

HEROES OF THE BLUES



A SET OF

36 CARDS



WILLIAM MOORE

1

WILLIAM MOORE

(1893-1951)

A barber by trade, William Moore was from Savannah, Georgia, but spent most of his life in Tappahannock, Virginia. His eight extant sides, recorded at a single Paramount session in 1928, stamp him as one of the few instrumentally oriented performers of the era. Moore's upbeat music may echo the happy-go-lucky ragtime dances popular before the heyday of the blues; "Ragtime Millionaire" is probably his best-known song. He died in 1951.

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PEG LEG HOWELL

PEG LEG HOWELL

(1888-1966)

A native of Eatonton, Georgia, Joshua Barnes (Peg Leg) Howell taught himself guitar around 1909, at the age of 21, and subsequently worked in Atlanta as a street singer. Howell was one of the earliest country blues performers to be recorded. He made 28 sides, many with string band accompaniment, between 1926 and 1929. Like most street singers of the period, Howell had a diverse repertoire that included both blues and uptempo ragtime songs. He died in 1966.

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CLIFFORD GIBSON

CLIFFORD GIBSON

(1901-1963)

Born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1901, Clifford Gibson cut his musical teeth in St. Louis, Missouri. He recorded 24 sides for two different labels between 1929 and 1931. One of the first purely urban performers whose playing had no pronounced rural influences, Gibson's single-string, vibrato-laden approach resembled that of the highly sophisticated jazz-blues guitarist Lonnie Johnson, but placed more emphasis on improvisation. Gibson died in 1963.

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BLIND BLAKE

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BLIND BLAKE

(recorded 1926 -1932)

Jacksonville, Florida's Arthur (Blind) Blake ranks among the most accomplished rag and blues guitarists of all time. In the 1920s he based his career in Chicago. Between 1926 and 1932 he recorded nearly 80 sides for Paramount, afterwards fading into obscurity. Unlike many blind blues performers, Blake played uptempo dance-oriented music. His polished technique and effortless-sounding improvisations attracted many imitators, but admitted no equals.

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FRANK STOKES

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FRANK STOKES

(1888-1955)

Born in 1888 in Whitehaven, Tennessee, Frank Stokes began playing around 1900, and pursued his career in Memphis, where he became one of the city's most popular entertainers. Between 1927 and 1929, he recorded 36 sides for two labels, usually in tandem with his accompanist Dan Sane. His best-known tune was "Crump Don't 'Low It," which referred to the mayor of Memphis and was nationally associated with composer W. C. Handy. He died in 1955.

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JAYBIRD COLEMAN

JAYBIRD COLEMAN

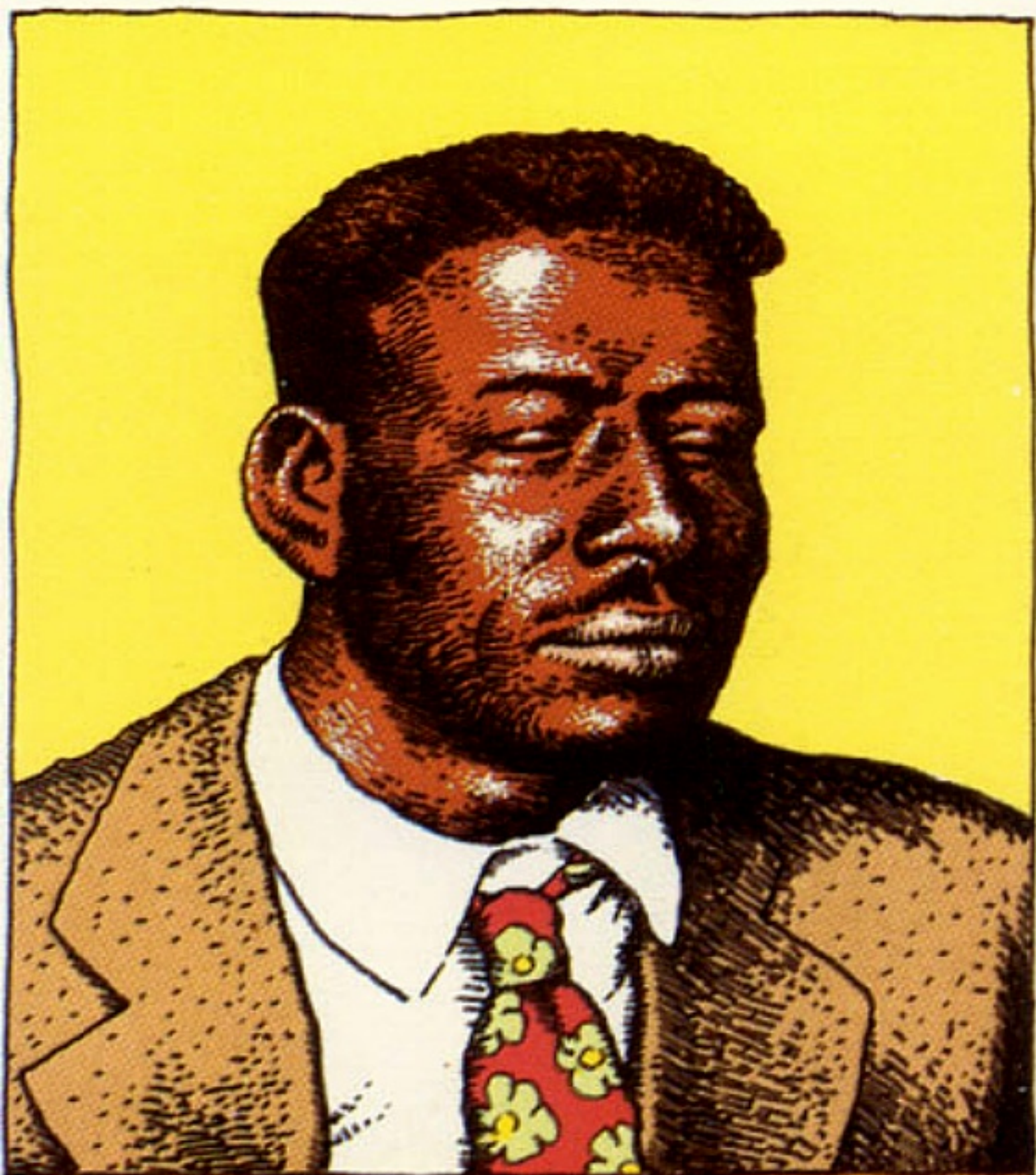
(1896-1950)

