

Popular Music (2021) Volume 40/3-4. © The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the same Creative Commons licence is used to distribute the re-used or adapted article and the original article is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained prior to any commercial use., pp. 492–508
10.1017/S0261143021000556

‘Daddy-callin’ Mamas’ and ‘Jelly Beans’: sex work and ribaldry in the blues archive

BRUCE CURTIS 

Department of Sociology and History, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada K1S 5B6
E-mail: bruce.curtis@carleton.ca

Abstract

I present a thematic overview of sex work and ribaldry in recorded blues songs for the period c.1920–1942. My ambition is primarily documentary, to take up Paul Oliver’s insistence that discussion of the blues must ultimately revolve around its ‘libidinous hub’ and to concretise Abbott and Seroff’s characterisation of blues as ‘unabashedly licentious a music form as America has ever produced’. Ribald sex work songs are common in the blues archive, but have not been a focus of sustained study. A grasp of the significance of sex work provides a key to decoding creative wordplay, even as the relation between blues performers and real sex work must remain obscure.

I hate to admit some of what I sold down there – but I was young, I was full of hell, and I did love that carryin’ on. I sold it back in those days – not often enough to be called a regular, but often enough to be called a whore. But you know that’s how the times was. It wasn’t nothing terrible. (Willie Mae Brown in Govenar 2019, p. 138)

Sex work has always been in the background of blues ethnographies, histories and biographies. Paul Oliver and Mack McCormick’s brilliant unfinished manuscript, *The Blues Come to Texas* (Govenar 2019), demonstrates graphically just how central it was to large swathes of musical practice and performance. Willie Mae Brown, quoted above, was part of a raucous and rowdy network of mainly young black male and female performers who circulated through the brothels and barrelhouses of the red light districts of Texas cities in the 1920s and 1930s. These were people out to ‘have a little fun’ and they weren’t counting costs. Some of the women turned tricks as the mood suited them. Some of the men pimped out those women they could, running ‘stables’, keeping women ‘on the track’ and dolling themselves up in fancy gear. And people sang about their milieu, as ‘Moaning’ Bernice Edwards did in ‘Hard Hustling Blues’.

The Texas towns and cities – Beaumont, Richmond, Galveston, Houston, Corpus Christi, Dallas, Waco – were wide open long after the 1917 end of regulated sex work in the United States. Saloons, clubs and brothels provided steady work for blues players and singers. Street sex work was commonplace in ‘Black Bottoms’ and

black as well as white men and boys flocked to brothels. Sex work in its various guises and the larger 'sexual service sector' (Meyerowitz 1988, p. 39) or field of pleasure commerce were a cornerstone of the underground urban economy.

Since Oliver and McCormick did their research, social histories of sex work and pleasure commerce have fleshed out such accounts (among many others, Blair 2010; Clement 2006; Connelly 1980; Harris 2016; Hartman 2019; Heap 2009; Keire 2010; Landau 2013; Lauterbach 2015; Rosen 1982; Tracey 1993; Tribbett 1998). The scenes that Oliver and McCormick uncovered were repeated in the red light districts of other American cities. As the musician Henry Townsend put it about St Louis's red-light in the 1930s,

Twenty-Second Street, Beaumont and Franklin, on Beaumont going back south – all that row of flats there was all red light. You could go in there and get anything you wanted to get ... That kind of carrying on supported the economy among the black people pretty well, because there was a lot of whites would come down and bring the money ... Most of them gals had pimps, and in turn they would put the money in circulation. (Townsend 1999, p. 15)

In 1968's *Screening the Blues* Paul Oliver wrote 'any discussion of the blues tradition must ultimately revolve around this libidinous hub of the music' (1968, pp. 98–9). Almost 50 years later Abbott and Seroff (2017, p. 110) repeated that blues is 'as unabashedly licentious a music form as America has ever produced'. Yet the literature on pre-war blues has not systematically charted sex work songs, nor has it detailed the sexual practices at the heart of ribaldry. In this article, I give a thematic overview of the matter. My ambition is primarily documentary.

In an article, I am unable to untangle the political, methodological and analytic issues in which the phenomena of racialised sex work, pleasure commerce and ribaldry are enmeshed. One issue, however, is the extent to which performers sing about their own experience. Willie Mae Brown's is a rare piece of first hand testimony from a blues player who sold sex. Most claims that performers did sex work are second-hand or are imputations made on the basis of song lyrics. Knowing who among performers did sex work might enable a more realist approach to their repertoire, but in the absence of such information, I treat ribaldry and sex work songs as performative. I stress that the adoption of an autobiographic 'I' in recordings is a performance strategy (McGinley 2014, p. 49), not an empirical self-description. Blues artists performed what audiences wanted to hear and 'the ability to separate one's own needs from those of the audience was central to the profession' (Miller 2010, p. 75). Expressed sentiments or descriptions of experience need not originate with the performer (Hesmondhalgh 2013, pp. 13–40). It is improbable in the extreme that all those who have recorded Cole Porter's 'Love For Sale' sold love themselves. Moreover, the wide circulation of floating verses in blues songs counsels additional caution about presupposing links between performers and the content of performances.

While I examine song lyrics to outline the content of a genre of cultural production, I stress that most black performers in the segregated United States had no choice but to perform in red-light districts and in venues in which sex was for sale. Most found themselves in one way or another performing for rough and rowdy audiences who had a taste for bawdy material. Some songs were composed expressly to accompany sex work, such as Tony Jackson's 'Naked Dance'. Dance music commonly encouraged lascivious display: 'shake your shimmy', or 'shake your yas-yas-yas'. Other compositions took inspiration from sex work but translated it or obscured it:

Ernest Hogan's 'All Coons Look Alike' began life as 'All Pimps Look Alike' (Oliver 1984 p. 50); Clarence Williams's first published success, 'Brown Skin Who You For?' (Abbott 1993) came from a New Orleans street solicitation; Mamie Smith's game-changing 'Crazy Blues' took its melody from the brothel song 'Baby, Get That Towel Wet' (Bradford 1965; Smith and Hoefler 1978, p. 104). Street performers worked red-light districts and dangerous city neighbourhoods: in Blind Willie McTell's case, Bell Street in Atlanta's 'Black Bottom'. 'That's where they were selling it all on the sidewalks', Kate McTell remembered. 'Police was scared to go down there'. Willie McTell cut two versions of 'Bell Street Blues', recounting the availability of cheap whiskey and rough women (Gray 2009, pp. 237–8, 241).

