



**HISTORY OF THE BLUES IN
TWO PARTS**

PART TWO – 1960s THROUGH PRESENT

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Early expansion of the Blues I

- Delta Blues – where it all began. Guitar and harmonica were dominant instruments. Early Delta Blues also introduced Slide Guitar. Delta Blues artists included Robert Johnson, Son House, Charlie Patton, Blind William Johnson and others. Delta Blues remained popular through the 1940s.. Crossroads by Robert Johnson is an example of Delta Blues
- Piedmont Blues – our area – emphasis on finger picking on acoustic guitar. Similar to Delta Blues but more upbeat and incorporating more rhythmic feels. Piedmont Blues artists include Reverend Gary Davis, Blind Boy Fuller, Etta Baker and others. Popular from ~the 1940s through the '60s. Key to the Highway by Big Bill Broonzy is an example of Piedmont Blues.
- Swamp Blues – based in the Louisiana Bayou, it incorporates accordion and harmonica. Swamp Blues artists include Slim Harpo and Lazy Lester and others. Also Popular from ~the 1940s through the '60s. She Caught the Katy by Taj Mahal is an example of Swamp Blues
- St. Louis Blues – Pianos or small combos with the Piano dominate this style. St. Louis Blues has a strong rhythmic component. St. Louis Blues artists include Roosevelt Sykes along with artists such as Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong who performed on awarding recordings of W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues. Popular from ~the 1920s through the 1940s

Early expansion of the Blues II

- Jump Blues – Emerged in the 1940s. It is highly rhythmic and up-tempo. Heavily influenced by the ‘big band’ sounds, songs often include the saxophone. Key artists include Louis Jordan and the Tympani Five, Roy Brown, Big Joe Turner and others. Remained popular through the 1960s. Saturday Night Fish Fry by Louis Jordan is an example of Jump Blues
- Chicago Blues – influenced by Delta Blues, incorporates electric guitar, harmonica, bass and drums. Chicago Blues became popular after WWII. It heavily influenced Rock ‘n Roll. Key artists include Buddy Guy, Muddy Waters, James Cotton, Little Walter, Willie Dixon, Koko Taylor. Still popular today. Born in Chicago by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band is an example of the 60’s Chicago Blues sound.
- Texas Blues – incorporates jazz style arrangements with electric guitar. Early artists such as Blind Lemon Jefferson were popular before the electric guitar. Other artists include Blind Willie Johnson, T-Bone Walker, Lightnin’ Hopkins. Modern day Texas Blues is often associated with Stevie Ray Vaughan and his brother Jimmy.
- West Coast Blues – Originated with Texas artists who moved to California such as T-Bone Walker. The style is known for incorporating jazz chord changes into the Blues. West Coast Blues has been evolving since the 1930s. Stormy Monday by T-Bone Walker is an example of West Coast Blues

Memphis Blues

- Memphis blues is a style created from the 1910s to the 1930s by musicians in the Memphis area, such as Frank Stokes, Sleepy John Estes, Furry Lewis and Memphis Minnie. The style was popular in vaudeville and medicine shows and was associated with Beale Street, the main entertainment area in Memphis.
- Memphis is home to the Blues Foundation which sponsors Blues Societies all over the world and holds the International Blues Competition annually, using all of Beale Street
- Over 100 bands, solo, and youth artists are involved
- Memphis is home to the Gibson Guitar Factory, Sun Recording Studios, The Rock 'n Soul Museum, Memphis Music Hall of Fame and the Blues Foundation – www.blues.org
- Riley King landed a 10-minute spot on WDIA in Memphis in 1948. This led to him becoming known as the Beale Street Blues Boy, From there he became B.B. King and evolved into a global blues artist bringing blues to audiences all over the world.
- The B.B. Kings Blues Club opened in Memphis in 1991 and remains a local Beale Street attraction.