Burl (Jaybird) Coleman was born in Gainesville, Alabama, in 1896 and began playing harmonica around 1908, settling in Bessemer in the early 1920s. Between 1927 and 1930 he made 11 sides, appearing in the rather unusual role of a harmonica player accompanying his own vocals. Of all recorded blues harmonica players, Coleman probably developed the richest and most varied tone. He was largely inactive after 1930 and died in 1950.

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BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON

BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON

(c. 1900 - c. 1947)

A native of Marlin, Texas, Blind Willie Johnson worked as a gospel singer. Between 1927 and 1930 he recorded 30 sides, including several vocal duets with his wife. Although religious in orientation, Johnson's music was as percussive as any dance blues, and he attained the most rhythmically fluid and tonally vibrant sound of any bottleneck guitarist of his time. His best-known piece is probably "Dark Was the Night." He died in the late 1940s in Beaumont, Texas.

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LEROY CARR and SCRAPPER BLACKWELL

LEROY CARR (1905 - 1935)

SCRAPPER BLACKWELL (1903 - 1962)

Leroy Carr, one of the first blues singers to use an understated vocal delivery, was born in Nashville in 1905. Francis (Scrapper) Blackwell was born in 1903 and learned guitar in childhood, eventually developing a delicate vibrato blended with string-snapping. The Indianapolis-based team of Carr and Blackwell popularized the piano-guitar blues duet. They made more than 100 sides between 1928 and Carr's death in 1935, including the famous "How Long Blues."

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BLIND LEMON JEFFERSON

BLIND LEMON JEFFERSON

(c. 1897 - 1929)

A native of Wortham, Texas, the legendary Blind Lemon Jefferson worked as a street singer and visited several states in the course of his travels. His successful recording debut in 1926 launched the vogue for country blues. Before his mysterious death in 1929, Jefferson recorded 85 sides and established himself as the most popular blues guitarist of his era. An off-beat guitarist known for his free phrasing patterns, he was one of the most inspired singers found in blues.

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CURLEY WEAVER and FRED McMULLEN

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CURLEY WEAVER (1906 - 1962)
FRED McMULLEN (recorded 1933)

Curley Weaver was born in 1906 and raised near Porterdale, Georgia. He learned guitar around 1922 and moved to Atlanta, Georgia, a few years later. Most of his records were duets with other local blues recording artists, such as Atlanta-based Blind Willie McTell and Fred McMullen of Macon, Georgia. McMullen began recording in 1933. He teamed up with Curley Weaver and Buddy Moss that same year in a recording trio known as The Georgia Browns.

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WHISTLER & HIS JUG BAND

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WHISTLER AND HIS JUG BAND

The first jug band to record, in 1924, was Whistler and His Jug Band, a group hailing from the Louisville, Kentucky, area—where, beginning at the turn of the century, jug bands playing string band arrangements entertained during the Kentucky Derby. From 1924 to 1931 Whistler's aggregation recorded 21 titles for three different companies. A movie clip of the essentially unknown players exists, a still from which provided the source for this card illustration.

