody in the lead sheet

Pineapple Blues

So much bomb throw-ing, Lawd, what's a man to do? So much
bomb throw-in', Lawd, what's a man to do? Some -
bo - dy blew my house up, must have been on ac-count of you.

contains the word “Lawd” in line 1, which is not found in the lyric sheet. The first line of each stanza is obviously meant to be repeated in order to make this a typical twelve-bar AAB blues. We cannot be certain, however, that Jefferson actually performed this as a twelve-bar blues, or whether he followed his normal practice of extending his lines. The melody in the lead sheet has a range of only a fifth, which is atypically narrow for Jefferson. This creates a suspicion that it is not a very accurate transcription of what Jefferson actually sang. It is unlike any of Jefferson’s other known melodies.

A pineapple is evidently a hand grenade. This song possibly refers to anarchist activity in the 1920s, although some of the imagery stems from World War One. Jefferson must have been a great listener and heard many war stories. It is easy to visualize him sitting in the barbershop in Wortham, Texas, in the early 1920s listening to the “sports” and oil wildcatters telling war stories of France, Italy, Mexico, etc.⁵⁵ Jefferson’s vivid imagination helped him re-elaborate these recollections into his First World War (“Wartime Blues” [ca. November 1926, Paramount 12425], “Lemon’s Cannon Ball Moan” [ca. March 1928, Paramount 12639], “Rabbit Foot Blues” [ca. December 1926, Paramount 12454]), “Pineapple Blues”) and Mexican campaign (“Dry Southern Blues” [ca. March 1926, Paramount 12347]) references. In any case, as is customary with blues lyrics, the apparent main

theme remains the man-woman relationship.

Three visual references are present in this composition. The first is “I got a note from her the day before yesterday,” which lengthens the already long list of Jefferson’s mentions of reading and writing.⁵⁶ The second is the more original “found a pineapple at my door.” The third, “I’m going to that woman waving a white flag for a truce,” is the temporary conclusion of a turbulent love battle (though not of the war), which these three images perfectly summarize.

Conclusion

Apart from the general consideration that these lead sheets are more valuable for their texts than for their music, two main conclusions may be drawn from the textual analysis of Blind Lemon Jefferson’s newly discovered songs: (1) Jefferson’s psychological need to give vent to his deepest feelings through violent imagery; (2) the confirmation of Monge’s earlier conclusions about Jefferson’s exorcism of blindness through an extensive use of more-or-less concealed visual references.

(1) Some of the new songs depict ravaging outbursts of violence, which is generally expressed by developing the two parallel themes of extreme personal violence and mass destruction. The former presents itself in the shape of potential brutality to be either perpetrated or suffered. In addition to the close of “Money Tree Mama Blues” and the implied destruction of the rats by the Maltese cat in “It’s Tight Like That”/“Maltese Cat Blues,” Jefferson’s murderous impulse is at its peak throughout “Dynamite Blues” (ca. January 1929, Paramount 12739), especially in the following three stanzas:

*I feel like snapping, starting a great big old row,
I say, I feel like snapping, starting a great big old row,
Because the woman I love says she don’t want me nohow.*

*The way I feel now, I could get a keg of dynamite,
I say, the way I’m feeling now, I could get a keg of dynamite,
Pour it all in her window and blow her up late at night.*

*I could swallow some fire, take a drink of gasoline,
I could swallow some fire, take a drink of gasoline,
Blow it up all over that woman and let her go up in steam.*

In most cases, however, Jefferson is the victim of violent or frightening assaults by people, objects, and creatures. Beside “Pineapple Blues” and the exhaustively examined plethora of references to fearsome or annoying animals, such as eagles, snakes, bearcats, mosquitoes, chinch bugs, etc.,⁵⁷ one could cite the blues songs dealing with legal execution, such as “Lectric Chair Blues” (ca. February 1928, Paramount 12608) and “Hangman’s Blues” (ca. July 1928 [matrix number 20751] and ca. August 1928 [matrix number 20816], Paramount 12679), and “Lemon’s Cannon Ball Moan” (ca. March 1928, Paramount 12639), where irony, violence and a sharp sense of vision are the ingredients of a very well-blended and effective cocktail.⁵⁸

*I got a dirty mistreater, she’s mean as she can be,
Got a dirty mistreater, mean as she can be,
I didn’t figure she was so mean till she dropped that cannon on me.*

