**Transcript for *The Land Where the Blues Began***

(00:00:00)

JOHNNY BROOKS: Ladies and Gentlemen…Children and (inaudible). Thousand eyed mosquitoes and bowlegged (inaudible). Pull up a seat or either sit on the floor. I’ll tell you a story you’ve never heard before.

(00:00:11)

WALTER BROWN: See, God is taking care of me because I should have been dead forty years ago.

(00:00:18)

[Music]

(00:00:28)

JACK OWENS: Learned my pieces right out in the cotton fields, plowing. Cotton field. I ain’t learned nothing in no town…ain’t been to town hardly.

BUD SPIRES: You didn’t know what town was, did you? Shuh!

(00:00:40)

BEATRICE MAXWELL: I worked twelve years—just me and my girls—farming. Twelve years. Didn’t have no men help at all. And I made it.

(00:00:52)

J.T. TUCKER: That band give the team spirit to play and they singing give you pep to work.

(00:00:59)

[Music—Bud Spires playing harmonica]

(00:01:18)

NARRATOR (ALAN LOMAX): These people witnessed the birth of the blues. They lived them. This haunting music, laughing at life’s ironies, and set to a dancing beat….This amazing mix of Europe and Africa is America’s most distinctive song style. It’s also the product of the folk culture of the Mississippi Delta. Today, the blues have gone electric, gone urban, and belong to the whole world. And that’s fine. But I’m worried because the folk culture that produced the blues has almost disappeared.

Now, I’ve spent a lifetime studying ethnic folklore and in 1931 recorded songs like this one in the Mississippi Delta.

(00:01:56)

[Music—work song]

(00:02:09)

NARRATOR: Once there were scores of such songs. Now, there are only a few left. And only a handful of the older generation remembers them. The wellspring that has given the world so much is drying up, neglected, misunderstood, and unheard. So today we give a platform to this vital folk culture and its creators. We visit picnics and revivals. We meet the black pioneers who helped to carve Mississippi out of the wilderness with their work on farms, river, railroad and levee, creating a new music out of their loneliness and their deprivation. Music that, once heard, can never be forgotten.

(00:02:51)

[Music]

(00:03:28)

[Opening Credits]

**THE LAND WHERE THE BLUES BEGAN**

**a program by**

**Alan Lomax**

**John M. Bishop**

**Worth W. Long**

(00:03:47)

NARRATOR: This old blues of the wondering laborer leads us deep into the hills east of the Delta. Just as the southern Appalachians preserved the old English ballads, so the Mississippi hill country sheltered a fantastic African music that fed the blues.

(00:04:07)

[Music by Lonnie Pitchford]

(00:04:27)

NARRATOR: This music is from Lexington, Mississippi. A young bluesman Lonnie Pitchford is playing his homemade one-stringed electric guitar. And his music is amazingly close to the sound this West African produces on his typical one stringed instrument. And his instrument looked like the model of a one stringer that Lonnie makes.

(00:05:04)

NARRATOR: The African musical bow, here played by two Bushmen boys, is the oldest of these one stringers. Black Mississippians call this instrument the diddley bow. And they make it by nailing a broom wire on the side of the house.

(00:05:20)

LONNIE PITCHFORD: So, place the nail like this. And wrap it around. OK, nail this in…tight. When you tune it, you pull this down, like so. I don’t know if you can here it too plain, but this is actually tuning it.

[Pitchford playing the diddley bow]

PITCHFORD: Those actually the songs I would play when I was a kid.

(00:06:17)

[Music—Napoleon Strickland sings while playing the diddley bow with a drinking glass as slide]

(00:07:04)

[Music—Napoleon Strickland playing bottleneck slide on guitar]

(00:08:03)

NAPOLEON STRICKLAND: (demonstrating how to make a cane fife) Now, when I first started…I started to making them fife? All right, I’ll show you. The way I start there, I start my fingers like this. Now that’s wet. Then I took my knife and swung it out like this. Swung that out. Then I rest my fingers like that. Then, I took my knife and swung this out. Then, I swung that out. All right. Got up here. Got my tongue like this.