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MISSISSIPPI SHEIKS

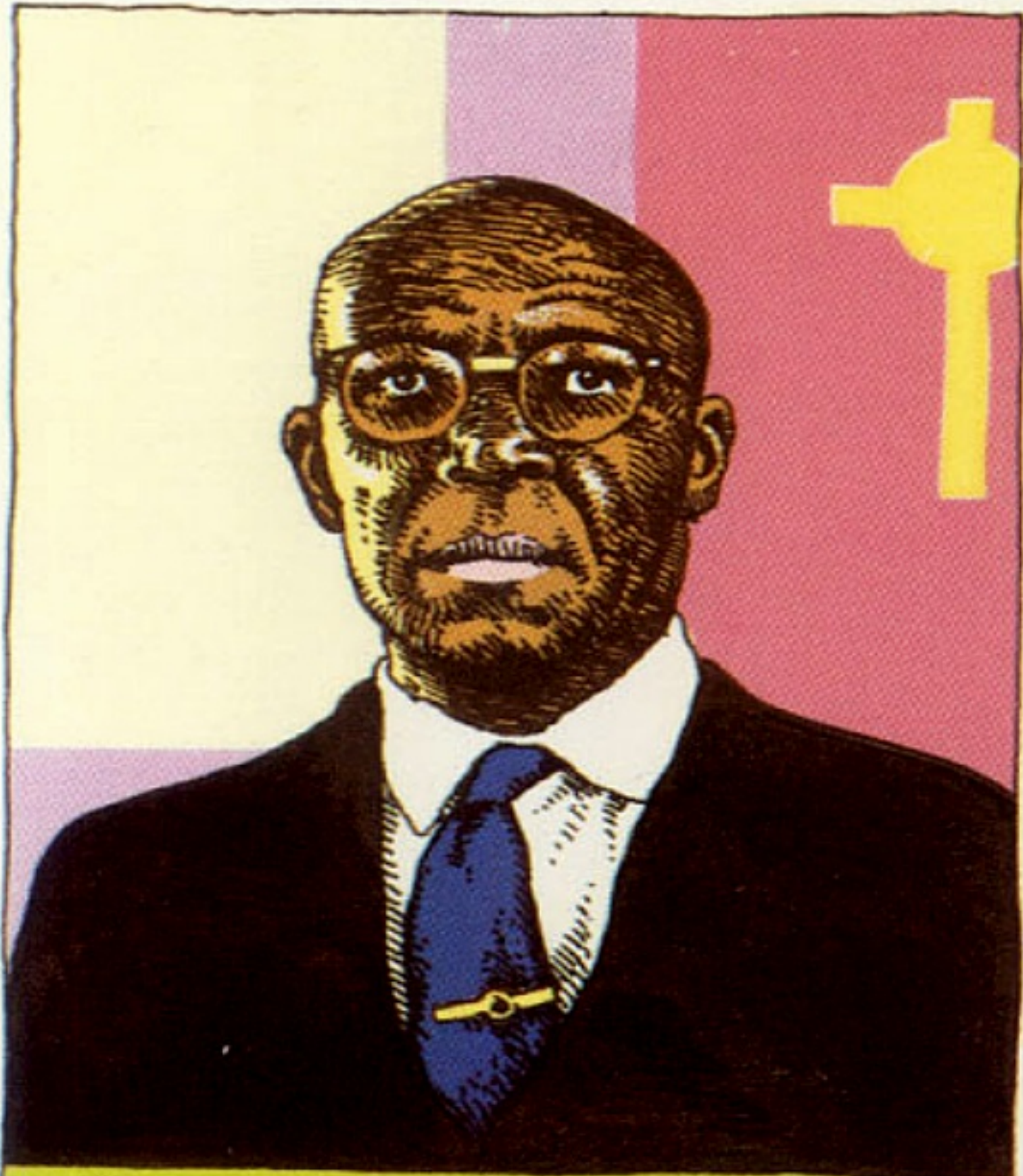
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THE MISSISSIPPI SHEIKS (Walter Vinson, Lonnie Chatmon, Bo Carter)

Singer-guitarist Walter Vinson and fiddler Lonnie Chatmon worked together for over a decade before recording as The Mississippi Sheiks in 1930 and producing the hit "Sittin' On Top Of The World." Natives of Bolton, Mississippi, they played for local white square dances, often with Lonnie's brothers, who included Bo Carter (Armenter Chatmon), seen at left. Both read music, and their 78 titles offer a mixture of blues and pop styles. They disbanded soon after their final session in 1935.

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RUBE LACEY

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RUBE LACY

(1901 - 1972)

Rubin (Rube) Lacy was born in 1901 at Pelahatchie, Mississippi, and learned guitar in his teens from an older performer, George Hendrix. Working out of the Jackson area in the Mississippi Delta, he became one of the state's most popular blues singers. His bottleneck style inspired that of the better-known performer Son House. In 1928, Lacy recorded two dance tunes for Paramount; four years later he became a minister. He died in 1972.