It is a commonplace that recorded blues songs embody practices of creative wordplay: of testifying, signifying and 'lying' (see Hurston 1997; Smith 2005). Double entendre, outrageous hyperbole, conscious indirection, ellipsis, targeted insults, the telling of 'tall tales', ribaldry and delicious obscenities are part and parcel of the genre. As the genre developed, wordplay became richer and more varied. Fears of censorship, competition for market share and racial segregation promoted lyrical innovation (Cooper 1993). Lyrics were coded in ways that were transparent to black but opaque to most white listeners, while segregation limited the latter's exposure to 'race records'. Lyrics became more obviously ribald as the Depression curtailed recording and many artists offered more explicit material when recording resumed in 1934, testing the limits of what companies would issue. Pressure from record companies and A&R men also pushed artists to compose or record ribald songs. J. Mayo 'Ink' Williams, for instance, suggested euphemisms to Paramount artists while soliciting 'earthy' material (Calt 2005). In a first career as 'Georgia Tom', Thomas A. Dorsey parlayed his experience as a brothel piano player into the composition of lewd blues songs, many of them as one of a 'hokum' duet with Tampa Red. As he reported, 'a lot of the blues songs that you were writing, the ones that you sang, were kind of humorous, suggestive ... I wrote suggestive blues, well, you had to have something suggestive, or they wouldn't hit, in some places, the folks wouldn't want 'em' (O'Neil and van Singel 2012, p. 17; on 'hokum', see Schwartz 2018). Jelly Roll Morton (2005) wrote songs that were 'kinda smutty' as an assertion of masculinity, to avoid the 'femininity stamp'. An awareness of the centrality of sex work practices and ribaldry to blues composition helps transcribers, scholars and fans better to grasp lyrics. No one familiar with gay sex scenes, for instance, would have missed the thrust of the Harlem Hamfats' 'The Garbage Man': a naïve listener wouldn't get it.

Finally, performance aims to entertain and ribaldry is inherently humorous. While I point to some sex work songs that describe difficult or dangerous conditions of life and labour, the rougher realities of segregated sex work are muted in the recorded archive. Despite the fact that a great many blues artists were so beat up by rough living that they died young or abandoned the occupation by the late 1930s or early 1940s, and despite the fact that street and alley sex work was dirty, dangerous and a disease vector, songs created a fantasy world of parody, pleasure and prowess. Even more serious lyrics were usually seriocomic. Few sex work songs were as ludicrously funny as those in the 'hokum' sub-genre, but most boasted of sexual power and prowess to provoke laughter and to talk back to middle class respectability.

In what follows, after noting the presence of sex work references in floating verses, I examine the euphemisms employed for what was for sale. I detail prices

and means of payment before documenting matters of hygiene, with an emphasis on shaming and odour. I present material on pimping and pimps. Pimps are excluded from the category of sex worker in some feminist literature (Mac and Smith 2018), but blues women and men sing about them. I discuss the content of songs in which women and men personate sex workers, point to their accounts of pleasure and danger, and end by dipping into the songbook of Lucille Bogan, a prolific author and performer of sex work music.

Floating verses, occasional lines

Songs with disjointed phrases, lines or verses referring to sex work appear frequently. For instance, Algernon 'Texas' Alexander's 'Mama, I Heard You Brought It Right Back Home' adopted the familiar melody of 'Fare Thee Well', introduced a complaint about his lover's ingratitude, then changed the melody to sing 'Way last summer mamma, times was tough/You was on the corner mamma, struttin' your stuff ... Way last winter mamma, times was good/You was on the corner mamma, catchin' what you could'. Sippie Wallace's verse: 'I can't see how some of these women sleep/They hangs on the corners like a police on his beat', bore no thematic relation to the rest of her 'Underworld Blues', while Blind Lemon Jefferson remarked in a verse unrelated to the rest of his 'Old Rounders Blues': 'There's a house over yonder, painted all over in green/Some of the finest young women there a man most ever seen'.

Over time, lines, verses and phrases acquired heightened valence, leading to new combinations. One of the earliest sex work blues, composed about 1901 by Mamie Desdunes (Vernhettes and Hanley 2014), had the verse, 'I stood on the corner, my feet was drippin, wet,/I asked every man I met/Can't give me a dollar, give me a lousy dime/Just to feed that hungry man of mine'. It echoed through race records from Bertha 'Chippie' Hill's 1926 'Walking The Street' to Lil Johnson's 1936 'Scufflin' Woman Blues' and beyond. Other performers transformed it into a standard trope for economic misery.

What was for sale?

Invoked to avoid censorship, euphemisms for the sale of sex multiplied and diversified in word play. Songs employed culinary images for sex. The most common image for women's (and often for men's) genitalia was 'jelly roll', shortened at times to 'jelly' or replaced by related terms such as 'gelatin'. Singers used jelly to refer both to a sexual object and to sexual practice. 'I'm a jelly sellin' woman, I sell out every day', sang Mrs Van Zula Carter Hunt, while Clara Burston reported that 'My man come home this mornin', he was awful mad/Thought I had sold all the jelly I had'. Others taking on the sex worker persona reported that they sold poontang, cakes, pudding, bread, rolls, cookies, pies and sweet potato pies, sandwiches, hamburgers, stew, yams, cabbage, butter (and its variants – country butter, dirty butter) or sugar. Men bought peaches or worried about their 'little bit'. In her cover of 'Groceries on the Shelf', Lucille Bogan played on the theme of self-service and cash sale available in the Piggly Wiggly store chain: 'My name is Piggly-Wiggly, and I swear you can help yourself/And you've got to have your greenback, and it don't take nothin' else'. 'Dry goods' was a variation on the grocery image, while 'petunia', subsequently spun as 'toonie', 'tuni', 'patootie', 'tootie' and so on, was a rare floral image.

Variations on the themes of the butcher shop and the sale of meat were commonplace. Lillian Glinn told her audience, 'I cut big steaks so juicy, so fat and fine/When you eat my meat, you are bound to grunt and whine', while Lil Johnson announced that 'if you're in the market for some real fresh meat/I've got a big rump roast and sellin' it cheap'. Lucille Bogan, in the persona of 'Barbecue Bess', repeatedly referred to the meat she had for sale. She had 'good doin' meat' and she had 'a market across the street where I sell my meat'. Although the images of meat-cutting and butcher's work are unlikely to strike contemporary audiences as erotic (but see Iton 2008, p. 278), they were common in race records. The cutting and preparing of meat stood for sexual intercourse and being a meat cutter was one way in which male singers could claim prowess.

Uncensored race records used 'cunt', 'pussy', and 'cock' to refer to women's genitalia. Only rarely did these terms make it into commercial recordings, unless they were supplied by listeners in response to ellipses in lyrics. 'Cunt' presumably completed the ellipsis in Stella Johnson's 'Hot Nuts Swing': 'Now, when a pig gets warm, starts to grunt/When these men gets warm they start lookin' for ...'. The vulva was invoked using terms such as cat, kitty kat or rarely pussy cat, and by other animal substitutes such as poodle, monkey or boa constrictor.¹ Tampa Red's 1942 hokum songs 'Let Me Play With Your Poodle' and 'She Wants to Sell My Monkey' continue to be recorded. Clara Smith's recording of 'For Sale (Hannah Johnson's Jack Ass)' pretended that the worn-out old ass she sold was a jackass.

