

CHAPTER SEVEN: “CHOO CHOO CH’ BOOGIE”: THE POSTWAR ERA, 1946–1954

Chapter Outline

I. Introduction

A. The postwar period was one of the most interesting, complex, and dynamic periods in the history of American popular music.

B. The entertainment industry grew rapidly after the war.

C. By 1947, record companies achieved retail sales of over \$214 million. The previous peak for record sales occurred in 1921.

D. Independent record labels became an important force in the entertainment industry.

A. Independent labels

1. Chess Records

a) Most important blues race label

b) Signed the most popular blues recording artists in Chicago, including Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf

c) Founded by Leonard and Phil Chess (Polish Jewish immigrants)

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2. Atlantic Records was founded in 1947 by Ahmet Ertegun, son of the former Turkish Ambassador to the United States, and Herb Abramson, former A&R man for National Records.

a) Based in New York City

b) Artist roster included Ruth Brown, Big Joe Turner, Ray Charles, Ben E. King, and Otis Redding.

E. Record companies began to target young people.

1. People under 21 made up one-third of the total record-buying population of the United States.

2. Many hit records of the 1940s and 1950s were romantic songs performed by crooners with an orchestral backup.

3. Larger record companies (Columbia, Decca, and RCA) were focusing their attention on mainstream pop.

F. Popular music and technology in the postwar era

1. Magnetic tape—better sound quality than previous methods of recording; recordings could be edited and overdubbed.

2. “Battle of the Speeds”

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- a) In 1948, Columbia Records introduced twelve-inch, 33 1/3 rpm, long-playing discs (LPs).
- b) In 1949, RCA Victor introduced seven-inch, 45 rpm discs—the format for hit singles.

3. Radio

- a) Increased influence of disc jockeys (DJs) on popular music
- b) The first commercial FM broadcast took place in 1939.

G. Rise of the big singers

- 1. By 1946, the focus of popular attention had shifted away from celebrity instrumentalists and bandleaders toward a new generation of vocalists.
 - a) Many of the top vocalists started their careers during the swing era.
 - b) The musicians’ union recording ban of 1942–44 did not apply to vocalists.
 - c) Many of the vocalists sang under their own names, often with choral accompaniment.
- 2. Frank Sinatra (1915–98)

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- a) Born in Hoboken, New Jersey, into a working-class Italian family
- b) Between 1937 and 1939, worked as a singing waiter for the Rustic Cabin, a nightclub in New Jersey
- c) Later worked for Harry James and Tommy Dorsey
- d) Sinatra was heavily promoted on radio, at the movies, and in the press, and his popularity soared.
- e) Singing style

(1) Combined the crooning style of Bing Crosby with the bel canto technique of Italian opera

(2) Influenced by female jazz and cabaret singers such as Billie Holiday and Mabel Mercer

3. Listening: “Nancy (With the Laughing Face)”

- a) Peaked at Number Ten on the *Billboard* charts
- b) String instruments dominate the instrumental accompaniment.
- c) Conventional thirty-two-bar AABA form

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- d) Cowritten by the Tin Pan Alley veteran Jimmy Van Heusen and the television and film comedian Phil Silvers in honor of the birth of Sinatra’s daughter Nancy
 - e) The brief orchestral introduction begins with four bars of waltz rhythm (three beats per bar), then shifts into the four-beat meter of the song.
 - f) Sinatra’s voice is relaxed and unforced, with warmth and a slight vibrato.
4. Nat “King” Cole (1917–65)
- a) The most successful black recording artist of the postwar period
 - b) In both musical and commercial terms, the greatest postwar crooner
 - c) Born Nathaniel Coles in Montgomery, Alabama
 - d) His family moved to the South Side of Chicago when he was four years old.
 - e) His father was the pastor of a Baptist church; Nat was playing organ and singing in the choir by age twelve.

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- f) He made his first recording in 1936, in the Solid Swingers, a jazz band led by his brother Eddie Cole.
- g) Nat Cole, a brilliant piano improviser, exerted a strong influence on later jazz pianists such as Oscar Peterson and Bill Evans.
- h) He moved from Chicago to Los Angeles in 1937 and formed his own group, the King Cole Trio.
- i) Along with the Mills Brothers and Louis Jordan, Cole was one of the first African American musicians to cross over regularly to the predominantly white pop charts.
- j) Although he continued to record a range of material—including jazz performances with the King Cole Trio—Cole’s biggest commercial successes were sentimental ballads, accompanied by elaborate orchestral arrangements:

(1) “(I Love You) For Sentimental Reasons” (1946)

(2) “Nature Boy” (1948)

(3) “Unforgettable” (1950)

(4) “Mona Lisa” (1950), his biggest hit; sold over five million copies

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(5) “Too Young” (1951)

k) Given the racial prejudice prevalent in the American music industry and in society as a whole, Nat “King” Cole’s professional success was truly remarkable.

5. Listening: “Nature Boy”

a) Written by Eden Ahbez (1908–95)

b) Performed by Nat “King” Cole accompanied by Frank DeVol’s Orchestra

c) Recorded in 1948; held the Number One position on the *Billboard* pop charts for eight weeks

d) “Nature Boy” was the first record to present Nat “King” Cole’s voice with full orchestral accompaniment.

e) The song is in a minor key, which is infrequent in mainstream popular music but common in Jewish music and is associated in the popular imagination with sadness, longing, and exotic images of the Orient.

f) It is the orchestral arrangement along with Cole’s honeyed baritone voice that makes this record work.