*When my rider drawed the cannon, ooh, my flesh begin to crawl,
When my rider drawed the cannon, my flesh begin to crawl,
Any man feels kind of different when he faces a cannonball.*

*I stepped two feet forward, started to break and run,
I stepped two feet forward, started to break and run,
Hollered, “Man don’t run a cannon, the same as a Gatling gun.”*

Often within a very sexually/visually-oriented co-text, when Jefferson deals with violence, he does so in order to drive off a rival’s attack, such as in “Cat Man Blues” (September 24, 1929, Paramount 12921):

*Tell me a cat got nine lives, honey, and I believe that’s true,
Tell me a cat got nine lives, honey, and I believe that’s true,
If the cat man has got nine lives, he gonna need ‘em when I get through.*

or to reassure his woman that he has good intentions, such as in “Oil Well Blues” (ca. March 1929, Paramount 12771):

*Ain’t nothing, mama, don’t be scared at all,
It ain’t nothing, mama, don’t get scared at all,
There’s a long distant well and it’s blowing in oil, that’s all.*

*Ain’t nothing to hurt you, sugar, ain’t nothing that’s bad,
It ain’t nothing can hurt you, honey, ain’t nothing bad,
It’s the first oil well that your little farm ever had.*

*I’m a long distance driller and wildcat the country through,
I’m a long distance driller that wildcat the country through,
But I’m done wildcatting if I bring in this well for you.*

*I’m a mean oil well driller, been a driller since I been a man,
I’m a mean oil well driller, been a driller since I been a man,
And I don’t stop drilling till I strikes that Woodbine sand.*

or to resort to his self-control, such as in “Peach Orchard Mama” (ca. March 1929 or ca. August 1929, Paramount 12801):

*Went to the police station, begged the police to put me in jail,
Went to the police station, begged him to put me in jail,
I didn’t wanna kill you, mama, but I hate to see your peaches tree fail.*

*Peach orchard mama, don’t turn your papa down,
Peach orchard mama, don’t turn your papa down,
Because when I gets mad, I acts just like a clown.*

When Jefferson is endangered or imagines himself to be endangered, he reacts to defend himself and his wife, such as in “Fence Breakin’ Yellin’ Blues” (September 24, 1929, Paramount 12921):

*They made a break at me and I broke for my pocket knife,
Made a break at me, broke for my pocket knife,
One had me cornered off while the other one talked about taking
my wife.*

*And when I went for my gun, you oughta seen them yellers breaking
that fence,
When I went for my gun, you oughta seen them yellers break the
fence,
I first thought they was crazy, but I found out they didn’t have no
sense.*

*You can take my money, I mean you can wear my best clothes,
I say, you can take my money, I mean you can wear my best
clothes,
Nothing won’t kill you no quicker but you bother with my
jellyroll.*

or resolves to take time, such as in “Bootin’ Me ‘Bout” (September 24, 1929, Paramount 12946):

*Her father told me, better not to come back no more,
I say, her father told me, better not to come back no more,
“If I catch you here, I’m gonna boot you through the door.”*

*I got to find me a scheme to get my gal off to herself,
I got to find a scheme to get my gal off to herself,
‘Cause I’m a fool about that woman, don’t want nobody else.*

or asks to be forgiven, such as in “Mean Jumper Blues” (ca. February 1928, Paramount 12631):

*I believe he’s looking for me, he’s up all hours at night,
I believe he’s looking for me, he’s up all hours at night,
She used to be my rider and he ain’t treating her right.*

*I met this joker one morning; he was out on the out edge of town,
I met this joker one morning; he was out on the out edge of town,
I had to talk and plead for to keep him from blowing me down.*

Some mainly traditional pieces envisage disruptive remedies to religious or political annoyances, such as Elder Green’s tearing down of the Church of God and the resort to an airplane and a submarine against the Kaiser in “Rabbit Foot Blues” (ca. December 1926, Paramount 12454). Jefferson sometimes provides solutions as violent and exaggerated—and often very visual in content—as the ones described, such as in “Mosquito Moan” (September 24, 1929, Paramount 12899):

*Lamp sitting in my kitchen, mosquitoes all around my screen,
If I don’t arrange to get a mosquito bomb, I’ll be seldom seen.*

*Lamp sitting in my kitchen, mosquitoes all around my screen,
If I don’t arrange to get a mosquito bomb, I’ll be seldom seen.*