Occasionally, 'dick' was used to refer to the penis, but other images predominated. Penises were eels, lizards, roots, bananas, lemon sticks, black horses and snakes, especially the ubiquitous black snake, which appeared in early hits by Martha Copeland, Victoria Spivey and Blind Lemon Jefferson. The equine images figured women more often than men as riders and 'easy riders'; on the other hand, men were 'jockeys' whose excellent technique 'in the saddle' was based on 'pushing once in the middle and rolling from side to side'. Male performers adopted penis euphemisms as stage names: Jelly Roll Morton, Toots (for tootsie roll) Washington or Bill 'Snake Root' Horton, for instance.

For those in the know, 'that thing', 'something', 'that stuff', 'the coldest stuff' and often merely 'it' referenced women's sex. Working women 'scooped', 'smacked', 'shook', 'moved', 'strutted', 'tapped' and 'did', that thing and 'put it on' men. Margaret Webster refused 'to give it away' although 'it's in demand and it's something wanted every day'. Lil Johnson told her male listeners where to go if they wanted 'something good and wanted it cheap', and Bo Carter sang, 'She got something that I really do love/It ain't in her stockin', man, you know it's just above'. By the end of the 1930s, 'it' so obviously referred to the sale of sex that composers did not need to specify further. 'I've got a gal, she live down, down by the jail', sang John Henry Barbee, 'Up on a sign, she says "Right here for sale"'.

Male performers were fascinated with the sight of 'it' (the vulva). A woman's sex was 'a reliever', in Josh White's 'Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday': 'Ella Weaver, she got a manicured reliever/Between her legs, lord, lord, lord, between her legs'. Men exclaimed if a woman bending over on the street to button her shoe allowed a glimpse of her sex. One let Tampa Red and Georgia Tom 'peak straight up Fifth Avenue' in their smash hit 'It's Tight Like That'. The Georgia Cotton Pickers repeated

¹ Beirne's (2019) genealogy of 'cunt' shows its connection to animalistic images for women's sex.

the line in 'Diddle-da-Diddle', while James Albert claimed 'the wind blew up her avenue'. The clitoris also appeared as an object of admiration and power. It was a 'boe hog's eye', or 'the boy in the boat'. In contrast, breast-talk was absent in ribald songs by men, with rare exceptions such as Alex Moore's 'Blue Bloomer Blues'. 'Shaking the shimmy' likely originated as an invitation to women to shake their breasts (Work 1915, p. 38), but in recorded blues it could refer to any bump-and-grind dance. In any case, the eroticisation of the vulva contrasts with silence about breasts (Bogan's 'Shave 'Em Dry' is the outlier). This suggests that singers thought of sex work primarily as vaginal intercourse, although references to 'playing in the mud' evoke anal sex.

Payment, prices, practices

Women and men sing about how the sexual transaction will take place. The standard 'Must Get Mine in Front' by Irene Scruggs made it clear that she was no one's fool: payment was to be in advance. The theme was repeated by many others, including Bee Turner in 'Jivin' Jelly Blues'. On the other hand, some customers demanded to inspect the merchandise before paying, as in Kansas City Kitty and Georgia Tom's duet, 'Show Me What You Got'.

Songs cited a variety of prices and, in contrast to the real world of sex work, they did not respond to the Depression of the 1930s. The Memphis composer and singer Hattie Hart told her audience, 'Now it's 25 cents a saucer, 75 cents a cup/ But it's extra dollar papa, if you want to keep it up'. Her contemporary, Mrs Van Zula Carter Hunt reported, 'Two and a half a saucer, five dollars a cup/Ten dollars to unwind, half if you wrap it up', suggesting that unprotected sex was more expensive. According to Sam Collins 'Twenty-five cents is the regular price/There's fifty cents you can buy her twice'. Charley Jordan had 'Get a nickel's worth of whiskey, a dime's worth of gin/I'm gonna pay that girl five dollars to see her grin', while Minnie Wallace complained 'Some of you gals, you are going too fast/You just doin' that thing for a dollar and a half'. Lucille Bogan sang, 'Some people wants to know, the regular price/Fifty five cents, you can get some twice'. In a swing blues duet with the Harlem Hamfats, Rosetta Howard demanded 'a dollar and a half or more'. Martin Delaney's 'Down On Pennsylvania Avenue' counselled men looking for sex to 'Just drop around about the middle of the week/When the broads is broke and can't pay rent/Get good lovin' boys for fifteen cents'. Prices cited in such songs are performances, not empirical reports.

Shaming, hygiene, odour

Singers expressed disdain and contempt for the lowest strata of sex workers, much of it for their uncouthness, lack of sophistication and poor hygiene. Established black urban residents were often disdainful of recent arrivals from the countryside and William Kenney (1993 pp. 37–42) shows that from the late 1910s musicians arriving on the scene in Chicago were tutored on appropriate forms of manners, dress and demeanour. Blues singers scorned the 'fanfoot woman' or the 'fanfoot clown' because she solicited in bare feet or cruised in heavy work shoes. Ma Rainey laughed at the recently arrived solicitors on Chicago's State Street who were 'wearing brogan shoes'. Lil Johnson poked fun at the woman who was 'with her mamma's man' and

who was indiscriminate in turning tricks for a dollar: 'she's the kind that don't pick 'em, she'll take 'em any style'. In the city, Bumble Bee Slim's uncouth country woman did not wash her face or comb her hair, wiped her nose on her sleeve, walked around with her stockings clumped at her ankles, dipped snuff and spat, and so on. Poor or dirty clothes also attracted scorn. Walter Coleman sneered at the backwards sex workers in Cincinnati's Green Cabin district brothels: 'Now you green cabin girls, you needn't flirt/You got fly specks on your underskirt'.

The several thousand blues songs recorded in the period before World War II rarely point to men's lack of sexual hygiene. In 'You Know I Got a Reason', Big Bill Broonzy did protest, 'Now, when you get into bed, you turns your back/You say I stink, but I say, baby, no, it ain't that': it was that she preferred her lesbian lover. In contrast, women's sexual hygiene and the hygiene of sex workers is a common theme. Women positioning themselves as sex workers assured customers that their product was hygienic. Lillian Miller ran 'a kitchen, I sure do keep it clean/I can feed more men than you ever seen', while Clara Burston's 'sandwich is good and warm and I keeps it clean as a pin/If I give you this hamburger, you'll be comin' here again'. Men positioning themselves as pimps or as the partners of sex workers made the same observations. Clifford Gibson vaunted his lover's cleanliness despite her intense sexual activity: 'I got a little woman ... she can bake good jelly-roll, now, and she's so nice and clean ... the best doctor in my town says he never heard tell of such/Little bit o' woman could roll that jellyroll so much'.