II. Urban Folk Music: The Weavers

A. Urban folk

1. Appeared on the pop charts in the early 1950s
2. Combined a number of seemingly contradictory tendencies
 - a) Inspired by rural folk music yet performed by urban intellectuals
 - b) Drew inspiration from the populist protest songs of Woody Guthrie yet was used by the record industry to generate millions of dollars in profits
 - c) Many urban folk recordings were seemingly harmless singalongs, designed to invite audience participation.
 - d) Only a few years after the initial burst of public interest in this music, some of its best-known practitioners were being persecuted for their political beliefs.
3. The Weavers were the first urban folk group to achieve commercial success.
 - a) A quartet led by the singer, banjo player, and political activist Pete Seeger (b. 1919)

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- b) Formed in 1948, they grew out of an earlier group called the Almanac Singers, which had included Seeger and Guthrie.
- c) With a repertoire based on American and international folk songs, the Weavers performed at union rallies, college concerts, and urban coffeehouses.
- d) The group was “discovered” at a New York City nightclub by Gordon Jenkins, managing director of Decca Records.
- e) Between 1950 and 1954, they placed eleven records in the Top 40.
- f) Three members of the group, including Seeger, were accused of being Communists during the early 1950s. (Their main accuser later admitted that he had fabricated the charges and went to prison for perjury.)
- g) Decca Records, unwilling to withstand the heat, dropped their contract, and the Weavers never again appeared on the pop music charts.
- h) Seeger, however, continued to play a leading role as a champion of folk music and a populist activist; he has been called “America’s tuning fork.”

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4. The Weavers’ singalong version of “Goodnight Irene,” composed by the Louisiana-born musician Huddie Ledbetter (aka Leadbelly, 1889–1949), was the most successful of their recordings, reaching the Number One position on the pop charts in 1950.

a) The strophic form of the song is clearly related to the folk ballad tradition, with a series of verses and a recurring chorus (*Irene goodnight, Irene goodnight. . .*).

b) On “Goodnight Irene,” as on their other hit records of the early 1950s (“Tzena, Tzena, Tzena,” “So Long (It’s Been Good to Know Ya),” “On Top of Old Smoky,” and “Wimoweh”), the Weavers were accompanied by the orchestral arrangements of Gordon Jenkins, who also worked with Frank Sinatra, Nat “King” Cole, and other pop stars.

5. Despite the folksy informality of much of their later work, the Weavers’ “Goodnight Irene” and other hits on the Decca label are pop records.

6. They helped define a niche in the popular market for folk-based popular music, including the later work of the Kingston Trio; Peter, Paul, and Mary; and Bob Dylan.

7. The Weavers’ use of international materials, including Israeli, Cuban, and South African songs, make them the first world beat artists.

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III. Southern Music in the Postwar Era

- A. After World War II, the market for forms of popular music rooted in the traditions of the American South reemerged with new vigor.
- B. The old categories “race music” and “hillbilly music” underwent a series of name changes, reflecting shifts in social attitudes and in the music industry’s perception of the economic potential of southern music.
- C. In 1942, *Billboard* began to list these records, subsuming them under the single category “western and race,” a hybrid designation that was soon changed to “American folk records.”
- D. In 1949, *Billboard* began using the terms “rhythm & blues” and “country and western” for “race” and “hillbilly,” respectively.
- E. During the late 1930s and the 1940s, millions of people migrated from the rural South in search of employment in defense-related industries.
 - 1. Cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, New York, Washington, D.C., Nashville, Atlanta, and Los Angeles were home to large populations of transplanted southerners whose musical tastes were shaped by their experience of rural traditions but also by the desire to forge new, urbanized identities.

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2. This domestic immigrant population greatly expanded the target audience for southern-derived music, providing a steady source of support for the venues where country and western and R&B groups played.
3. Radio played a crucial role in the popularization of this music.
 - a) There was an increase in the number of radio stations catering to transplanted southerners, some capable of saturating the entire country’s airwaves, others low-wattage affairs with a broadcasting radius of only a few miles.
 - b) The country music radio business was booming in the late 1940s and early 1950s, with new shows modeled on Nashville’s *Grand Ole Opry* coming on the air in all of America’s major cities and on hundreds of small stations that sprouted in rural areas.
 - c) During the war, a number of white DJs began to mix in black popular music with pop records.
 - d) 1949 marked the inauguration of the first radio station dedicated to playing music for a black audience—WDIA in Memphis, Tennessee, featuring the blues musician and disc jockey B. B. King.
 - e) In 1953, a nationwide survey in *Billboard* reported that pop music accounted for an average of thirty-one hours a week of radio

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programming, with country music occupying eleven and a half hours, and R&B two and a half.

f) While these figures may not seem impressive at first glance, the fact that country music was being heard for more than an hour a day on average, and that R&B recordings were getting any airplay at all on mainstream pop radio stations, is an indication of the expanding audiences for these styles.

g) The jukebox business and the Movieola—a type of jukebox that played short, musical films or “soundies”—also played a part in popularizing southern-based musicians.

F. The AFM recording ban of 1942–44 and the rise of BMI provided many southern-born musicians with new opportunities for recording.

1. Because many of these performers did not belong to the musicians’ union, the ban on studio recording did not apply to them, and they were free to continue making records.
2. Similarly, the success of BMI in licensing southern-born songwriters was based on ASCAP’s long-standing refusal to admit these musicians as members.
3. In the end, the combined prejudice of these mainstream music institutions against rural, southern, and black musicians backfired.