(00:08:38)

[Music—Fife and drum by Napoleon Strickland]

9:26

NARRATOR: All through the northeast Mississippi hill country the fife and drum bands call the folks to summer picnics. Looking like The Spirit of ’76, Afro-American style.

[Music—Fife and drum music, dance]

(00:10:57)

NARRATOR: This picnic music was a happy relic of the old time South hidden away in the Mississippi hills just like a reservoir of hot rhythms for the later blues. And it’s a joyous group thing while the blues tends to be solo and melancholy. It was the song of the individual foreigner caught between poverty and prejudice. And you hear the first notes of the blues in the work songs he sang.

(00:11:23)

[Clyde Maxwell sings a work song while chopping wood and felling a tree)

(00:11:55)

NARRATOR: Generations of steel muscled black axe men hacked away at the endless forests of the Delta bringing daylight into the river bottoms and opening up the richest land in the world for cultivation. Land suitable for vast cotton plantations where agriculture became a big, impersonal business that grew richer and richer at the expense of hired black labor.

(00:12:20)

[Alan Lomax interviews Lucius Smith]

LUCIUS SMITH (age 92): Well, he would come. Way back yonder all you’d work for [was] your clothes. Way back yonder.

LOMAX: They didn’t pay you any money at all?

SMITH: They’d pay you fifty cent a day, or forty cent a day. I picked cotton thirty-five cent, a hundred. Chopped cotton from sun [up] to sun [down]—two bits and forty cent. My daddy lived in 1900, chopped cotton on a Saturday evening—started at one o’clock and chopped til sundown for twenty cent. That’s it.

NARRATOR: As one old time bluesman told me, “It take a man that have the blues to sing the blues.”

(00:13:08)

[Music—singing while plowing with a mule]

NARRATOR: At the bottom of the system, the debt laden black farmer somehow recalled the wailing complaints of his ancestors under West African kings and in his free rhythmed, ornamented field hollers the blues melodies began to grow.

(00:14:18)

[Alan Lomax interviews Jack Owens and Bud Spires]

JACK OWENS: Learned my pieces right out in the cotton fields, plowing.

BUD SPIRES: Cotton field.

OWENS: I ain’t learned nothing in no town…ain’t been to town hardly.

SPIRES: You didn’t know what town was, did you? Shuh!

OWENS: No. No, I learned all my blues in the country. Right here out in the country.

SPIRES: In the fields.

OWENS: Fields, picking the cotton, plowing, hoeing, picking peas, all that kind of mess.

SPIRES: Picking cotton or either hoeing, don’t make no difference.

OWENS: That’s where we learned this mess at. That’s the reason we don’t know no other pieces.

SPIRES: We learned something.

LOMAX: Have you been a farmer all your life?

OWENS: All my life . . . been farming out here all my days. Ain’t never had no . . .

SPIRES: Plow a mule in the daytime, pick guitar at night.

OWENS: That’s right, that’s all I do. Nothing but a farmer. Daddys and things was a farmer. That’s all I known. Raise chickens and a few hogs—something to eat around here. Farm out there in the fields. That’s all they ever knowed. That’s all they ever knowed.

(00:15:23)

[Music by Owens and Spires]

(00:17:16)

NARRATOR: And so the blues were born. Field hollers floating over solid, syncopated dance rhythms. Songs that voiced unspoken anger. The powerful bitter poetry of a hard pressed people.

(00:17:26)

BEATRICE MAXWELL: I started the field when I was eight years old. I used to cry to go to make a day. And my mother, she didn’t want me to go. So, there was this old white man, weren’t staying too far from us. All of them would be in the fields but me. He asked to see what I was crying for. I told him I was crying because I wanted to go make a day like the rest of them. They started me off at a dollar a day. I was getting just what they was getting. From then on I come all the way through. I cleaned up new ground. I cut down trees. I cut wood. I can cultivate. I can plow. I can even sweep. And then I can plant. I done did all of that all the way through in my life and days.