Usually in a bantering tone, men counselled or urged women towards personal and sexual hygiene, coded sometimes in house cleaning and cooking images. There were a number of covers of 'Keep Your Yes Ma'am Clean' and similar compositions such as Luke Jordan's 1929 'Won't You Be Kind': 'Won't you be kind to your kitchen/I mean your dinin' room, scrub out your pantry, now/Won't you be kind, keep your back yard clean'. Among similar songs, Sam Hill recorded 'You Got To Keep Things Clean', while Charley Jordan's 'dozens' song, and the Quillian brothers' hokum song 'Keep It Clean', were both popular. Odour especially is a tell-tale of women's sexual activity. Sometimes, as in Verdi Lee's 'Signifying At You', women denounce men who come home stinking of sex but it is far more common for men to chide women for infidelity because of the smell of sex. The archetypes are 'Dead Cat On The Line': 'You come home at night talkin' out your head/You have to take a bath before you go to bed', alongside Walter Davis's 'I Can Tell By The Way You Smell', Bo Carter's 'What Kind of Scent is This?' and Peetie Wheatstraw's 'What's That (I Smell)?'

Male and some female singers show a preoccupation with vaginal odour, something that continues to be a source of anxiety (Backstrom *et al.* 2012; Bay-Cheng and Fava 2011). Piscine images predominate: references to the odour of fish, sardines, shrimp, mackerel, seafood and so forth, although images of cheese, flowers and herbs are also present.² The invocation of such fishy images is by no means always disobliging. It is often humorous, as in Blind Boy Fuller's 'What's That Smell Like Fish?' or in the commonly copied verse in Roosevelt Sykes' version of 'Dirty Mother For You': 'There was a blind man by the name of Dell/He couldn't see but

² Common vaginal bacterial infections, vaginosis and more relevantly the sexually transmitted trichomoniasis, can both produce fish-like odours. Perhaps, given the absence of antibiotics before the 1940s, active sex workers were prone to trichomoniasis. Men can catch and transmit this infection, although it is not evident that they exude an odour of fish.

he really could smell/The fish man passed the house the other day/He thought it was a gal, he hollered, "I'm goin' your way". Peetie Wheatstraw's 'I Want Some Sea Food' praises the object, and in Georgia Tom and Kansas City Kitty's duet, 'Fish House Blues', Kitty begins, 'I runs a fish house, get my fish down by the sea', and Tom answers, 'You got a new kind of fish, it sure do taste good to me'. Big Bill Broonzy counselled listeners that 'If you want somethin' smell like fish/Go down in the alley, you will find that dish'.

Vaginal odour also figures in relation to oral sex, again more or less humorously. References to cunnilingus are far more frequent than are references to fellatio. In the period of regulated sex work, 'French Houses' specialised in fellatio, but if present on race records, it is heavily coded, appearing perhaps under references to kissing, to a 'new way of loving', or to a 'new kind of stuff'. Rare exceptions are a line in Bo Carter's 'Queen Bee': 'She sucked my johnny quill this morning', using the image of a daffodil ('jonquille' in French) for penis, and Lucille Bogan's party record 'Til The Cows Come Home'.

In reference to cunnilingus, Peetie Wheatstraw claimed, hilariously, 'the first woman I had, she made me get on my knees/And had the nerve to ask me, hoo hoo, did I like Limburger cheese?' In a hokum duet, Georgia Tom sang to Kansas City Kitty, 'Open that window, let in the breeze/Stuff you give me's Limburger cheese', while Al Miller claimed that the 'stuff you sell for fifty cents ... smells just like any Limburger cheese'. In her exuberant 'Keep On Eating' Memphis Minnie was cooking oysters, shrimp and crab for her man, and assured him: 'I know you got a bad cold and you can't smell/I ain't gonna give you something that I can't sell/So keep on a-eating/Oh, keep on a-eating/Keep on eating, baby, till you get enough'. Alice Moore praised her lover's prowess at cunnilingus: 'Yes, my man is a pearl diver, and his stroke, it can't go wrong/And he puts it on the bottom and holds his breath so doggone long'. There are women who refuse to be mollified by attempts at cunnilingus by cheating husbands as is Hazel Smith (Irene Mims) in 'Get Off Your Knees', and there are fastidious singers, such as Bob Robinson, who won't do it: 'Now, you know I love you from your head to your feet/But there is certain things that I refuse to eat/Now, don't serve me nothin' that smells like fish/'Cause I can live a long time without that dish'.

Odour figures in what might now be thought of as 'slut-shaming' songs. In many of these, the singer complains about women who 'give it away', an echo of the 'charity girls' in the secondary literature (Heap 2009, p. 68; Peiss 1989). Others mock worn-out sex workers. Memphis Minnie sang, 'What is that you're goin' round here tryin' to sell?/If it ain't good to eat, you know it ain't good to smell/Don't nobody want it, you can't even give it away'. Georgia White went, 'You're lookin' dear so nice and neat/But the stuff you sellin' the boys won't eat'. From Cow Cow Davenport we hear, 'The boys, now, I think they treats Liza mighty rough/Liza out in the alley last night tryin' to peddle that stuff/She used to sell it, 'cause she had righteous stuff then/But now she can't give it away'. Casey Bill Weldon used the image of a broken-down wagon to describe a worn-out sex worker.

'Jelly Beans'

The abolition of regulated sex work in the United States, the closing of legal brothels from 1917 and various municipal attempts at prohibition left many female sex workers to solicit on the streets, from their doorways or windows or flats. Many bars,

cabarets and dance halls banned the entry of single women. While boys and men had acted as intermediaries for sex workers before prohibition, the end of legal brothel work made women more directly dependent upon men. For some, sex work was a family enterprise and husbands or lovers solicited on their behalf; some used such intermediaries as cabbies or bicycle messengers; others entered into more or less exploitative and violent relations with pimps. Men and women sang about these matters, sometimes naming pimps as such, but also calling them jellybeans, pinchbacks, sweet men, sweet backs, fat mouths, juicy mouths, peanut or banana men, hustlers, Eastmen, and occasionally, gigolos. In an Irving Johns composition, Bessie Smith warned young women to 'let all these pinchbacks be', while Clara Burston's 'C[riminal] P[rostitution] Blues' warned 'you women stands in the rain and snow/When you've spent your last dollar, your pimp can't use you no more'.