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4. The success of country and western and R&B music was indebted to the reemergence of dozens of small, independent record labels.
5. As in the 1920s, this new generation of indies was made possible by a strong national economy and by the activity of small-scale entrepreneurs eager to create new market niches, develop specialized audiences, and exploit areas of America’s musical map that the major companies did not perceive as significant.
6. These small record companies played an important role in country music and dominated the R&B field.

IV. Rhythm & Blues

- A. Described music performed almost exclusively by black artists for sale to African American audiences
 1. Loose cluster of styles rooted in southern folk traditions
 2. Shaped by the experience of returning military personnel and hundreds of thousands of black Americans who had migrated to urban centers such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles during and just after the war
 3. The top R&B recordings of the late 1940s and early 1950s included
 - a) swing-influenced “jump bands,”

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- b) Tin Pan Alley–style love songs performed by crooners,
- c) various styles of urban blues, and
- d) gospel-influenced vocal harmony groups.

B. Small, independent record labels emerged during and just after the war.

1. Provided an outlet for performers who were ignored by major record companies such as Columbia, RCA Victor, and Capitol
2. The development of portable tape recorders made it possible and affordable for entrepreneurs to produce recordings.
3. Each company was centered on one or two individuals who oversaw every aspect of the recording process, including publicity, distribution, and a variety of other tasks.
 - a) Paid radio DJs payola to promote their records on radio
 - b) Visited nightclubs to find new talent
 - c) Hustled copies of their records to local record store owners
 - d) Occasionally tried to interest a major label in a particular recording or artist with crossover potential

C. Most indie label owners worked a particular piece of musical and geographical territory.

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1. However, they also had dreams of the huge financial success that would accrue to the label that found a way to cross R&B records over to the pop music charts.
2. The middle-class white audience for this music—and the big record companies’ and radio networks’ interest in it—were growing, but the competition was fiercer than ever.
3. By 1951, there were over one hundred independent labels slugging it out for a piece of the R&B market, and few of them lasted more than a few months.
4. Indie owners often gave themselves composer credits on songs they recorded and thereby often earned more royalties from songs than the actual composers.
5. In the postwar era, the importance of composers’ credits was based on the fact that artists and record companies often tried to cash in on the potential popularity of a recording by creating their own (sometimes almost indistinguishable) versions of it.
6. Although the most famous examples of this practice involve white musicians (and major record companies) exploiting songs first recorded by black artists (and independent record companies), the profit motive led to a variety of interactions, including pop versions of hillbilly songs and black versions of Tin Pan Alley songs.

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7. In general, this practice—called “covering” a song or making a “cover version”—was crucial to the increasing crossover success of black music (and, to a lesser degree, black musicians) during the 1950s.

V. Jump Blues

A. The first commercially successful category of R&B, flourished during and just after World War II

1. During the war, the leaders of some big bands were forced to downsize.
2. They formed smaller combos, generally made up of a rhythm section (bass, piano, drums, and sometimes guitar) and one or more horn players.
3. These jump bands specialized in hard-swinging, boogie-woogie–based party music, spiced with humorous lyrics and wild stage performances.

B. Louis Jordan (1908–75)

1. Led the most famous jump band, The Tympany Five
2. Arkansas-born saxophone player and singer who began making recordings for Decca Records in 1939
3. The first jump band musician to appeal to a mass audience
4. Flamboyant style and humorous lyrics

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5. Ensemble setup—two trumpets, two saxophones, bass, piano, and drums—became the standard for R&B music
6. Tremendously popular with black listeners and able to build an extensive white audience during and after the war
7. Inspired a number of the first rock ’n’ roll artists
8. Jordan’s first big hit, “G.I. Jive,” reached Number One on *Billboard*’s “Harlem Hit Parade” (as the R&B chart was labeled in the earlier 1940s), held the top spot on the pop music charts for two weeks, and sold over a million copies.
9. From 1945 through 1948, Jordan, working with the white record producer Milt Gabler (b. 1911), recorded a string of crossover hits, including the following:
 - a) “Caldonia” (Number One R&B, Number Eleven pop in 1945)
 - b) “Stone Cold Dead in the Market” (adaptation of a calypso from Trinidad, Number One R&B and Number Seven pop in 1946)
 - c) “Ain’t Nobody Here but Us Chickens” (Number One R&B, Number Six pop in 1946)
10. The popularity of the Tympany Five was reinforced by a series of films featuring the band.

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- a) These short, musical features were rented to individual movie theaters and shown as a promotional device a few days before the band was due to hit town.
- b) Louis Jordan was a gifted comedian, as well as a musician, and many of the films had a decidedly wacky tone.
- c) One was a musical parody of Western movies, with Jordan in full cowboy gear, astride a horse and with his sax slung across his back.
- d) Jordan’s films, like his records, were popular in white as well as black movie theaters, even in the Deep South.

11. However, the fact that his music appealed to an interracial audience should not lead us to assume that Jordan’s career was unaffected by racism.

- a) Promoters in larger cities booked Jordan for two evenings, one for a white audience and the other for a black audience.
- b) Sometimes white R&B fans sat in the balcony of a segregated theater or dance hall, watching the black dancers below to pick up the latest steps.
- c) At other times, a rope was stretched across the middle of the dance floor to “maintain order.”