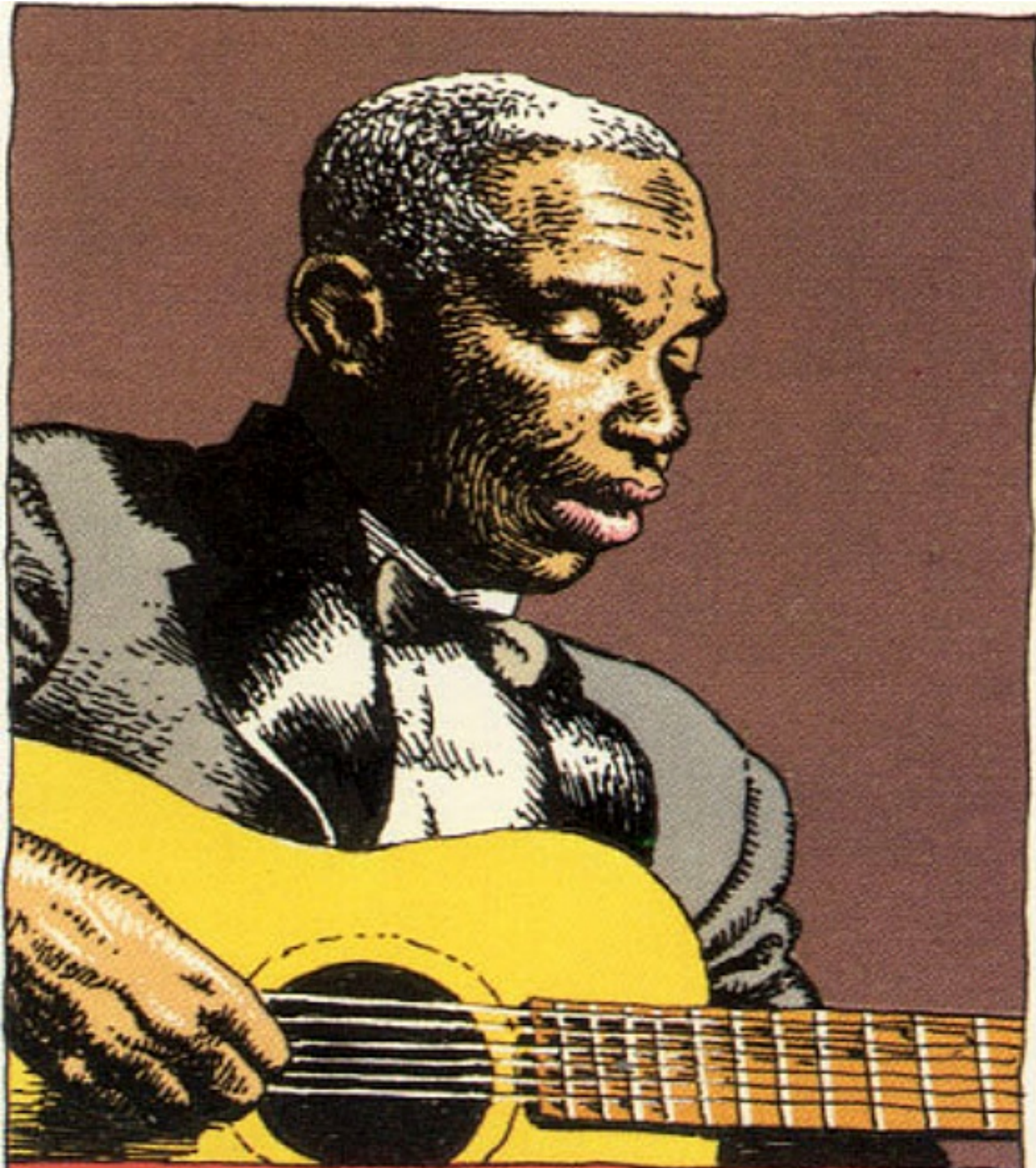
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SKIP JAMES

SKIP JAMES

(1902 - 1969)

Nehemiah (Skip) James was born in 1902 and raised in Bentonia, Mississippi. He learned guitar in his late teens from a local player, Henry Stuckey, and began piano soon afterwards under the tutelage of an older Arkansas performer, Will Crabtree. A professional blues musician from 1924 onward, James recorded 17 sides for Paramount in 1931, and entered the clergy the same year. His "I'm So Glad" became a rock hit shortly before his death in 1969.

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BO-WEAVIL JACKSON

BO-WEAVIL JACKSON

(recorded c. 1926)

One of the earliest country blues performers to be recorded, James (Bo-Weavil) Jackson was discovered while singing on a Birmingham, Alabama, street in 1926. He produced 12 sides for two labels, one of which billed him as Sam Butler. His frantic tempos, impromptu guitar figures, and use of varied melodic lines within single songs mark Jackson as one of the blues' most distinctive and least predictable performers. His "You Can't Keep No Brown" is a frenetic bottleneck masterpiece.

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FURRY LEWIS

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(c. 1900 - 1981)

Walter (Furry) Lewis was born about 1900 and raised in Memphis, Tennessee, where he learned guitar in the early 1900s by listening to a middle-aged street singer named Blind Joe. Never a full-time musician, Lewis played mainly on local streets, where his most popular piece was "John Henry." From 1927 to 1928 he recorded 23 sides. In the 1960s the personable Lewis began a second career as a concert performer, even appearing in a Burt Reynolds movie.

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SAM COLLINS

SAM COLLINS

(1887 - 1949)