Men complained about pimps. 'What makes a rooster crow every morning 'fore day?' asked Lonnie Johnson: 'to let the pimps know the working man is on his way'. Lucius Hardy pleaded with 'Mr Jellybean' not to take his 'mama away'. He was 'happy with her, happy as I can be', and there were plenty of 'good-looking brown skin women' who didn't have a man on whom the pimp could prey. Al Miller did everything possible to treat his lover right, buying her clothes, loving her every day, and giving her all of his money, to no avail. The pimp couldn't be defeated. As soon as he turned his back, his lover was looking for 'Juicy Mouth Shorty'.

Far more common are songs full of braggadocio in which men trumpet the fact that women feed and clothe them and are irresistibly attracted to them sexually. Many men included some variety of the popular 'a woman for every day of the week' song in their repertoire, in which a different woman lavished money and comfort on them each day, at times explicitly by turning tricks, and each was jealous of the others. Harvey Hull's band detailed the different strolls its women worked, probably in Greenville, Mississippi: 'Monday girl, she works it on Broad and Main ... Wednesday girl, she works it on Broadway Square'. In another common theme, the singer declares that he has so many women he needs to build a castle or mansion so that he can keep an eye on all the streets in which they are working. Arthur McClain or Joe Evans was 'gonna build me a castle, baby, down on Jackson Avenue' so that he could 'see everything that my babies do'.

Men's pleasure in pimping, of having a 'meal ticket woman', was domination, sexual satisfaction, status among peers, never having to work or pay rent and always being fashionably dressed. In a political economy where menial manual labour was the lot of most black men, never having to do anything but eat and sleep was a mark of prowess. Big Bill Broonzy's woman pecked on the window at her house on State Street in Chicago to attract passing men and always brought Bill 'something good'. Bill wore diamonds every day and women couldn't resist his 'swing'. The 'Sheik of Desplains Street' controlled a multi-block section of 1920s Chicago's red-light district and also didn't 'do nothin' but eat and sleep'.

The attitudes of singers positioning themselves as pimps to female sex workers varied from open admiration to disdain and contempt. Oliver and McCormick's informant Buster Pickens was bemused by the relations between pimps and sex workers and was openly contemptuous of the latter (Govenar 2019 p. 140), but sex workers were admired in some pimp songs for their prowess, popularity and earning potential. Barbecue Bob's 'gal on Second Avenue' could 'do things' that no other woman could, enough to make the deacon 'lay his Bible down'. Variations on that

theme were common. The prolific composer of sex work songs, Peetie Wheatstraw, was effusive in his praise for Betty Hobbs, whose secret was that 'she never did hurry, she just kept on cuttin' 'em slow'. Betty worked by the steamboat landing and was so popular that she had 'workin' men all over the south'. She had 'diamonds on her hand and gold in her mouth'. She could bail herself out when arrested and bought herself a new car at Christmas, all because she did not hurry her work.

Wheatstraw took up a variety of positions in relation to sex work in a song book that included at least 160 sides between 1930 and his untimely death in 1941. He was the smooth 'confidence man', living his life 'the easy way'. As the trickster, he was the 'devil's-son-in-law', always coming up with a new something to make women 'rave and clown': he had some of them 'goin' from hand to hand'. He was a rapporteur on working conditions on depression relief projects. 'Third Street's Goin' Down' described how highway construction in St Louis forced sex workers out of the Valley district, while another song pointed to Cake Alley, popular because 'the cakes are very cheap'. It was one of the rougher areas of the St Louis red-light district and if you went there, 'you better know just what to do/Because the bums in Cake Alley will take your money from you'. In 'Good Hustler Blues', Wheatstraw complained that he could make no money because there were too many pimps at work and suspected his lover was giving his money to one of them.

Wheatstraw echoed the complaints about managing a sex worker and the bragging about the use of violence that were shared by other men positioning themselves as pimps. His 'Hard Headed Black Gal' was stubborn when it came to turning tricks. She refused to do working men or even to solicit a man with money. She might insult a trick who offered to take her to his room. Wheatstraw thought she could make lots of money if he could 'keep her out on the line' (i.e. the stroll). He was going to beat her so that she would learn to 'get out and help a man'. Similarly Sonny Scott complained that he took his woman to work in the levee camps but she 'couldn't make a dime'. When he set her up in a house, she let 'a man stay there for nothin' at all'.

Gene Campbell told his woman how to solicit: 'You can get some of their money if you hold them in your arms/Put a feeling on him, baby, that man is bound to fall/And if he's got a thousand dollars, you can get it all'. A trick might not want to spend money, but she should 'pull up on him and call him daddy' and he'd quickly 'change his mind'. Campbell reassured her that he would post bail if she got arrested, and finished with the injunction: 'Put your make-up on baby, go and see what you can find/You can't tell what's for you till you get out on the line'.

One of the most striking pimp songs is Sam Theard's instruction manual, 'The Lover and the Beggar'. Theard urged his listeners to imitate his violent conduct: 'I beats her up, boys, but she better not squawk/Every time I need some money, I send her out for a walk/. . . You gotta get yourself a woman from some little old country place/Dress her up in the evenin' and make her powder her face/You gotta tell her what to do, boys, when she walks down the street/Then she finally get a dollar from the very first man she meet'.

'Daddy-callin' Mamas'

Although the secondary literature shows that black women did sex work in brothels, cabarets, saloons, dancehalls and 'good-time flats', in blues songs women usually position themselves on the street or in the alley. Singers often complain of standing

on a street corner at night in the rain with their feet soaking wet while waiting for custom. If they cruise, they compare themselves with 'Big Six', the policeman pounding his beat in the night. They solicit for a variety of reasons: because they are forced to do so by the threat of violence from a husband or pimp; to feed themselves; to pay the rent; to buy clothes and shoes for a child or lover or pimp; or because they enjoy exercising their sexual prowess and the money that comes with it.

While sex work is difficult, sometimes dangerous and performed under coercion, black women singers do not typically position themselves as victims. In 'Fall and Summer Blues', Lizzie Washington negotiates when faced with violence. Lizzie is told by her man in the middle of the night that 'it's time to get on your beat and bring the money home to me'. She protests that it's cold and raining, that she doesn't have proper clothes or shoes, 'there's nothin' doin' on a night like this', and she doesn't want to come back empty-handed to get a black eye. If her man supports her in the winter when sex work is slow, she'll support him in the summer. Hazel Carby (1986; 1992; also Davis 1998, pp. 108–9) has made much of Ma Rainey's demonstration of independence given her threat in 'Hustlin' Blues' to take her man before the judge should he hit her for coming home empty-handed. Lillian Glinn warned the man who spurned her after she had bought him fine clothes and shoes that he 'would reap just what you sow', a theme repeated in Sippie Wallace's enduring hit, 'Up The Country Blues'. As Wallace headed out to tour with her band, she demanded the return of the coat, shirt, shoes and socks that she had bought her mistreating man, and she wanted the hat too, to 'let his naked [or nappy] head go bald'.