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C. Listening: “Choo Choo Ch’ Boogie” (1946)

1. Louis Jordan’s biggest hit
 - a) Released in 1946 by Decca Records
 - b) Topped the R&B charts for an amazing eighteen weeks, reached Number Seven on *Billboard*’s pop hit list, and sold over two million copies.
 - c) Exemplifies key elements of the jump blues style of R&B
 - d) Cowritten by Milt Gabler, Jordan’s producer, and two country and western musicians who worked at a radio station in New York City
2. The title of the song draws a parallel between the motion of a train and the rocking rhythm of boogie-woogie music. Boogie woogie provided an important link between R&B and country music during the postwar period.
3. Form
 - a) Series of twelve-bar blues verses, alternated with an eight-bar chorus
 - b) Combines elements of African American music and Tin Pan Alley song

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4. The arrangement—devised by Gabler and Jordan
 - a) Opens with a twelve-bar instrumental introduction in which the horns (a trumpet and two saxophones) imitate the sound of a train whistle
 - b) The rhythm section establishes a medium-tempo boogie-woogie rhythm—a “shuffle.”
 - c) Twelve-bar verse and eight-bar chorus, both sung by Jordan
 - d) Twelve-bar boogie-woogie piano solo
 - e) Twenty-bar saxophone solo instead of a piano solo

D. Blues crooner style

1. Dominated by a blend of blues and pop singing
2. The roots of this urbane approach to the blues reach back to a series of race recordings made in the late 1920s and 1930s by the pianist Leroy Carr (1905–35) and the guitarist Scrapper Blackwell (1903–62).
3. Leroy Carr
 - a) Born in Indianapolis, Indiana
 - b) Developed a smooth, laid-back approach to blues singing that contrasted sharply with rough-edged rural blues

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- c) Attracted a national black audience
4. The late 1930s jazz recordings of the King Cole Trio, with its instrumentation of piano, bass, and guitar, had a more immediate influence on postwar blues crooners
 5. Cole’s later recordings took him well into the pop mainstream.
 6. Cecil Gant (1913–51)
 - a) In 1944, Cecil Gant, a black G.I. from Nashville, Tennessee, walked up to the stage at a war bond rally in Los Angeles and asked if he could play a few songs on the piano.
 - b) The crowd loved him, and Private Gant, the “G.I. Singstation,” was soon signed by the new independent record label Gilt-Edge.
 - c) Gant recorded the love song “I Wonder,” sung in a gentle, slightly nasal, bluesy style, and accompanied only by his own piano playing.
 - d) “I Wonder” reached the Number One position on *Billboard*’s “Harlem Hit Parade” and attracted attention from some white listeners.

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e) Unfortunately, Gant was never able to repeat the success of his first hit, although he made dozens of recordings for various independent record labels.

7. Charles Brown (1922–99)

a) The most successful blues crooner of the late 1940s and early 1950s

b) A soft-spoken, Texas-born pianist and singer

c) Studied classical piano as a child, graduated from college in 1942 at age twenty

d) Moved to Los Angeles in 1943 and joined Johnny Moore’s Three Blazers, a small combo that played pop songs for all-white parties in Hollywood and a more blues-oriented repertoire in the black nightclubs along Los Angeles’s Central Avenue

e) His smooth, sensitive, somewhat forlorn vocal style (sometimes called “cocktail blues”) attracted attention, and he began to develop a national reputation with the release of “Drifting Blues,” one of the top-selling R&B records of 1945 and 1946.

f) In 1948, Brown left to form his own quartet and had a Number One R&B hit the following year with “Trouble Blues.”

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- g) Over the next three years, he recorded ten Top 10 hits for Aladdin Records—one of the dozens of independent labels popping up in Los Angeles at the time—and became one of the most popular R&B singers nationwide.
- h) A handsome, dapper, gracious man, Brown projected an image of ease and sophistication.
- i) His repertoire, which included blues, pop songs, and semiclassical numbers such as the “Warsaw Concerto,” suggested a man in touch with his roots but not constrained by them.
- j) Brown was never able to break through to the pop charts—Columbia Records offered him a solo contract in 1947, but he turned it down out of loyalty to his bandmates.
- k) He was rediscovered by a new generation of R&B fans in the 1980s and went on to develop a successful international touring career, culminating in a Grammy nomination.

8. Listening: “Black Night”

- a) Written by Jessie Robinson; performed by Charles Brown and His Band; released in 1951
- b) One of Brown’s most successful recordings; held the Number One position on the R&B charts for fourteen weeks in 1951

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c) The fact that “Black Night” did not show up on the pop charts can be attributed, in part, to the record’s dark mood, slow tempo, and somber lyrics:

Nobody cares about me, ain’t even got a friend

Baby’s gone an’ left me, when will my troubles end?

Black night is falling, oh how I hate to be alone

I keep crying for my baby, but now another day is gone.

I’ve got no one to talk with, to tell my troubles to

Don’t even know I’m living since I lost you

Black night is falling, oh how I hate to be alone

I keep crying for my baby, but now another day is gone.

My mother has her troubles, my father has his, too

My brother’s in Korea, and I don’t know just what to do

Black night, black night is falling, oh how I hate to be alone

I keep crying for my baby, but now another day is gone.

9. Form

a) Twelve-bar blues

b) Exemplifies the continuing importance of the blues in black popular music

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c) This is a truly haunting recording, with Brown’s subdued voice, accompanied by the sparse textures, blue notes, and dirgelike tempo of the rhythm section and the mournful tenor saxophone of Maxwell Davis.

