



What is the Blues? Why does it exist?

Rooted in the African tradition of call-and-response, the Blues, mother and father of Jazz, Rock & Roll, Rhythm & Blues, Gospel, and even Hip-Hop music, is an indigenous African American art form. It's also a cultural institution filled with volumes of autobiographical, economical, sociological, and historical information expressed through the arts in disciplines such as, but not limited to music, literature, dance, and theater. In brief, it's the soundtrack of America.

The Blues addresses controversial issues such as race, class, gender, politics, and even socio-economics.

Blues songs generally tell complete stories in just three verses exposing one's joys, truths, tragedies, triumphs and their trials & tribulations. Here is a basic song theme chart.

Slavery: Seeds of the Blues

*Ivory, gold, and tribal bodies
Stolen from Africa's great body of work
Remains of stained etchings
In the minds of sagacious elders.
Bitter to taste in mouths of her babies,*

*Carrying my ancestors 'round in my suitcase
Unbelievable, their ears as they listen
400 years of Black folk and their fears
Slaves with permanent shackles . . .
Separated by skin color, classism, ed-ju-ma-cation,
Hair texture, and zip codes.
From all the cotton jeans I wear
Granddaddy's blood innate in the stitching
Depicting patterns of the deep South's incomprehensibility.*

*For all the cotton shirts that I wear
On my unbeaten back
Lies Grandma's recollection of the old days.
The cotton in the jeans I wear
Are only microcosms of the sacks
And rows upon rows
Of cotton they picked, religiously.
Once 10 tons of steel
Echoed in a welder's protective facemask
Now, mills are replaced
By my broken back's memory of yesterday's 9 to 5.
From the auctioneer's,
"This fine young buck has good teeth,"
To "Swing low sweet chariot" to "I have a dream"
To "I am somebody!"*

However, the institution of slavery dates back to Ancient Times as far as 3,500 BC. It was practiced among the powerful, privileged, and prosperous in countries such as Assyria, Babylon, China, Egypt/Kemet, India, and Persia. In 1619, the Dutch brought the first enslaved Africans to Jamestown, Virginia. I guess this is what B.B. King is talking about when he sings:

*Everybody wants to know why I sing the Blues.
Yes, I say, 'Everybody wants to know
Why I sing the Blues.'
Well, I've been around a long time . . .
Really have paid my dues*

*When I first got the Blues
They brought me over on a ship.
Men were standing over me,
and a lot, Lawd, with a whip.*

Everybody wants to know. . .

Some of the enslaved Africans were specialists in agriculture from Senegal and Gambia. They were brought to the United States in cramped, dark, damp, malodorous ship bottoms as indigent servants to work the land.

Once here, they worked on plantations in areas such as Alabama, Arkansas, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana,

Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Texas, and Virginia. They were also taken to and sold in Cuba, Jamaica, Mexico, and Saint Domingue (today known as Haiti). In addition to bodies (also known as Black gold), artifacts such as diamonds, ivory, gold, art, exotic animals, timber, cottonseed, rubber, coal, palm oil, coffee, wheat, corn, rice, sugarcane, nuts, fruit, tobacco, copper, lead, uranium, and zinc were taken. Technological information pertaining to agriculture was also stolen during Africa's rape. Sharks had been known to instinctively trail merchant ships in anticipation of the inevitable . . . African bodies thrown overboard into the Atlantic Ocean during the Middle Passage.

The term Rock & Roll was originally used in urban and rural African American communities decades before it was called a form of music. It could have meant any and everything from getting down with your loved one sexually to taking care of business to having a good time. The term Rock & Roll was lifted from the African American lexicon by someone outside the experience and applied to this new and exciting form of music.