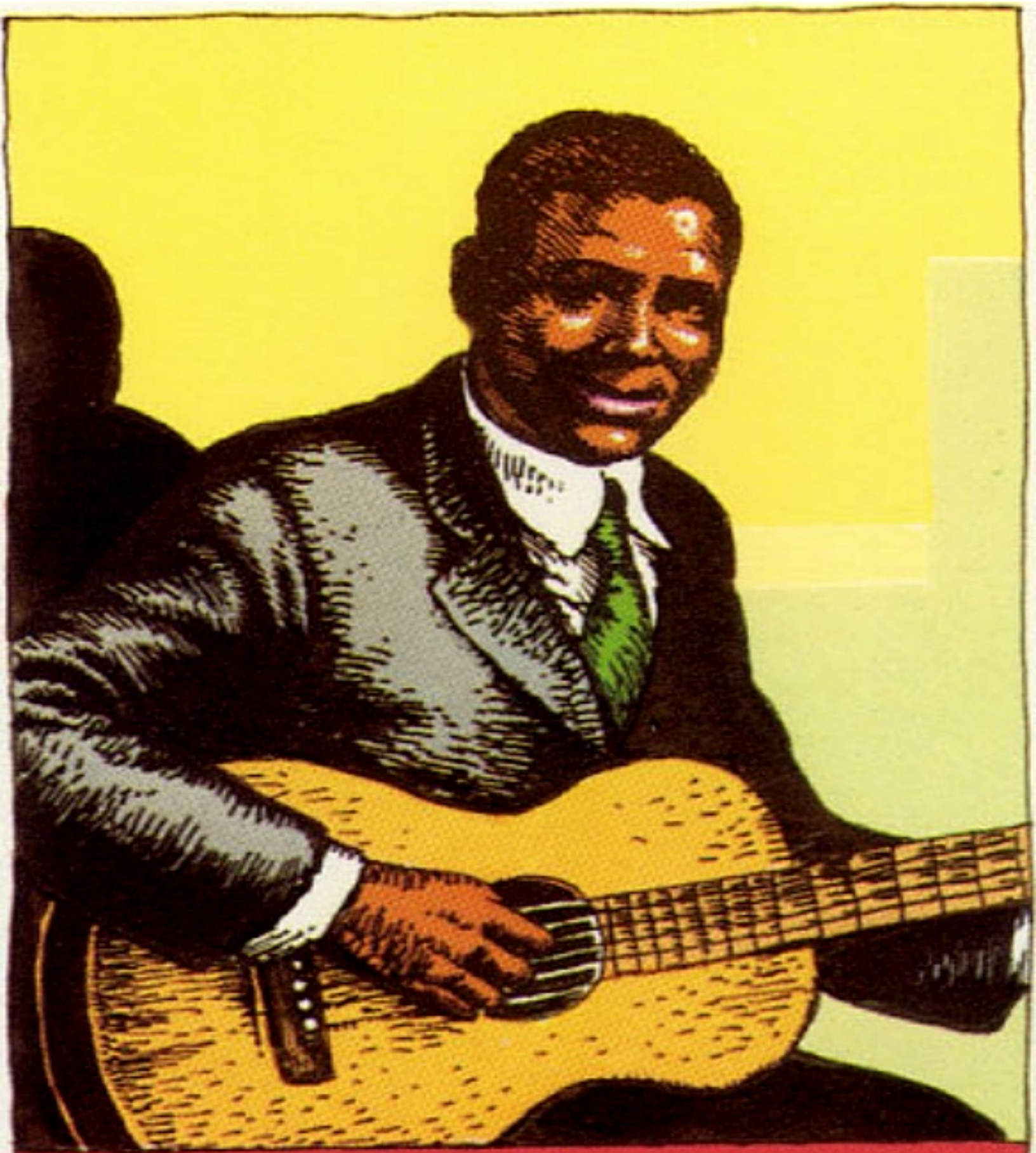
Born in 1887 in Louisiana, Sam Collins was raised in southern Mississippi. His 19 extant recordings, made between 1927 and 1932, reflect a background in street singing and tent show musicianship similar to that of Georgia-born Blind Willie McTell. His free-form bottleneck guitar approach and his unusually high-pitched singing gave him a distinctive musical sound. Collins eventually settled in Chicago, where he died in 1949.

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RAMBLIN' THOMAS

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RAMBLIN' THOMAS

(1902 - c. 1935)

Willard (Ramblin') Thomas was born around 1902 and raised in Logansport, Louisiana. A self-taught guitarist, he played in Shreveport and in Oklahoma before his discovery in Dallas. Between 1928 and 1932 he recorded 18 sides, most of them in the idiom of a street performer. His colorful lyrics and free phrasing patterns invite comparison to Blind Lemon Jefferson. Thomas died in Memphis in the 1930s and was survived by his blues-playing brother, Babyface Thomas.

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SLEEPY JOHN ESTES

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(c. 1899 - 1977)

One of the blues' most expressive vocalists, John Estes was born in 1899 in Ripley, Tennessee. He later moved to his lifelong home of Brownsville, where he learned guitar from Hambone Willie Newbern. Between 1929 and 1941 he recorded 50 sides, generally in an ensemble format that marked a departure from the usual country blues vein. Estes' tunes were notable for their topical references to local people and events. His career revived during the 1960s and he died in 1977.

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CANNON'S JUG STOMPERS

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CANNON'S JUG STOMPERS (Gus Cannon, Ashley Thompson, Noah Lewis)

Cannon's Jug Stompers, based in Ripley, Tennessee, consisted of banjoist Gus Cannon (Banjo Joe), guitarist Ashley Thompson, and harmonicist Noah Lewis. Cannon was born in Mississippi in 1883 and played professionally before 1900. Lewis, a native of Henning, Tennessee, was born in 1895 and began working with Cannon around 1910. The group's 28 recordings between 1928 and 1930 included "Walk Right In," made famous as a folk-rock song in the 1960s.

