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had trouble with the sheriff, with "the Man," or at Parchman sang about it in their songs. Other blues told of hard times in making a living, or of broken relations between men and women.

Some songs, including W. C. Handy's famous "Yellow Dog Blues," told of travel on the railroad. As automobiles became more common in Mississippi after World War I, blues singers reacted with "Highway 61 Blues," "49 Highway Blues," and "Greyhound Blues." More than a dozen blues songs were written about the famous Delta flood of 1927.

In the 1920s and 1930s, national record companies sent scouts to Mississippi to find and record blues singers. In these years several Mississippi singers became nationally famous, and their records continue to sell today.

Early bluesmen include Big Bill Broonzy, Robert Johnson, Son House, and Mississippi John Hurt.

"Big Bill"

William Lee Conley Broonzy was born in Scott, Mississippi, on June 26, 1893, one of 21 children. He farmed in Mississippi and Arkansas and then served in the army in World War I. After the war, he found the segregated atmosphere of the South unbearable. Later, he wrote a famous song about it:

If you're white, you're all right.
If you're brown, stick around.
But if you're black, get back! Get back! Get back!

He went north to Chicago in 1920. At first he worked as a redcap with the railroads. But he worked continuously on his music, and at the age of 34 he managed to get Paramount Records to release his first record. After more years of hard work, his records began to sell and he performed in nightclubs and concert halls.

After World War II, however, he seemed to be forgotten. For a while he worked as a janitor at Iowa State College. But then new audiences discovered his records and he played to sold-out crowds in Paris and London on a world tour.

Big Bill Broonzy.



In the summer of 1958, he made a final release, *The Big Bill Broonzy Story*, which covers five records of singing, playing, and talking. The morning after the last recording session, he was operated on for lung cancer. And on the morning of August 14, as an ambulance rushed him back to the hospital, he died.

But his life was not a tragedy. He left behind a golden treasure of friendships and recordings. As he said of himself in his autobiography:

When you write about me, please don't say that I'm a musician or a guitar player—just write Big Bill was a well-known blues singer and player and has recorded 200 blues songs from 1925 up till 1952; he was liked by all the blues singers; some would even get a little jealous sometimes, but Bill would buy a bottle of whiskey and they would all start laughing and playing again. . . .

Minstrel Shows

For a brief period around World War I, minstrel shows were a major part of the Mississippi musical scene. In buses or private trains, the minstrels traveled from town to town, playing and singing jazz, ragtime, blues, and even classical music. White minstrel performers also toured the South, often in "blackface." A few minstrel shows continued to tour Mississippi until television killed them in the 1950s.

Minstrel shows: programs of songs, dances, etc., put on by a band of performers.

The Delta Blues Go North

Black Mississippians moved north after World Wars I and II, and they took the blues with them. Robert V. Weinstein described the result: "As the black man changed his lifestyle, moving from the fields to the towns and finally to the big cities, his music also changed." Electric instruments came in, and the bass guitar was added. Larger groups often replaced the solo performer.

But although Chicago was the new center of the blues, the home of the music—and of many of the performers—was Mississippi. Famous urban blues singers from Mississippi include John Lee Hooker, B. B. King, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and Bo Diddley.

Work songs led to Delta blues which led to urban blues.

Country Music

"Country" music, a singing tradition popular especially among white Mississippians, developed shortly after the