The seriocomic accounts of male violence against female sex workers mentioned above are augmented by references to the cutting, slashing, shooting, badger games, pickpocketing and robbery to which tricks were subject in the roughest venues (see Blair 2010). Lonnie Johnson's 'Low Down St. Louis Blues' described sex workers on Walnut and Deep Morgan streets who used razors and blackjacks to kill men. One was 'so bad, the cops scared to walk the beat'. In '45 Pistol Blues', Walter Roland warned about 'Third Alley' where men with pistols and women with razors would 'shoot you and cut you' if you started anything. Many singers covered some version of Bert Hatton's 1927 crossover hit of the dangers 'Down in Black Bottom'. As Black Bottom McPhail put it, 'Now, you go down in Black Bottom, put your money down in your britches/For them women's gonna rob you, you dirty mmmm ...'.³

Sex work songs negotiated rough trade and corrupt police. A Cincinnati madam called 'Katy Lee' faced regular shakedowns by police detectives in a Kid Coley song. The prolific 'Little' Alice Moore from St Louis warned her street walking sisters about the dangerous men around who would try to control them. She was afraid to go on the stroll herself until she got 'a good man' to protect her. Again as a street solicitor, a 'daddy-callin' woman', Moore met men eager to take of advantage of her. 'I used to stand on the corner, call any daddy that came along', she sang, 'but now I have learned better', to be more selective. And a woman should be careful not to 'have too many men', not only because they would fight over her on the street,

³ I cannot do justice here to the complexities of violence in race records. We find songs in which men beat and abuse women, but there are equal numbers of songs in which women cut and slash unfaithful men: Geeshie Wiley's 'Skinny Legs Blues', for instance, as well as outlandishly masochistic songs, such as Trixie Smith's 'You've Got to Beat Me to Keep Me'.

but also because 'they will hypnotize you or beat you, and keep you in trouble too/ You will have to go to the hospital, and that will be your doggone end'. Memphis Minnie's story of dealing with rough trade 'down in the alley' ended with her resolution to 'stop working and walking late at night. Cause it's so dangerous'.

According to Rosa Henderson, Chicago policemen only wore the uniform to extort sex workers. They would arrest you 'for absolutely nothing at all' and Henderson complained that 'pigs about the only thing supposed to squeal'. Bertha 'Chippie' Hill claimed she was going to get off the street 'cause the cops is getting bad, and the dough is coming slow'. Lil Johnson warned her Chicago sisters to be cautious 'when you're walkin' down Thirty First Street' because 'the vice squad is on their beat' making arrests. Some police were more tolerant than others. On Helena, Arkansas's Cherry Street stroll, Memphis Minnie recounted that she and her soliciting partner were stopped at dawn by big 'Reachin' Pete', who made Minnie throw her knife away and arrested her partner. But then he bailed her partner out. Pete was 'all right' but his own partner was to be avoided. Street walking made for a hard life according to Lucille Bogan, forced always to be 'duckin' and dodgin' the Cadillac squad'.

Silences and pleasures

Despite high rates of gonorrhoea, syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases among sex workers and clients, blues songs are largely silent on these matters. In a few songs, people go or are sent for treatment to Hot Springs, Arkansas, the main pre-war treatment centre. Contraception might be referenced in the many songs in which women declare that they will 'practice safety first', but the reference is obscure. In a rare mention, Clara Smith sang that 'every man in this county' could ride Hannah Johnson's 'big jack ass . . . bare back', although Hannah refused to 'pull double' (do threesomes). And in an echo of a longstanding cultural theme (see Barker-Benfield 1973), singers joked about excessive sexual activity making people sick. Only exceptionally was sexual congress portrayed as a disease vector. This disease-free fantasy world resembles that presented in contemporary pornography, where unsafe sexual practices seem never to lead to disease.

While Jelly Roll Morton mentioned menstruation in his unissued 'Winin' Boy Blues', in commercial recordings women seem not to menstruate. Abortion is not visible. References to pregnancy or to unwanted pregnancy are more common. Problematic pregnancies are most often discussed in relation to claims about women's infidelity or voracious sexual appetites. Such a figuration of women was common in the discourse of white supremacy, as a justification for male violence, and in respectable black concerns about the fate of daughters and about marital infidelity (Hartman 2019; Hicks 2009). Preachers railed against black women with black husbands who had yellow children, but blues singers treat such matters humorously. Male singers complain that none of their children resemble them, and seek to isolate their wives. In another conventional theme, false promises of faithfulness from male lovers expose women to pregnancy and abandonment and female singers warn their sisters to stay away from pimps in part for that reason.

Singers note that 'shaking that thing' or doing the 'Alley Boogie' – sex work – leads to women getting 'an armful' or to coming home with their 'arms round a young 'un'. Such pregnancies might lead to rejection by a pimp or madam. However, pregnancies are also presented as unproblematic: women like to have 'a

little fun and' then, as is to be expected, along comes 'a little urchin' or 'a little urchin from three or four'.

Sex workers are adept at giving pleasure, often finding pleasure themselves as they do so. If women are looking for sexual excitement, singers point to where they can find it. On Atlanta's Decatur Street, for example, where there are men of all skin tones: walk around at night and you'll 'surely meet heaven just rollin' along'. Singers vaunt both their prowess and their sexual liberty: 'Wear my skirt up to my knees/ Whip my jelly with whom I please'. 'Some womens like two mens', sang Lucille Bogan, 'some womens, they like three/But I like as many men I see is good to me'. Sexual prowess was freedom from domestic drudgery. You could quit school, never learn to cook or sew, and men would pay your rent and buy your clothes and booze. Such was Merline Johnson's situation because 'when it comes down to lovin', they say I'm out [of] the book'. Prowess did not depend upon beauty. Lil Johnson said she wasn't good looking and didn't have curly hair but 'my mama give me somethin' carry me through this world'. Bessie Mae Smith did no housework and instead of a husband had 'a dozen married men'. 'No man can rule me', she declared, 'try if you dare'. Sex work songs talked back to patriarchal domination.

'My fuckin's made for workin' men's two dollars'

Lucille Bogan cut 100 or so records between 1923 and 1935, under her own name, as 'Bessie Jackson' and 'Bertha Ross', and as one of the 'Jolly Jivers'. Her 'Pawn Shop Blues' was the first blues recorded in the South (Mazor 2015, pp. 52–3). Her creative genius stands out in songs that were hits in her own time and which have been covered repeatedly since, while her uncensored 1935 versions of 'Shave 'Em Dry' and 'Til The Cows Come Home', sold privately as party records, are still underground favourites.