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MEMPHIS JUG BAND

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THE MEMPHIS JUG BAND

(Will Shade, Ben Ramey, Charles Polk, Will Weldon)

The Memphis Jug Band was organized by singer-guitarist Will Shade, also known as Son Brimmer, who was born in 1898 and spent most of his life in Memphis. Other members of the band included local musicians Ben Ramey, Charles Polk, and Will Weldon. Between 1927 and 1934 the group recorded nearly 75 sides, many of them infectious uptempo pieces. Their "Bottle It Up And Go" of 1932 became a blues standard of that decade. Shade died in 1966.

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BIG BILL

BIG BILL BROONZY

(1898-1958)

Born in 1898, Bill Broonzy played violin in the vicinity of Little Rock, Arkansas, before moving to Chicago where he took up guitar in the early 1920s. He first recorded in 1927 and became a hit-maker during the next decade, enjoying a continuous recording career up to his death in 1958. He was associated with a sound rather than a signature song and his warm voice, facile touch, and strong beat earned him popularity as both a "city" and "country" blues stylist.

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ROOSEVELT SYKES

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(1906- 1983)

Roosevelt Sykes, known as The Honeydrinker, was born in 1906 and learned piano around 1918 in Helena, Arkansas. His main influence was Lee Green, from whom he derived his 1929 hit, "44 Blues." He began his recording career while living in St. Louis, and produced nearly 125 sides between 1929 and 1942, some under the pseudonyms Willie Kelly and Dobby Boggs. Sykes continued as a postwar attraction and his career was enhanced during the 1960s blues revival.

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BLIND GARY DAVIS

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(1903-1972)

A native of Laurens, South Carolina, Gary Davis learned guitar around 1903, at the age of seven. As a street singer, he specialized in gospel songs. When first recorded in 1935, he lived in Durham, North Carolina, and counted the popular Blind Boy Fuller as a protégé. Davis' magnificent guitar playing earned him an avid following among northern audiences after he moved to New York in the 1940s, and he toured and made numerous records before his 1972 death.

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PAPA CHARLIE JACKSON

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(died c. 1938)

New Orleans musician Papa Charlie Jackson was one of the first self-accompanied blues performers to record. Discovered on the streets of Chicago, he produced over 70 sides between 1924 and 1935, most of them on six-string banjo. Jackson combined sophisticated technique with a driving beat. His dance hit "Shake That Thing" was one of the most influential tunes of the era, and his comedic approach inspired the hokum style of Georgia Tom and Tampa Red.

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CHARLEY PATTON

CHARLEY PATTON

(C.1890 - 1934)

One of the most influential Mississippi blues musicians, Charley Patton was born in the 1890s and raised in the Delta town of Dockery. By 1910 he was already an established performer, known for such songs as "Pony Blues." A prolific artist, he recorded more titles (42) within a single year than any blues artist of the decade after his debut in 1929. His blend of comedy effects and hard blues gave him a unique musical identity. He died in 1934.

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BUDDY BOY HAWKINS

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(recorded 1927-1929)

Walter (Buddy Boy) Hawkins, a reputed resident of Blytheville, Arkansas, recorded 12 sides for Paramount in 1927 and 1929. Details of his life are scanty. Hawkins played exclusively in open A tuning and utilized a sophisticated guitar style. His repertoire included both fast raggy songs and slow blues. His timing and touch were impeccable, his harmonies considerably more developed than those of his peers; yet his records sold poorly and he faded into obscurity.

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BARBECUE BOB

BARBEQUE BOB

(1902 - 1931)

Robert Hicks was born in 1902 at Walnut Grove, Georgia, and learned guitar from his brother, who recorded under the name Charlie Lincoln. Around 1920 Hicks moved to Atlanta; his employment at a local restaurant gave rise to his recording name, Barbecue Bob. Between 1927 and 1930 Hicks recorded 55 sides. His 12-string guitar style was among the most percussive found in blues, setting him apart from some like-sounding Georgians. He died in 1931.

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ED BELL

ED BELL

(c. 1905 - c. 1960)

Ed Bell was born around 1905 and raised in Greenville, Alabama. He is said to have derived his style from an older localite, Joe Pat Dean. Bell first recorded in 1927 and, in addition to the music released under his own name, he also used the pseudonyms Sluefoot Joe (with Clifford Gibson) and Barefoot Bill. Taken together, the blues recorded under these three names forms a unique style. Bell gave up music for the pulpit during the Depression. He died around 1960.