10. The lyrics

a) Convey a deep anxiety about the future and a fear of loneliness, evoked by the coming of night

b) Advertisements for the record in black newspapers and magazines typically suggested that the record would make listeners forget their own troubles, but this song also spoke volumes to a people weary of deferred promises.

11. After 1952, Brown’s blues ballad style became less popular, as the urban black audience’s taste shifted toward more hard-edged singers, perhaps reflecting the growth of active resistance to racial segregation.

VI. Chicago Electric Blues

A. Urban blues tradition of the postwar era

1. Derived more directly from the Mississippi Delta tradition of Charley Patton and Robert Johnson

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2. Chicago was the terminus of the Illinois Central railroad line, which ran up through the Midwest from the Mississippi Delta.
3. Although Chicago’s black neighborhoods were well established before World War II, they grew particularly rapidly during the 1940s, as millions of domestic rural immigrants came north in search of employment in the city’s industrial plants, railroad shops, and slaughterhouses.
4. The South Side’s nightclubs were the center of a lively black music scene that rivaled New York’s Harlem and L.A.’s Central Avenue.
5. The musical taste of black Chicagoans, many of them recent immigrants from the Deep South, tended toward rougher, grittier styles, closely linked to African American folk traditions but also reflective of their new, urban orientation.
6. The rural blues tradition had almost completely died out as a commercial phenomenon by World War II.
7. The old Delta blues emerged in a reinvigorated, electronically amplified form.

B. Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield) (1915–83)

1. “Father of Chicago Blues”
 - a) “Discovered” in the Mississippi Delta by Allan Lomax in 1941

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- b) Moved to Chicago in 1943
 - c) Played both acoustic and electric slide guitar
 - d) Switched from the acoustic to the electric guitar (1944) and eventually expanded his group to include a second electric guitar, piano, bass, amplified harmonica (“blues harp”), and drum set
 - e) The single greatest influence on the British blues boom in the 1960s
2. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, he was the most popular blues musician in Chicago, with a sizeable following among black listeners nationwide.
3. Waters’s approach to the blues is different from that of blues crooners like Charles Brown and represents direct continuities with the tradition of Charley Patton and Robert Johnson.
4. Waters was a master of bottleneck slide guitar technique. He used his guitar to create a rock steady, churning rhythm, interspersed with blues licks, which were counterpoised with his voice in a kind of musical conversation.
5. The electric guitar, which could be used to create dense, buzzing tone colors (by using distortion) and sustained notes that sounded like

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screaming or crying (by employing feedback), was the perfect tool for extending the Mississippi blues guitar tradition.

6. Waters’s singing style

a) Rough, growling, moaning, and intensely emotional—was also rooted in the Delta blues.

b) The songs he sang were based on themes long central to the tradition: on the one hand, loneliness, frustration, and misfortune, and on the other, independence and sexual braggadocio.

C. Listening: “Hoochie Coochie Man”

1. Written by Willie Dixon; performed by Muddy Waters; released in 1954

2. The song was Waters’s biggest hit for Chess Records, reaching Number Three on the R&B charts in 1954.

3. This recording typifies Chicago urban blues:

a) Loud volume and dense textures

b) Buzzing, growling tone colors and insistent beat

4. “Hoochie Coochie Man” is also an example of a common variation on the blues form, a sixteen-bar blues.

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- a) The first eight bars of the song feature a technique called “stoptime,” in which the beat is suspended to focus attention on the singer’s voice. (In essence, this is equivalent to the first four bars of a twelve-bar blues, made twice as long by application of the stoptime technique.)
- b) The regular pulse is then reestablished, and the last eight bars are played.
- c) Because the lyrics of the stoptime section change each time (like a verse), while the lyrics in the second eight-bar section are repeated (like a chorus), the song combines the blues form with a strophic verse-chorus structure.
- d) The lyrics of “Hoochie Coochie Man” are essentially an extended boast, related to the African American tradition of “toasts,” fantastic narratives emphasizing the performer’s personal power, sexual prowess, and ability to outwit authority:

I got a black cat bone, I got a mojo too

I got the John Conkaroo, I’m gonna mess wit’ you

I’m gonna make you girls lead me by my hand

Then the world’ll know I’m a hoochie-coochie man

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- e) The song draws a direct link between the personal power of the singer (quintessentially expressed through sex) and the southern folk tradition of mojo, a system of magical charms and medicines, including the black cat bone and John the Conquerer root.
- f) This image of supernatural power applied in the service of personal goals was ultimately derived from the cultures of West Africa, and it tapped a common reservoir of experience among Waters’s listeners, many of whom were not many years removed from the folk culture of the rural South.
- g) In essence, the lyrics of “Hoochie Coochie Man” are an argument for the continuing relevance of deep traditional knowledge in the new urban setting, and it is easy to see why this would have been an attractive message for recent domestic urban immigrants.
- h) “Hoochie Coochie Man” can also be heard as a direct ancestor of contemporary “gangster rap” recordings, which project a similar outlaw image in response to the challenging conditions of urban life.