Not surprisingly, Jefferson’s recourse to the description of prospective acts of violence seems to become more frequent from 1928, that is, when his compositions begin to become more thematic and consistent. Statistically, the episodes where Jefferson is the victim of persecution from a particular rival, lover, or animal largely prevail over those in which he acts as a persecutor. This may be due to Jefferson’s unconscious and individualistic rather than rational way of overcoming his physical—and consequently psychological—disability. In any case, both types of expression of extreme violence seem to put a curb on Jefferson’s increasing sense of fear and rage. As pointed out by Paul Oliver in a more general context, “the blues acts as a catalyst at times, the singer dispersing his anger or the irresponsibility of his intentions through the blues. The prevalence of some themes may indicate a particular function of the music, acting as a release for discharged energies which might otherwise seek more dangerous outlets.”⁵⁹ The British scholar also stated: “Many blues are aggressive in content and to canalize violence would appear to be one of the functions of the blues.”⁶⁰ The impression is given by these songs that if Jefferson had not had his music, he would have been a dangerous man to deal with.

(2) The conspicuous quantity of visual references in these new songs, as listed in the Appendix, corroborates the assumptions made in an earlier article by Monge. The average number of visualizations per song (3.7) is startlingly higher than the average (2.48) found in the complete body of Jefferson’s issued songs as well as the average (2.39) resulting from a randomly chosen sample of his work.⁶¹ The average number of visualizations of the new songs is even more startling, considering that these statistics a) do not take into account the two missing visual references of “Easy Rider,” which are not listed here due to the lead sheet’s textual truncation; and b) include “English Stop Time,” the only purely instrumental piece Jefferson ever recorded. These factors actually considerably reduce the average number of visualizations per song in these new compositions.

Being Jefferson’s first and only piece explicitly dealing with blindness as a subtext, “I Labor So Far from Home” contains many more visual references than the songs developing other themes in a more-or-less traditional manner. In this title, however, it is the quality and not the quantity of the mentions which matters. If we exclude “I Labor So Far from Home” from the statistics concerning this new material, the average number of visual references per song (2.44) turns out to be very close to the partial and total ones ascertained in the earlier study of Jefferson’s issued songs. All in all, these new lyrics strengthen the hypothesis of Jefferson’s attempt to exorcize his sightlessness by means of frequent textual visualizations.

From a broader perspective, this material has an even larger significance than what we might have expected before its examination. First, it enhances Blind Lemon Jefferson’s literary legacy, shedding new light on his persona and craftsmanship; second, it helps us better understand the diffusion of several early blues and folk tunes and their seminal contribution to the

development from unrecorded and unpublished music to the limelight of popular commercially recorded music; finally, it reveals Jefferson as an artist deeply immersed in a variegated folk musical tradition, which, in turn, he largely helped to expand and mold before, during, and (through phonograph records) after his unprecedented commercial success. ■

Appendix

Visual References in Blind Lemon Jefferson's New Songs, Presented Chronologically

Songs

Visual References

<i>Laboring Man Blues</i>	The girl that I love and who I crave to see Is far cross the sea when (sic) I can't see
<i>Easy Rider</i> [Two visual references missing due to truncation]	[Two visual references missing due to truncation]
<i>Elder Green's in Town</i>	He's got it printed all over his old automobile, he's Alabama bound I've got a high brown, and she's long and tall
<i>English Stop Time</i>	[instrumental: no lyrics]
<i>I Labor So Far from Home</i> see	Old man went the other day his loving wife to see What did he see but someone's boots where his boots ought to be Who's (sic) boots are these lying under my bed where my boots ought to be You old fool, blind fool, old man, can't you
see?	I never saw a coffee pot with boot heels on
before	Old man went the other night his loving wife to see What should he see but someone's horse his horse ought to be Whose horse is this hitched in my rack where my horse ought to be I never saw a milk cow with a saddle on before What should he see but someone's coat where his coat ought to be Whose coat is this hanging on my rack where my coat ought to be I never saw a blanket with coat sleeves on
before	What should he see but some old man lying where he ought to be What man is this lying in my bed where I ought to be I never saw a baby with whiskers on before
<i>Light House Blues</i>	I've got a lighthouse on the sea She's a high brown mama I got a letter this morning Mama don't wear no black My ghost will come sneaking back
<i>Too Black Bad</i>	I wonder why my partner sits around looking so sad If he quits her it'll be too black bad She's a well made woman She's a dark brownskin, color of chocolate drop it ain't in the book