Newport Jazz Festival in the 60's a turning point

- The Newport Jazz Festival began including American Blues Artists in the 60's such as Skip James, Muddy Waters, Memphis Slim, Willie Dixon
- Bob Dylan was booed for playing an electric set there on July 25th, 1965. He was backed by members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band – Mike Bloomfield, Al Kooper, Jerome Arnold and Sam Lay.
- Towards the end of the sixties the Festival was featuring artists such as Sly and the Family Stone, John Mayall, and others. Albert King played at the Festival in 1970

Significant Artists – The Kings

- Many people refer to B.B. King as the “King of the Blues”. The album “Live in the Cook County Jail” is thought by many to be the best Live Blues album of all time. It was recorded in 1970. His guitar style was extremely influential. He was one of the first black blues artists to break through to white rock ‘n roll audiences. He spent most of his life touring in the U.S. and eventually worldwide.
- Freddie King was a blues guitarist whose style of electric guitar was also extremely influential. Instrumentals such as “Hideaway”, “The Stumble”, and “Sidetracked” are staples for most blues guitarists. Freddie King was also known for his hit song “Have You Ever Loved a Woman”
- Albert King – Albert was large, approximately 6’4” with huge hands. He played his guitar well-defined and upside down. His well-defined style incorporated huge bends and the minor pentatonic scale as heard in his hit song “Born Under a Bad Sign”. Other significant songs include “As the Years go Passing By” and “Crosscut Saw”.
- The Kings were not related. Albert’s real last name was Nelson. He changed it to King and claimed to be B.B.’s brother for a time as he thought it could help his career.

British Invasion

- Prior to the invasion, Skiffle music was very popular in 1950s England. Notable artists included Lonnie Donegan, Van Morrison. Midnight Special by Lonnie Donegan is an example of the Skiffle style.
- The invasion began in the mid sixties. The Beatles and Rolling Stones led the way covering American Blues Tunes on their early albums
- John Mayall led some of the best British Blues bands of the era. His album with Eric Clapton, known as the “Beano” Album is considered a seminal blues record, which continues to influence blues players to this day,
- Other “invading artists” included Led Zeppelin, who covered many American Blues Tunes
- Several Rock ‘n Roll artists such as Herman’s Hermits, Eric Burdon and the Animals, the Zombies and many others also were popular in this period

Blues 1960s – Present

- R&B Rhythm and Blues was very influenced by blues in the 60s and blended with elements of gospel music and soul music contributing to the Motown Sound. Call and answer is also a big part of the Motown Sound.
- Texas Blues –although it began in the 30s, Texas Blues saw a comeback with bands such as ZZ Top, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Johnny Winter and Stevie Ray Vaughan. Modern Texas Blues incorporates a great deal of influence from Rock ‘n Roll.
- Chicago Blues also had a heyday in the 60s with artists such as the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Buddy Guy, Lonnie Brooks and his two sons – Ronnie Baker and Wayne, Matt “Guitar” Murphy, Otis Spann, Koko Taylor, Junior Wells and many others.
- Blues Rock started to be significant in the 60s with British Invasion bands such as Led Zeppelin, Cream, Aerosmith, the Animals, and continues to this day with artists like Joe Bonamassa, Eric Gales, Government Mule, the Tedeschi-Trucks band and many others.
- Southern Rock was brought to prominence with the success of the Allman Brothers, the Marshall Tucker Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd among others. It is a very popular style that includes blues influences.

Blues 1960s – Present

Significant Contributors

- Besides the Kings, many other artists made significant contributions to the development of the Blues. These artists included, but are by no means limited to, in no particular order
- Taj Mahal, Buddy Guy, Johnny Winter, Gatemouth Brown, Robert Cray, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Ruth Brown, Koko Taylor, Bonnie Raitt, Etta James, John Mayall, The Blues Brothers
- Current artists – Buddy Guy & Eric Clapton are touring together in 2026, Bonnie Raitt is still going strong. The class of the 2020's include Gary Clark, Jr., Robben Ford, Matt Schofield, Beth Hart, Joe Bonnamassa, Susan Tedeschi and Derek Trucks, Warren Haynes, Ana Popovic, Ally Venable and countless others.

Summation

- Blues is a truly American form of music. Rooted in Fields Hollers of the Deep South, Gospel Music of the 1800s, the Blues spread through the Great Migration. Different locations developed different styles.
- Blues is also a major contributor to other music styles such as Jazz, Rhythm and Blues, Folk Music, Country, Pop, etc.
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- It was presented by Doug Harris and Rob Higginbotham, both local music teachers and founding members of the Smoky Mountain Blues Society. Copies of the presentations and other information are available at www.blueseducation.com