I worked twelve years—just me and my girls—farming. Twelve years. Didn’t have no men help at all. And I made it.

(00:18:38)

[Music]

NARRATOR: Many men often left home and farm looking for better jobs along the river. And these rootless men became the creators and consumers of the blues.

Life on the big white river boats was hard. But it also meant freedom and money to spend, and wild good times for the roustabout.

(00:19:17)

[Music]

NARRATOR: These old time roustabouts had such fond memories of river life that they fixed up a rig to show us how the work was done and the songs were sung.

[Music]

WALTER BROWN: Me and one man! He had it on one end and I had it on other, going down the gang planks…going over, over the water. And we’d get out there and we’d stagger like that, you know, like we gonna fall with it? And just keep on rocking!

I worked on the Tennessee Belle and Kate Adams. When the Katie used to get just, she would make that blow. And that levee there would be lined with women, meeting us.

LOMAX: What would the blow be?

ARTHUR (no last name given): Three longs and one short.

BROWN: Whoooaa—whoooa—whoooaa—whuh.

LOMAX: What would happen then?

BROWN: You usually would see women come from everywhere!

LOMAX: What did they come out there for?

BROWN: Meeting they men!

ARTHUR: Meeting payday!

BROWN: Payday. Women be done take that man’s… . A whole month, they put them out then man out then because that man off the boat. He ain’t going to be there except two or three days, then they going to take him on. When that boat blowed, they’d put him out. And he’d have to stay gone until the boat go back out.

ARTHUR: He was a playboy.

BROWN: Playboy!

(00:21:04)

[Music by Owens and Spires]

(00: 21:51)

LOMAX: Did the guys on the boat know about know about those men?

WALTER BROWN: No.

ARTHUR: No, they didn’t know about it.

BROWN: I caught one at my house one time.

LOMAX: What happened?

BROWN: I left him right there, him an her. I just got my clothes and left them there.

(00:22:12)

[Music by Owens and Spires]

NARRATOR: In the competition for women and a place to stay, the bluesman with his music had a decisive advantage. As one of them told me, “I’ve got a home everywhere I go.”

(00:23:07)

EUGENE POWELL (“SONNY BOY NELSON”): If I seed a woman that I wanted, and she just absolutely . . . her husband couldn’t carry her home. I picked that guitar hard. I’d play that guitar hard and sing hard. I’ve had women come and kiss me. Didn’t ask could they kiss me, kiss me right then. Just grab me and kiss me.

(00:23:25)

[Music by Eugene Powell]

(00:24:24)

NARRATOR: And so the bluesman appealed for feminine sympathy and a place to hang his hat. The favorite subject of the blues, however, was the troubled relationship between men and women in a disturbed society. And years before the rest of the world, the people of the Delta tasted the bittersweet of modern alienation so that the blues of those days ring true for all of us now.

(00:24:45)

[Sam Chatmon singing and playing guitar]

*I told you you could go*

*And don’t come back to Sam no mo.*

*Woman, it’s your last time*

*Shaking it in the bed with me.*

*Says, I told you to your face*

*I had another good girl to shake it in your place.*

*Babe, it’s your last time*

*Shaking it in the bed with me.*

*Oh, you shake it, you can break it, hang it on the wall.*

*Throw it out the window and run round and grab it just before it falls.*

*Shake it, you can break it, hang it up on the line.*

*I don’t want your love cause it shore ain’t none of mine.*

*I told you in the spring,*

*When the birds all began to sing,*

*Woman, it’s your last time*

*Shaking it in the bed with me.*

*Well, you kicked all my cover off the bed and on the floor.*

*You better be glad, sandfoot, you ain’t gonna get to kick it no more.*

*Now you wear your miniskirt way above your knees,*

*Now you can shake your jelly with every other man you please.*

*I told you you could go*

*And don’t come back to Sam no mo.*

*Woman, it’s your last time—*

*Shaking it, I mean twisting it,*

*Doing that monkey dog,*

*And that slop in the bed with me.*

*Oh go, baby!*

SAM CHATMON: I suppose the blues is about a, about a woman. If you have the blues about a woman, your wife or anybody, and they misuse you then you go long and make up a song to sing. Instead of telling her in words, you would sing that song. So, when you be singing that song you have your mind direct on how she done treated you.