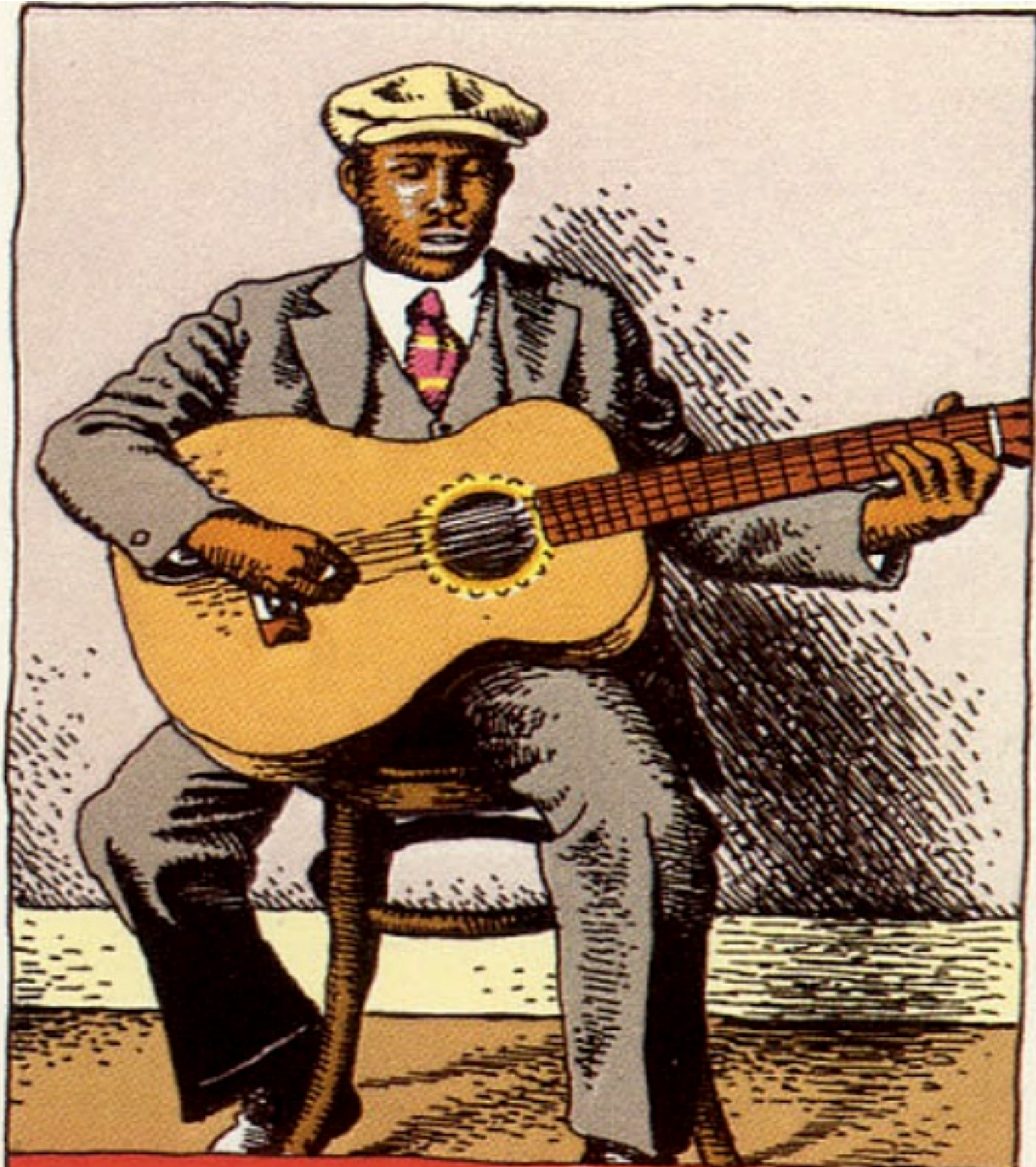
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BLIND WILLIE McTELL

BLIND WILLIE McTELL

(1901 - 1959)

Born in Thompson, Georgia, in 1901, Willie McTell learned guitar from his mother around 1914 and made his recording debut in 1927 after working as a street singer and medicine show minstrel. Over the next nine years he recorded 48 sides for four companies under four different names, sometimes teamed with his wife Kate McTell. A deft guitarist with a sweet voice, McTell made Library of Congress blues field recordings and postwar records for the R&B market as well. He died in 1959.

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SON HOUSE

SON HOUSE

(c. 1900 - 1988)

The possessor of a powerful voice, Eddie James (Son) House gave up preaching for music around 1927 while in his native Lyon, Mississippi. His friend Charlie Patton arranged for his 1930 recording debut, which resulted in nine titles. He worked with Willie Brown and recorded for the Library of Congress before moving to Rochester, New York, in 1943. House influenced such famed musicians as Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters. His career revived when he was rediscovered in 1964.

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MEMPHIS MINNIE

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(1897 - 1973)

Lizzie Douglas, born in Algiers, Louisiana, was raised in Memphis, and learned guitar at the age of 11. As Kid Douglas, she toured the South from 1916 onward, returning to Memphis in the late 1920s under the name Memphis Minnie. An accomplished guitarist and gifted song-writer, she recorded over 150 sides between 1929 and 1941. Most were solo blues, but she also teamed for duets with her second husband, guitarist Kansas Joe McCoy, and her third husband, guitarist Little Son Joe Lawlar.

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MISSISSIPPI JOHN HURT

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(1894 - 1967)

John Hurt was born in 1894 at Teoc, Mississippi, and raised in nearby Avalon. He took up guitar in 1903, developing a soft singing style and a unique three finger picking technique. Never a professional musician, Hurt rarely traveled before or after recording 12 sides for Okeh in 1928, but his 1960s rediscovery helped launch a blues revival, and he performed and re-recorded songs such as "Coffee Blues" and "Richland Woman" to great acclaim before his death in 1967.