Bogan was a sonic poet whose turn of phrase could be evocative. Unlike many of her contemporaries, she almost never took up the position of the victim of male abuse and she repeatedly placed herself as an active sex worker with an astonishing command of technique and prowess. 'All the women singin' the blues, tellin' the mens they feel so bad', she sang, but 'the blues is something I ain't ever had', because 'men is like street cars . . . miss one now, get another'n right away'. She tells her pimp, the lazy 'pot hound' who lies around expecting to be fed and won't come across for her rent, to 'bring me a job, or money . . . 'cause I can get your kind of lovin' in the streets just anywhere'.

Her conduct is the very antithesis of middle class respectability. She is 'Pig Iron Sally' living in a dirty back alley and she is 'evil and mean'. She bootlegs whiskey and bribes the judge when she gets arrested. She'd 'rather be sloppy drunk sittin' in the can, than to be at home' having sex with her man. She's a 'long tall mama' called 'a chocolate brown'; give her a couple of drinks and she'll 'clown'. 'Whiskey' is my habit, she says, 'good men is my crave' and she'll be drinking in the barrelhouse until her grave. She shoots craps with the men, gambles at cards, and goes into tough 'Boogie Alley', razor in hand to get her man away from other women. She is so tough that she 'has a head like a switch-engine'.

In several of Bogan's songs she personates a sex worker on the street, at railway junctions or in the levee camps. In 'Pay Roll Blues', she's off to the junction of the Southern and the Yazoo Delta (the 'Yellow Dog') railroads to work the men on pay day. They're making 'dollars a day' and Bogan is broke, so she is going to be

'steady rollin' from sun to sun'. She'll make a bundle (a 'water-haul') or if she can't make the 50 dollars she needs by turning tricks, she'll rob men after dark. Or she'll work up and down the Tennessee River, near the Wilson Lock and Dam. Things are worse in the levee camps, where business is slow.

In her street walking songs from 1930 to 1931, Bogan is tricking to feed and clothe herself and to pay the rent: there is no pimp in the background. The work is tedious, walking the streets dressed in black clothes and trying to avoid the vice squad, while customers are few despite the low price she charges. 'Tricks ain't walkin' no more', she sings, adding slyly 'and if you think I'm lyin', follow me to my door'. In the depths of the Depression with work and money both scarce, she will have to rob someone if she can't turn the tricks she needs. Either that or she is 'going to do just like a blind man, stand and beg for change'. 'Strutting her stuff' in the roughest parts of town, she is continually harassed by the police: 'Every time the police see me comin/He wants to 'rest poor me/Says I'm drunk and diso'dely and rowdy as I can be'. Yet all the men want to see her 'strut her stuff', some offering a dollar, some only 'a lousy dime'.

Bogan's remarkable talent, prowess and novel sexual technique make her irresistible. She has 'something' to 'make a rabbit hung a hound' and that 'will make a mule kick his stable down'. She has 'a new way of lovin'', which other women cannot match, but she'll 'learn that thing to you' if you pay her price. She can grind. She does the 'Georgia grind' and while you have to pay to get it, once you do you'll be back for more. Her grinding is so good 'it'll make you bite your tongue'. In her uncensored mode, she invites the listener to 'grind me until I cry'. She is insatiable: she 'boogies' in the alley all night long, and wakes in the morning ready to 'boogie some more'. Sometimes she is 'long and tall' but more commonly she is fat: 'a big fat woman, with the meat shakin' on my bones' and when she shimmies 'a skinny woman lose her home'. In her polite mode, she is as 'big as a barrel' and round as a result of 'struttin' her stuff, while in her uncensored mode she tells us that while 'a pig gets fat from suckin'', the 'reason this whore fat like I am ... I got fat from fuckin'' and not for free: 'my fuckin's made for workin' men's two dollars'. Politely, if she 'kisses' you it will 'make the water run outta your eyes' and she proclaims 'if I squeeze your lemon, baby, you'll be satisfied'. More to the point, she has something between her legs that will 'make a dead man come'.

Conclusion

The contents of blues songs have been configured in many ways since the earliest work of the folklorists. I do not claim that my documentation offers a definitive configuration of the genre. My aim has been to flesh out the observations of others about the 'libidinous hub' of the blues and to stress the hilarity that reigns in many parts of the archive (Reed 2001), a useful emphasis, in the dour times of identity politics.

I see race records as a complex assemblage structured by racism, white supremacy and the heritage of minstrelsy. Record labels were under the control of white capital and most A&R officials were white men. Limiting black artists to a few genres – 'hokum' songs, songs of blues 'n' trouble, gospel songs and bawdy material – was conscious practice. Marketing strategies and restricted access to radio broadcasting confined race recordings mainly to black audiences. Within this narrow space creative practices flourished.

In conclusion, I notice three sites for future work. First, while popular ribaldry certainly exists in other musical genres, racist practice constituted a socio-political delegation of ribaldry and sex work to 'race records' and to black performers. This delegation was underpinned by racist lies about the supposedly unbridled sexuality of black people. Yet, forced to perform in rough cultural venues where sex work was common, many artists made the best of their situation, embracing the bawdy and the ribald and spinning them in ways that were sometimes counter-hegemonic, talking back to middle class respectability and satirising racist imagery.

Second, some of the delegation of ribaldry to black performers looks to be intra-racial and cross-gender. The field of blues composition as a whole is under-served. Many performers composed their own material, but a great many songs, especially when the 'blues Queens' were dominant, came from a black Tin Pan Alley. Here a host of often obscure but also often college-educated black male song writers (Alex Hill, for instance) were organised by white publishing companies, such as the Jack Mills Publishing Co., to compose ribald material for female performers. The political-economic, class-cultural, racial and gender politics of this phenomenon deserve analysis.

Finally, there is the issue of the ribald itself. Blues ribaldry is not simply Bakhtinian because it does not involve the scatological befouling of a ruling class by a peasantry (Bakhtin 1984). However, it does centre on the 'material bodily lower stratum'. And it is intensely sensual, concerned with the sights and smells of the organs of pleasure. Men's bawdy songs often denigrate women's sexuality and there is some such content in race records. Yet the sexual politics are more complicated than that, since women as well as men vaunt their attractiveness, insatiable appetites and mastery of technique. In those ways, ribaldry is a practice of power and liberty with ludic qualities.

Acknowledgements

My thanks for critical commentary on earlier drafts to James Dickinson, Andrea Doucet, Billy Flynn, Reisa Klein, Michèle Martin, Phil Schoenfeld and two anonymous reviewers.