D. Vocal harmony groups

1. Although this tradition is today sometimes called “doo-wop,” the earliest performers did not use this term.

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2. During the postwar era, variants of the African American vocal harmony tradition, both sacred and secular, moved into the R&B market.
 - a) Many of these vocal groups were made up of high school kids from the black neighborhoods of cities such as New York and Washington, D.C.
3. Initially, these groups did not sing as a way to make a living; this changed after the first vocal R&B groups achieved commercial success.
4. The Dominoes
 - a) The vocal harmony group most responsible for moving away from the pop-oriented sound of the Mills Brothers
 - b) Created a new, harder-edged sound more closely linked to black gospel music
 - c) Led by vocal coach Billy Ward, a strict disciplinarian and savvy entrepreneur
 - d) In 1950, Ward started rehearsing with a number of his most promising students and a seventeen-year-old tenor singer named Clyde McPhatter (1932–72).
5. The Dominoes’ first big hit was “Sixty Minute Man,” recorded in New York City and released by the independent label Federal Records in 1951.

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6. A large part of the song’s popularity was due to its lyrics, which catalogue the singer’s lovemaking technique in some detail:

There’ll be fifteen minutes of kissin’,

Then you holler please don’t stop

(GROUP: Don’t stop!)

There’ll be fifteen minutes of teasin’

And fifteen minutes of pleasin’

And fifteen minutes of blowin’ my top!

7. The combination of naughty lyrics, a rocking dance rhythm, and a bass lead vocal caught the attention of the R&B audience, and “Sixty Minute Man” monopolized the Number One spot on the R&B charts for fourteen weeks during the summer of 1951.

8. It was also one of the first vocal-group R&B records to cross over to the pop charts, where it reached the Number Seventeen position—doubtless without the assistance of AM pop radio.

9. The Dominoes’ “Have Mercy Baby” pushed vocal group R&B firmly in the direction of a harder-edged, explicitly emotional sound.

- a) “Have Mercy Baby” was recorded in Cincinnati, Ohio, and released by Federal Records in 1952.

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- b) It was the first record to combine the twelve-bar blues form and the driving beat of dance-oriented R&B with the intensely emotional flavor of black gospel singing.
- c) The song’s commercial success (Number One R&B for ten weeks in 1952) was in large part due to the passionate performance of the Dominoes’ lead tenor, Clyde McPhatter, the former gospel singer from North Carolina.
- d) The musical sensibility of Clyde McPhatter, the son of a Baptist preacher and a church organist, was shaped by the black church.
- e) The emotional intensity in McPhatter’s plea for redemption spoke directly to the core audience for R&B.
- f) Although it did not appear on the pop music charts, “Have Mercy Baby” attracted an audience among many white teenagers.

10. The mixing of church music with popular music was controversial in some quarters, and McPhatter and later gospel-based R&B singers faced occasional opposition from some church leaders.

E. Johnnie Ray (1927–90)

1. Partially deaf since childhood

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2. Rose to become one of the biggest international pop stars of the early 1950s
3. Crowned the “Prince of Wails” and parodied as the “Guy with the Rubber Face and the Squirt Gun Eyes”
4. Created an idiosyncratic style based partly in African American modes of performance, and in so doing paved the way for the rock ’n’ roll stars of the later 1950s
5. His stage act was dynamic: Ray writhed, wept, and fell to his knees.
6. Ray’s melodramatic, over-the-top approach appealed to the expanding white teenage audience for popular music.
7. His hit “Cry” reached Number One on both the pop and R&B hit parades, making him the only white performer to reach the top of the black charts between 1946 and 1956, when Elvis Presley’s “Hound Dog” reached Number One on both the pop and R&B charts.
8. In this sense, Johnnie Ray was a crucial link between the crooners of the postwar era and the rock ’n’ roll stars of the later 1950s.

VII. Women in R&B: Ruth Brown and Big Mama Thornton

A. Ruth Brown (b. 1928)

1. “Miss Rhythm”

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2. Born in Virginia
3. Began her professional career at age sixteen, and in 1949 signed with the new independent label Atlantic Records
4. Chart figures suggest that Ruth Brown was the most popular black female vocalist in America between 1951 and 1954.

B. Listening: “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean”

1. Written by Johnny Wallace, Herbert J. Lance, and Charles Singleton
2. Performed by Ruth Brown
3. Released in 1953
4. Held the Number One position on the R&B charts for five weeks in 1953 and reached Number Twenty-Three on the pop charts
5. The form is another example of the blending of blues and Tin Pan Alley–derived forms.

a) The song’s A section is sixteen-bar blues.

(1) The twelve-bar form here is expanded by adding four extra bars in the middle of the song

(2) Rather than the AAB text form typical of twelve-bar blues, the lyrics follow an AAAB pattern.

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- b) The B section is also sixteen bars.
6. The band plays the song at a medium tempo, with the horns (saxophones and trumpets) riffing behind the singer.
7. Brown’s vocal style:
- a) Warm, somewhat husky tone
 - b) Strong rhythmic feeling
 - c) Little upward squeals at the ends of words such as “mama,” “man,” and “understand”
8. Brown was paid less than seventy dollars for recording the song, in addition to a promised royalty of 5 percent of sales.
- a) As was often the case in the R&B business, she received few of her royalties.
 - b) One of the biggest stars of the postwar era, Brown ended up leaving the music business entirely for a decade and working as a domestic servant to raise her children.
 - c) She was rediscovered in the 1970s and worked to publicize the plight of older R&B artists who had been denied their share of profits by record companies.

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d) In the 1980s, she appeared in the Broadway show *Black and Blue* and won a Tony Award in 1989.