Money Tree Mama Blues

My brown
Money sticking in her hair
Search all over this town
When I find that woman

Pineapple Blues

I got a note from her
I'm going to that woman waving a white
flag for a truce
Found a pineapple at my door

NOTES

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- Charters, *The Bluesmen*, 175-189; Dixon, Godrich and Rye, *Blues and Gospel Records 1890-1943*, 442-445; Swinton, "A Twist of Lemon," 4-9.
- Charters, *The Bluesmen*, 179, 181.
- For further information on Jefferson's Okeh session, see Roger Brown, "Recording Pioneer Polk Brockman," *Living Blues* 23 (September/October 1975): 31.
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- Paul Oliver, *Blues Off the Record: Thirty Years of Blues Commentary* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988), 41.
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11. Peter Narváez, "Afro-American and Mexican Street Singers: An Ethnohistorical Hypothesis," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 42 (1978): 73-84; Peter Narváez, "The Influences of Hispanic Music Cultures on African-American Blues Musicians," *Black Music Research Journal* 14, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 203-224.
 12. David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 75-81.
 13. For a discussion of this complex of songs, see Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, "They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me: Sheet Music, Southern Vaudeville, and the Commercial Ascendancy of the Blues," *American Music* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 402-454; Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 115-118.
 14. For further information on John William "Blind" Boone, see Ann Sears, "John William 'Blind' Boone, Pianist-Composer: 'Merit, Not Sympathy Wins,'" *Black Music Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 225-247.
 15. Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950), 121.
 16. Perry Bradford describes a 1913 cutting contest in Chicago with Jelly Roll Morton: "I played and sang a whole gang of blues; among them was 'I'm Alabama Bound,' the song I changed the title to 'Don't Leave Me Here,' and then I played 'Cannon Ball Blues.'" See Bradford, *Born with the Blues* (New York: Oak Publications, 1965), 94.
 17. See Newman I. White, *American Negro Folk-Songs* (Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates Inc., 1965), 307-308, 353-354; Will H. Thomas, "Some Current Folk-Songs of the Negro," Austin: Folk-Lore Society of Texas, pamphlet 1 (1912): 12; Gates Thomas, "South Texas Negro Work-Songs: Collected and Uncollected," in *Rainbow in the Morning*, ed. J. Frank Dobie (Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1965), 154-180, esp. 177.
 18. John Work, *American Negro Songs and Spirituals* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1940), 241.
 19. An Elder Green, described as "minister," is included in a 1910 list of black residents of Greenwood, Mississippi. See <http://www.rootsweb.com/~msafamer/mslflore1910Dir.txt>. We wish to thank Bob Eagle for calling our attention to this source. There is no way to determine if this Elder Green is the subject of this folksong.
 20. For further information on these themes, see Horace Clarence Boyer, *The Golden Age of Gospel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 12-29; E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Shocken, 1964), 47-67; Joseph R. Washington, Jr., *Black Sects and Cults* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1972), 58-82; Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints*, 199-228; Anthony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times*, rev. ed. (New York: Limelight, 1985), 173-186.
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 22. D. K. Wilgus and Lynwood Montell define a blues ballad as "a highly variable, subjective, lyrical, yet dramatic narrative which celebrates and comments on an event rather than presenting a straightforward, circumstantial account." See Wilgus and Montell, "Clure and Joe Williams: Legend and Blues Ballad," *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 81 (1968): 296.
 23. Charters, *The Bluesmen*, 179, 181.
 24. Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York: Dover, 1965), 88-95, 303-304. Originally published in ten volumes, 1882-98.
 25. John Minton, "'Our Goodman' in Blackface and 'The Maid' at the Sookey Jump: Two Afro-American Variants of Child Ballads on Commercial Disc," *John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly* 17 (Spring/Summer 1982): 31-35, 38-40; and Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints*, 229-230.
 26. Oliver, *Songsters and Saints*, 230.
 27. Tristram Potter Coffin and Roger de V. Renwick, *The British Traditional Ballad in North America*, edition revised by Tristram Potter Coffin, with a supplement by Roger de V. Renwick (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 143-145, 272-273; Bertrand Harris Bronson, *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*, 4 Volumes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 95-129.