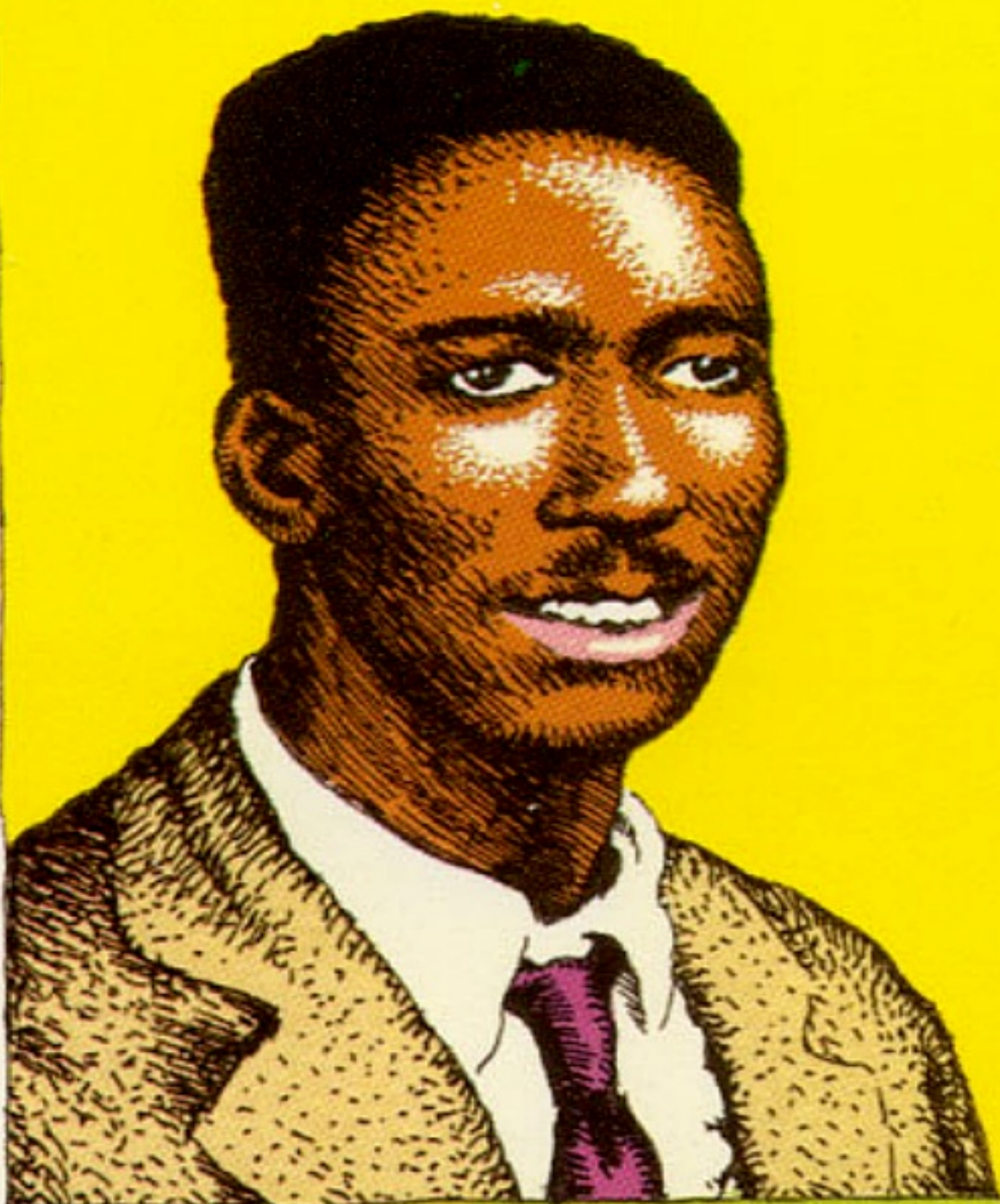
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TOMMY JOHNSON

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(c. 1896 - 1956)

An outstanding vocalist whose trademark falsetto was widely copied, Tommy Johnson was born around 1896 near Terry, Mississippi. He took up music around 1914 and was influenced by Delta performer Charlie Patton, although his guitar playing was far more ragged than his mentor's. Johnson's travels made him a familiar figure throughout the Mississippi Delta. Between 1928 and 1930 he recorded 11 sides, including the popular "Big Road Blues." He died in 1956.

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PEETIE WHEATSTRAW

PEETIE WHEATSTRAW

(1902 - 1941)

Peetie Wheatstraw was born William Bunch at Ripley, Tennessee, in 1902. He lived for a time in Cotton Plant, Arkansas, then moved north in 1929. Working largely out of St. Louis, he became one of the blues' most popular vocalists, and recorded 161 titles between 1930 and 1941. His style of interjecting a fleeting falsetto in the last measure of a verse was the most widely copied blues mannerism of the period. A fatal car accident cut short his career in 1941.

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BO CARTER

BO CARTER

(1893 - 1964)

Armenter Chatmon, better known as Bo Carter, was raised in Bolton, Mississippi. He learned guitar in the early 1900s, played bass viol in a family string band led by his brother Lonnie Chatmon in the 1910s, and later joined the Mississippi Sheiks. Carter's career as a street singer was largely imposed by the blindness that afflicted him in the late 1920s. Between 1930 and 1940 he recorded 105 titles, many notable for their musical sophistication and for the clever sexual innuendo of their lyrics.

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