References

- Abbott, L. 1993. "Brown skin, who you for?" Another look at Clarence Williams's early career', *The Jazz Archivist*, 8, pp. 1–14
- Abbott, L., and Seroff, D. 2017. *The Original Blues: The Emergence of the Blues in African American Vaudeville* (Jackson, Miss., Mississippi University Press)
- Backstrom, L., Armstrong, E.A., and Puentes, J. 2012. 'Women's negotiation of cunnilingus in college hookups and relationships.' *Journal of Sex Research*, 49/1, pp. 1–13
- Bakhtin, M. 1984. *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Bloomington, Indiana University Press; originally published 1965)
- Bay-Cheng, L., and Fava, N. 2011. 'Young women's experiences and perceptions of cunnilingus during adolescence', *Journal of Sex Research*, 48/6, pp. 531–42
- Barker-Benfield, G.J. 1973. 'The spermatic economy: a nineteenth-century view of sexuality', in *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective* (pp.336–72), ed. M. Gordon (New York, St. Martin's Press)
- Beirne, P. 2019. 'Animals, women and terms of abuse: towards a cultural etymology of con(e)y, cunny, cunt and c*nt', *Critical Criminology*, 28. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-019-09460-w>
- Blair, C.M. 2010. *I've Gotta Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-century Chicago* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press)
- Bradford, P. 1965. *Born with the Blues* (New York, Oak Publications)

- Calt, S. 2005. 'The anatomy of a "race" music label', in *Rhythm and Business. The Political Economy of Black Music* (pp. 90–115), ed. N. Kelley (New York, Akashic Books)
- Carby, H. 1986. "'It just be's dat way sometime": the sexual politics of women's blues', *Radical America*, 20, pp. 9–24
- Carby, H. 1992. 'Policing the black woman's body in an urban context', *Critical Inquiry*, 18, pp. 738–55
- Clement, E.A. 2006. *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900–1945* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press)
- Connelly, M.T. 1980. *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press)
- Cooper, B.L. 1993. 'Sultry songs as high humor', *Popular Music and Society*, 17, pp. 71–85
- Davis, A.Y. 1998. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism. Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York, Random House)
- Govenar, A.B. 2019. *The Blues Come to Texas: Paul Oliver and Mack McCormick's Unfinished Book* (College Station, Texas A&M University Press)
- Gray, M. 2009. *Hand Me My Travelin' Shoes. In Search of Blind Willie McTell* (Chicago, Chicago Review Press)
- Harris, L. 2016. *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City's Underground Economy* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press)
- Hartman, S. 2019. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company)
- Heap, C. 2009. *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885–1940* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press)
- Hesmondhalgh, D. 2013. *Why Music Matters* (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell)
- Hicks, C.D. 2009. "'Bright and good looking colored girl": black women's sexuality and "harmful intimacy" in early-twentieth-century New York', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 18/3, pp. 418–56
- Hurston, Z.N. 1997. 'Characteristics of Negro expression', in *Sweat* (pp. 55–72), ed. C. Wall (New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press)
- Iton, R. 2008. *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics & Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York, Oxford University Press)
- Keire, M.L. 2010. *For Business & Pleasure. Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890–1933* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press)
- Kenney, W.H. 1993. *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904–1930* (Oxford, Oxford University Press)
- Landau, E.E. 2013. *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana State University Press)
- Lauterbach, P. 2015. *Beale Street Dynasty. Sex, Song, and the Struggle for the Soul of Memphis* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company)
- Mac, J., and Smith, M. 2018. *Revolted Prostitutes. The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights* (London, Verso)
- Mazor, B. 2015. *Ralph Peer and the Making of Popular Roots Music* (Chicago, Chicago Review Press)
- McGinley, P.A. 2014. *Staging the Blues: From Tent Shows to Tourism* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press)
- Meyerowitz, J.J. 1988. *Women Adrift. Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880–1930* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press)
- Miller, K.H. 2010. *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press)
- Oliver, P. 1968. *Screening the Blues: Aspects of the Blues Tradition* (London, Cassell)
- Oliver, P. 1984. *Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)
- O'Neal, J., and van Singel, A. 2012. 'Georgia Tom Dorsey', in *The Voice of the Blues: Classic Interviews from Living Blues Magazine* (pp. 1–40), ed. J. O'Neal and A. van Singel (New York, Routledge)
- Peiss, K. 1989. "'Charity girls" and city pleasures: historical notes on working-class sexuality', in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History* (pp. 57–69), ed. K. Peiss and C. Simmons (Philadelphia, Temple University Press)
- Reed, T.L. 2001. 'Elder Eatmore and Deacon Jones: folk religion as humor in Black secular recordings, 1918–1961', *Popular Music and Society*, 25, pp. 25–44
- Rosen, R. 1982. *The Lost Sisterhood. Prostitution in America, 1900–1918* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press)
- Schwartz, R.F. 2018. 'How blue can you get? "It's tight like that" and the Hokum Blues', *American Music*, 36, pp. 367–93
- Smith, A. 2005. 'Blues, criticism, and the signifying trickster.' *Popular Music*, 24/ 2, pp. 179–91
- Smith, W. 'The Lion', and Hofer, G. 1978. *Music On My Mind. The Memoirs of an American Pianist* (New York, De Capo Press)
- Townsend, H., and Greensmith, B. 1999. *A Blues Life* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press)
- Tracy, S.C. 1993. *Going to Cincinnati. A History of the Blues in the Queen City* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press)
- Tribbett, M. C. 1998. "'Everybody wants to buy my kitty": resistance and the articulation of the sexual subject in the blues of Memphis Minnie.' *Arkansas Review*, 29/1, pp. 42–54
- Vernhettes, D., and Hanley, P. 2014. 'The Desdunes family', *The Jazz Archive*, XXVII, pp. 25–45
- Work, J.W. 1915. *Folk Song of the American Negro* (Nashville, Fisk University Press)

Discography

Morton, J.R., *The Complete Library of Congress Recordings by Alan Lomax*. Rounder Records, ROUNDER 11661-1898-2, 2005 [1938]

Discographic and methodological note

Discographic information for this article is from Robert Dixon, John Godrich, and Howard W. Rye, 1997, *Blues and Gospel Records, 1890–1943*, 4th ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press). Additional information about lyricists and composers can be found at the Discography of American Historical Recordings, hosted at the University of California San Diego.

I based this article on the 11,000 or so songs and sermons in the 13-volume set of transcriptions of material on Document Records and Yazoo Records produced by R.R. Macleod, 1994–2004 (Edinburgh, PAT Publications). I have read, selectively transcribed and coded all of this material into search-and-sort software. Scholars will appreciate Macleod's excellent ear and wry, self-effacing commentary. Where Macleod was uncertain about his transcriptions or in cases where they seemed dubious, I have replayed the material in question. I concentrate on the period from the recording of Mamie Smith's 'Crazy Blues' in 1920 to the Petrillo recording ban of 1943, that is, the period in which black music appeared in 'race records'.

Macleod left about 120 Document CDs unfinished. I have supplemented his material with songs mentioned in the secondary literature, through online searches, by drawing on my own collection of several thousand songs and by consulting online discussion fora such as weeniecampbell. <https://weeniecampbell.com/yabbse/index.php?board=10.0>