(00:27:41)

[Sam Chatmon singing]

*I went down to that river, oh, thought I’d jump and drown.*

*I thought about the woman I was loving, boys, I turned around.*

*I went down to that depot, asked the man how long the train been gone.*

*He said, “It’s been gone long enough for your woman to be at home.”*

(00:28:26)

NARRATOR: The railroad was another escape from the plantation system. It also brought jobs with a new since of competence and higher pay, and a new flowering of rhythmic work songs.

WILBUR PUCKETT: It’s a good job, I mean, you can raise a family with your job. It pays pretty good, nowadays. I started out here while… Course the rate of things back then, you didn’t make too much money, but it was enough, you know, to have a job, to support your family off of. And nowadays it’s almost the same thing. I mean you make a little bit more money but the cost of living at this time and age is (inaudible) it all. So, we just about doing about as good as we did in (19)45.

J.T. TUCKER: It was good enough for me to put five kids through high school and college too. Course it was tough, but I made it.

You talk about singing on the railroad. It’s just like a band on a football field. That band gives the team spirit to play and that singing gives you pep to work.

(00:30:11)

[Group of railroad workers singing]

*All right, now.*

*Up under the rail*

*Up on the tie,*

*Up under the rail*

*where the tie lie.*

*Up under the rail*

*Where the tie lie.*

*Up under the rail*

*Up on the tie.*

*Up under the rail*

*Where the tie lie.*

MAN: A lot of mens have got hurt handling steel. Steel is very dangerous. It’s heavy and if you don’t… . If they hadn’t have devised some method of handling that steel with a big bunch of mens, they’d always be putting our money on hospital bills and (inaudible). And they had to have some system to protect that, you know. To prevent it from happening all the time. And at best, we have accidents with it.

PUCKETT: When you come to work on Monday morning at seven o’clock and get out there on the job working, singing comes according to what job you’re doing. Now you take lining track. That singing was just a rhythm that the labor used in keeping in time and getting the track lined like your boss man wanted it. But now, singing—wasn’t no joy in it whatsoever. That was just a part of the way we men set up to work. To get the job done.

[Group demonstrates lining the track lead by track caller George Johnson]

*Well the old lady says, “You calm me down”*

*She put a hand on her hip and one on the fire*

*Good Lord,*

*have mercy*

*Good Lord,*

*have mercy*

*Good Lord,*

*have mercy*

*Alright,*

*quarter back.*

[Another work song by same group. George Johnson leads.]

*Alright, alright*

*Just a little bit*

*Just a hair*

*Just a little bit*

*Right there*

*Just a little bit*

*Just a hair*

*Just a little bit*

*Right there*

*Alrighty,*

*Jack the Rabbit,*

*Jack the Bear,*

*Just a little bit*

*Right there.*

MAN: (surveying the track, then calls to the group) Give it to me in the center.

[George Johnson sings]

*What did the hen done said to the drake*

*No more crawfish in this lake*

*Just dive*

*Other side*

*Dive*

*Other side*

*Dive*

*Other side*

*Dive*

*Dive*

MAN: Alright, did we get it? Move ahead a little bit.

[George Johnson sings]

*Alright, alright*

*Jack the Rabbit*

*Jack the Bear*

*Just a little bit*

*Just a hair*

MAN: Alright, gotta move. Train coming.