 28. Coffin and Renwick, *The British Traditional Ballad in North America*, 144.
 29. William Barlow, *Looking Up at Down: The Emergence of Blues Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 69.
 30. Monge, "The Language of Blind Lemon Jefferson," 60-62.
 31. Barlow, *Looking Up at Down*, 69.
 32. Monge, "The Language of Blind Lemon Jefferson," 50.
 33. For an analysis of two illuminating examples in gospel songs, see Luigi Monge, "Visual References in the Lyrics of Blind Pre-War Blues and Gospel Musicians," in *The Lyrics in African American Popular Music*, edited by Robert Springer (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2001), 100-103.
 34. See "The Adulteress," collected from Maude Stockton and included in Elsie Clews Parsons, "Tales from Guilford County, North Carolina," *Journal of American Folklore* 30 (1917), 199.
 35. We have not been able to examine the following versions: Jim Henry's "Where My Coat Used to Be" (March 8, 1937, AFS 885-B-2) and Will Starks's "Our Good Man" (August 9, 1942, AFS 6652-A-1). Colon Keel's "The Three Nights Experience" (June 1939, AFS 2709-B-1) is listed in Dixon, Godrich and Rye's *Blues and Gospel Records 1890-1943*. A note by the collector John A. Lomax, however, indicates that Keel was white. There is another version of "The Western Cowboy" by Don Mooney (February 27, 1936, AFS 604-A-1) that we have not examined, and thus we cannot state whether it contains verses from Child no. 274. Huddie Ledbetter [Leadbelly] recorded "The Western Cowboy" several times, but his versions do not contain any verses from this ballad. John A. Lomax, in a headnote to a transcription of Harry Jackson's version, stated that he had written down five variants of "The Western Cowboy" from the singing of Negro prisoners in Texas penitentiaries. The ballad also exists in black tradition in the Bahamas and the island of Nevis.
 36. Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 44.
 37. See nos. 1, 3, 48 and 49 in Bronson, *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*, 98, 99, 124 and 125.
 38. *Ibid.*
 39. *Ibid.*, 114-115.
 40. Abbott and Seroff, "They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me," 409-412; Richard L. Riley, *Early Blues: Volume One*, Piano Mania, n.d. [ca. 1995], 5-8.
 41. White singer George O'Connor recorded "Nigger Blues" in 1916 (Columbia A-2064). The song was reissued on *Let's Get Loose: Folk and Popular Blues Styles from the Beginnings to the Early 1940s*, with liner notes by David Evans, New World NW 290, 1978. New Orleans-born vaudeville and blackface entertainer Al Bernard recorded it in early 1919 (Edison 3766, 50542), and Bernard or possibly White himself recorded only the first stanza with banjo accompaniment as part of "Lasses White Minstrels - Plantation Scene" (April 1923, Columbia A3871) by Lasses White and Company with Al Bernard.
 42. *Dallas City Directory* 1912, 587. We are indebted to Alan Govenar and Jay Brakefield for doing research on the exact location of the Happy Hour Theatre. For further information on the Dallas music scene, see Alan B. Govenar and Jay F. Brakefield, *Deep Ellum and Central Track: Where the Black and White Worlds of Dallas Converged* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1998).
 43. It is also a variant of one line in the thirty-three stanzas collected by W. Prescott Webb in Beeville, Texas. See W. Prescott Webb, "Notes on Folk-Lore of Texas," *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 28 (1915): 295.
 44. Abbott and Seroff, "They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me," 410.
 45. Wolfe and Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*, 44. Two versions of Leadbelly's song were printed in John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), 136-137, and John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *Leadbelly: A Collection of World-Famous Songs by Huddie Ledbetter* (New York: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc., 1959), 32.
 46. André Prévos, "Religious Words in Blues Lyrics and Titles: A Study," in *Saints and Sinners: Religion, Blues and (D)evil in African-American Music and Literature*, edited by Robert Sacré (Liège; Belgium: Société Liégeoise de Musicologie, 1996), 321, 325, 327.
 47. Dixon, Godrich and Rye, *Blues and Gospel Records 1890-1943*, 444.
 48. Swinton, "A Twist of Lemon," 7.
 49. Max E. Vreede, *Paramount 12000/13000 Series* (London: Storyville Publications, 1971), n. p.
 50. For the meaning of this colloquial expression see Jean Paul Levet, *Talkin' That Talk* (Levallois-Perret: Soul Bag, 1986), 25-26; Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 73.
 51. For another example of Jefferson's conscious use of slang expressions