C. Big Mama Thornton (1926–84)

1. Born in Montgomery, Alabama
2. The daughter of a Baptist minister
3. Began her career as a professional singer, drummer, harmonica player, and comic on the black vaudeville circuit; later settled in Houston, where she sang in black nightclubs
4. In the early 1950s, arrived in Los Angeles and began working with Johnny Otis, a Greek-American drummer

D. Listening: “Hound Dog”

1. Written by Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller
2. Sung by Big Mama Thornton
3. One of the top-selling R&B records of 1953
 - a) Number One for seven weeks
4. Thornton’s deep, raspy, commanding voice, reprimanding a ne’er-do-well lover, projects a stark image of female power rarely, if ever, expressed in popular music of the 1950s.

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5. The bluntness of the lyrics is reinforced by the musical accompaniment:
 - a) Bluesy, Delta-style electric guitar
 - b) A simple drum part played mainly on the tom-toms
 - c) Hand clapping on beats 2 and 4
6. The tempo is relaxed, and the performance is energetic but loose.
7. The basic form of the song is a twelve-bar blues, but the band adds a few extra beats here and there, in response to Thornton’s phrasing.
8. The all-male band, howling and barking in response to Big Mama’s commands, reinforces not only the record’s humor but also its feeling of informality.

VIII. Country and Western Music

A. Patti Page (b. 1927 in Oklahoma)

1. Sold more records than any other female singer of the early 1950s
2. Had success with love songs and novelties like “The Doggie in the Window” (Number One pop in 1953)
3. Her biggest hit was a recording of “Tennessee Waltz.”

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- a) Page’s version of the song held the Number One position on the pop charts for thirteen weeks and eventually went on to sell more than six million copies.
- b) In some ways, this recording pointed back toward the nineteenth century—a sentimental waltz packed with nostalgic references to the South.
- c) However, the popular appeal of this record was also apparently boosted by two technological innovations:

- (1) The use of multitrack tape recording, which allowed Page to sing a duet with herself

- (2) Its issuing as a 45 rpm single—one of the first

- d) “Tennessee Waltz” helped make Mercury Records into a major label.

- (1) Spawned a rash of cover versions by other artists

- (2) Served notice that a pop-styled approach to country and western music could not only penetrate but actually dominate the mainstream

B. The range of country music styles during the postwar era resembles contemporaneous developments in R&B.

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1. Country crooners, who specialized in a smooth, pop-oriented style
2. Bluegrass musicians, who focused on the adaptation of traditional southern music in a package suitable to the times
3. Honky-tonk musicians, who performed in a hard-edged, electronically amplified style and wrote songs about the trials and tribulations of domestic immigrants to the city and male/female relationships

C. Country crooner: Eddy Arnold (b. 1918)

1. The most popular country crooner
2. Dominated the country charts from 1947 to 1954 and scored eleven Top 40 hits on the pop charts
3. Began his career as a country singer on local radio shows in his native Tennessee and joined the cast of the *Grand Ole Opry* in the mid-1940s
4. Key elements of his style are evident from his early recordings:
 - a) A smooth, warm baritone voice
 - b) Propensity for sentimental songs
5. Eddy Arnold’s transformation from country singer into country-tinged crooner parallels that of Nat “King” Cole, who moved from jazz toward pop stardom at around the same time.

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6. Arnold’s turning point was “Bouquet of Roses,” which topped the country charts in 1947 and also crossed over into the pop market.
7. The song itself, composed by Steve Nelson and Bob Hillard, combined the two-beat rhythm of country music with touches of Tin Pan Alley harmony and sentimental lyrics.
8. The crossover success of this record was mainly due to its presentation, positioned midway between country and pop.
 - a) Arnold’s rich baritone voice had just a hint of rasp.
 - b) His round pronunciation of vowels was colored with only the lightest touch of Tennessee dialect.
 - c) The orchestral accompaniment combined a typical country band of the period (electric guitars, electric bass, drum set, and piano) with a string orchestra.
9. Despite his eventual induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame, Arnold is still viewed by many tradition-oriented country fans as a sell-out, a country singer who turned his back on tradition.

D. Bluegrass: Bill Monroe (1911–97)

1. Bluegrass music is a style rooted in the venerable southern string band tradition.

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2. Bill Monroe (1911–97)
 - a) The pioneer of bluegrass music
 - b) Born in Kentucky
 - c) Started playing music at a young age and was influenced by his uncle (a country fiddler) and by a black musician and railroad worker named Arnold Schulz, whose influence can be seen in the distinctive bluesy quality of Monroe’s music
 - d) In 1935, formed a duet with his brother, Charlie
 - e) The Monroe Brothers played throughout the southeastern United States, creating a sensation with their vocal harmonies and virtuoso fiddle and guitar playing.
3. In 1938, Bill started his own group, the Blue Grass Boys, and the following year, he joined the cast of the *Grand Ole Opry*.

E. Listening: “It’s Mighty Dark to Travel”

1. Performed by Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys
2. Recorded in Nashville in 1947

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3. Classic example of bluegrass, a blend of Anglo-American string band music, traditional singing of the Appalachian Mountains, and influences from black music, especially the blues
4. Acoustic stringed instrumentation: fiddle, guitar, mandolin, banjo, bass
5. The stringed instruments are all assigned well-defined roles within the ensemble:
 - a) Bill Monroe’s “chop-chord” mandolin style creates a percussive sound occurring in alternation with the bass.
 - b) Earl Scruggs’s highly syncopated, three-finger technique on the banjo interlocks with the rhythm of the other instruments.
 - c) The string bass provides steady support, playing on the first and third beats of each measure.
6. The first seconds of “It’s Mighty Dark to Travel” establish the virtuosity and high energy for which this group is well known.
7. The vocal performance, with Bill Monroe’s tenor voice in the lead, is closely related to the “high, lonesome” style popularized first by the Carter Family and then by hillbilly duets such as the Blue Sky Boys and the Monroe Brothers.