[Music]

(00:33:15)

[Scene switches from the railroad to levees]

NARRATOR: This is the blues that grew up in the shadow of the levee on which we’re riding. This earthwork thrown up against the Mississippi floods higher and longer than the Great Wall of China was piled up by generations of black muleskinners who added a new chapter to the book of the blues. In the days when the levee camps outdid the Wild West with careless violence the men yonder walked the levee living the blues. Walter Brown, Joe Savage, William S. Hart, Bill Gordon. They are meeting us at this old river towboat to swap the stories that, African style, they used to encourage their mule teams.

[Joe Savage singing]

*Lord, my wheel mule crippled,*

*And my lead mule blind.*

*Lord, I’m gon need some ol body,*

*I can’t shake a line.*

LOMAX: How many people would be singing at one time? Would everybody be singing?

WALTER BROWN: Aw, everybody and everybody. You couldn’t hear your ears. Ad some of ‘em could sing so good, till the mules would go to hollerin. They’d just holler, just holler : “Ahhhh! Ah! Ah!”–like it was twelve o’clock or something. (Laughs)

WILLIAM S. HART (regarding his team of mules): I get out there and got my team, man. I’d get way back on my a-lines, you know—driving two great big ol mules, their heads up in the air like that, their harness jinglin, tassels hangin all down the side of um, just takin their time, walkin, just walkin and walkin.

[William S. Hart singing]

*I’m gonna be late in the morning,*

*I’m gonna be late all day,*

*I’m gonna be late all day,*

*I wanna be late all day,*

*Heyyy------*

*I’m gon be late all day*

*With ol Freddie Mae.*

HART: Them big sons a guns just stepping! (laughs) They stepping with me, they pullin me up the levee! They pullin me up the levee! I’m just raring back on the lines.

(00:35:45)

NARRATOR: The work season was short. The dirt had to move. Mules died by the hundreds. And as one levee engineer remarked, “You could smell those tent cities a mile away. And there was a buzzard on every fence post.”

WALTER BROWN: People that’s been here a few years…I guess that’s why God didn’t kill ‘em all. He left somebody here to tell the story.

BILL GORDON: It be so cold out there—he wouldn’t let you go to the fire—you’d have to let your lines slip through your hands.

LOMAX: I don’t understand. Tell me how that was.

GORDON: Like your wheeler’d be goin on, you’d have two mules to it, ad the mule’d be goin along and you’d walk along an git up to the fire.

LOMAX: What was the fire doing there?

GORDON: The fire…They had a fire built for you to warm going by. You couldn’t stop at it, your wheeler couldn’t stop, but you could let the mules keep a-goin and let the lines slide through your hands till it get to the end, then you got to catch em. You could never just, say, stop at the fire and warm.

LOMAX: What would they do to you?

GORDON: Would cut your head! Beat it with a pistol or stick or something.

WALTER BROWN: They’d ride right in the middle of the pit. And Ol Man Brown used to take his hat off his head—he wore a big white Stetson, a great big one—and he’d throw it up and he’d shoot six holes in it before it hit the ground! The he’d tell somebody down there, “Hand me my hat!” And they would hand it to him and he’d say, “Now listen, I’m gon whip you if you stand and I’m gonna kill you if you run. I want you all to do so and so and so. I want you to get me some dirt. I got to finish such and such a station by such and such a time….Is there any questions?” When he asked you that he had his hand on that pistol.

William S. Hart:

Kill a nigga

Hire another one

Kill a mule

Buy another one.

BILL GORDON: Plenty of mornings you had to wait until it get light enough to work.

WALTER BROWN: That’s right!

GORDON: You’d be standing there in the dark.

BROWN: Standing there in the dark!

GORDON: And when it get light enough, then you go to work. And then you work in the evening, until it get dark and you couldn’t see how to come in.

BROWN: You weren’t locked up. But other than that it was just like the penitentiary. They paid you what they wanted. They give you what they wanted you to have. If you didn’t do it, somebody’s going to beat you up.

LOMAX: Why did you men go into those places? That’s what we don’t understand.

GORDON: We didn’t know no better.