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8. The song features sections of flashy solo improvisation (“breakaways”) rooted in the tradition of country fiddle contests and reinforced by the influence of black music, including jazz.
9. Although bluegrass never really dominated the country charts, its unique blend of traditionalism and innovation has continued to inspire country musicians

F. Honky-tonk style

1. Born in oil boomtowns of Texas and Oklahoma after World War II
2. Loud bars were called “honky-tonks”
3. Music had to be loud to be heard.
4. Songs were about the pleasures and problems of the honky-tonk audience.
5. Sentimental or religious songs would not have worked.
6. Country musicians adapted traditional instruments and playing techniques to the rowdy atmosphere of juke joints.
7. The typical instrumentation of a honky-tonk band included a fiddle, a steel guitar, a “takeoff” (lead) guitar, a string bass, and a piano.

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8. The guitars were electronically amplified, and the musicians played with a percussive, insistent beat (sometimes called “sock rhythm”) well suited to dancing.
9. Honky-tonk vocal styles were often directly emotional, making use of “cracks” in the voice and stylistic features from black music, such as melisma and blue notes.

G. Ernest Tubb (1914–84)

1. Began his career in the 1930s as a disciple of Jimmie Rodgers, “the Singing Brakeman”
2. By the 1940s, had developed into one of the first honky-tonk performers, singing in a deep baritone voice roughened by many years of singing in juke joints
3. One of the first musicians to move toward a harder-edged country sound and to switch to amplified instruments; wrote some of the classic songs in the honky-tonk genre
4. His first big hit was “Walking the Floor over You” (released by Decca Records in 1941), which secured him a spot on the cast of the *Grand Ole Opry* and helped him create a nationwide following.

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5. After the war, Tubb recorded a series of honky-tonk classics, including “Slipping Around” (Number One country in 1949), often cited as the first country song to deal explicitly with marital infidelity.

H. Hank Thompson (b. 1925)

1. Created a popular variation of honky-tonk music by combining it with elements of western swing.
2. His biggest hit was “The Wild Side of Life,” Number One on the country charts for fifteen weeks in 1952.

I. Listening: “The Wild Side of Life”

1. Recorded in Hollywood
2. Written by William Warren and Arlie Carter
3. Based on Warren’s personal experiences with a “honky-tonk angel”
 - a) Reflects major themes in honky-tonk music:
 - (1) Dislocations of urban working-class life
 - (2) Transience of male-female relationships

You wouldn’t read my letter if I wrote you

You asked me not to call you on the phone

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But there’s something I’m wanting to tell you

So I wrote it in the words of this song

I didn’t know God made honky-tonk angels

I might have known you’d never make a wife

You gave up the only one that ever loved you

And went back to the wild side of life

J. Kitty Wells (b. 1918)

1. The first female superstar of country music
2. Born in Nashville, married the popular country entertainer Johnny Wright
3. Began appearing with him on the radio in 1938
4. Her reputation was spread by network radio appearances.
5. Kitty Wells specialized in songs of love and betrayal, with titles like “Paying for That Back Street Affair” and “Whose Shoulder Will You Cry On”

K. Listening: “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky-Tonk Angels” (1952)

1. An answer record to Hank Thompson’s hit “The Wild Side of Life”

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2. The first recording by a solo female performer to top the country and western charts.

As I sit here tonight, the jukebox playing

The tune about the wild side of life

As I listen to the words you are saying

It brings memories when I was a trustful wife

It wasn't God who made honky-tonk angels

As you said in the words of your song

Too many times married men think they're still single

That has caused many a good girl to go wrong

L. Hank Williams (1923–53)

1. Symbol of the honky-tonk Style
2. Most significant figure to emerge in country music during the immediate post–World War II period
3. Born into poverty, began singing at a very young age
4. At sixteen, had his own local radio show and was known as the “Singing Kid”

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5. Vocal style blended elements of blues gospel and traditional country singing

M. Listening: “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry”

1. Evokes the flavor of “old-timey” country music
2. Waltz-like triple meter
3. Straightforward strophic form
4. Vocals have an intensity that brings the pain behind the words to life.
5. Vocals have sustained vowel sounds placed on the downbeats:

a) Hear that lonesome whippoorwill

N. Listening: “Hey, Good Lookin’”

1. Written and performed by Hank Williams
 2. Recorded in 1951
 3. A minor crossover hit
- a) Number Twenty-Nine pop, Number One on the country chart for eight weeks in 1951

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- b) Danceable character and pop-friendly thirty-two-bar AABA form borrowed from Tin Pan Alley models
 - c) “Teen-friendly” lyrics that address cars, dancing, and young romance; terms like “hot-rod Ford,” “soda pop,” “go steady,” and “date book”
4. The hard-living, hard-loving, rambling life that Hank Williams led had its price:
- a) Divorced by 1952
 - b) Fired by the *Grand Ole Opry* for failing to appear
 - c) Dependent on alcohol and painkillers
 - d) Died on New Year’s Day 1953 after suffering a heart attack in the back of his car on the way to a performance