BROWN: You couldn’t do no better. You couldn’t do no better. You was trying to leave the farms for fifty or seventy-five cents a day and go someplace where you could earn a little bit more money. But when you get in those places, well then you would earn the money but you wouldn’t get paid for it.

GORDON: Yeah, you get out there. They’d say they were going to give you fifteen dollars a week. That’s two and a half a day. Payday, he may pay you off and then he may not pay you off. Used to work out there sometimes two and three months and just give you a drag, like ten of fifteen dollars. Something to gamble around in the camp with.

[Joe Savage singing]

*Mister Charlie gave us payday, boys,*

*And Sadie gave a drag.*

*Weren’t no difference in that whoa---money*

*That the two men had.*

(00:39:30)

[Music]

[Belton Sutherland singing and playing guitar]

NARRATOR: Some of the men from the levee have, like many itinerant Delta workers, served time in jail and in the State Pen at Parchman. They brought us out into the Mississippi River bottoms to show us what it was like in the State Penitentiary in the bad old days when they were driven all day in the fields under the gun. And it was only their bluesy songs and the strength in working and singing together that kept their hearts alive under the Mississippi sun.

[Group reenacting the Parchman field work, singing “Rosie”]

*O Rosie,*

*O Lord, gal.*

*O Rosie,*

*O Lord, gal.*

*I’ve been callin you for*

*Twelve long years, Rosie*

*You raw axman wonder*

*Do you hear?*

*O Rosie*

*O Lord, gal*

*O Rosie*

*O Lord, gal*

*Go ahead and marry don’t you*

*Wait on me*

*Long road hoe till I*

*I go free.*

*O Rosie*

*O Lord, gal*

*O Rosie*

*O Lord, gal*

*Look on your finger*

*And think of me*

*Ring I bought you when I*

*I was free*

*O Rosie*

*O Lord, gal*

*O Rosie*

*O Lord, gal*

(00:42:43)

[Man singing a worksong while felling a tree with an axe]

*Big-Leg Rosie, with her big-leg drawers,*

*Got me wearin’ these striped overalls.*

*Overalls, Lordy*

*Overalls*

*Got me wearin’ striped overalls.*

*Step behind the bushes, they gon break my legs*

*Catch you foolin with my woman, I kill you dead.*

*Kill you dead.*

*Kill you dead.*

JOE SAVAGE: There was seven of us that broke jail together. We broke out of jail and they caught me. They caught me five-and-a-half years later.

LOMAX: Did they still use “the bat” when you were at Parchman?

SAVAGE: Hmm?

LOMAX: Did they still whip the prisoners when you were there?

SAVAGE: They whipped us with big, wide straps. They whipped us with big, wide straps.

LOMAX: How many blows did they give?

SAVAGE: How many blows they give? Just as many as you could stand. They whip you just….I got two whippings while I was there. They didn’t whip no clothes. They whipped your naked butt. (laughs). And they had two men to hold you.

WALTER BROWN: Four!

SAVAGE: As many as they need.

BROWN: Two on your legs and two on your arms.

LOMAX: Did they ever injury anybody that way?

SAVAGE: Wooo!

BROWN: Yeah!

SAVAGE: Kill um! Kill um!

BROWN: They’d kill um like that.

[Joe Savage singing]

(00:46:51)

[Church congregation singing]

NARRATOR: In the society of the blues it was the church—the only committed community institution—that offered solace to the wounded individual. It might bring the poor boy a long ways from home back into the human community through the ritual of conversion.

[Congregational singing]

[Reverend Caesar Smith addressing his congregation; call-and-response pattern]

REVEREND CAESAR SMITH: Do you not know tonight one thing that I like about God? He’s so just.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REVEREND CAESAR SMITH: God is a just God.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: God is so just tonight that Kennedy’s got to stand before God.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: I said, Rockefeller’s got to stand before God.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: And that means your money can’t buy you nothing.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: No matter how much money you’ve got, that can’t buy you God.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: ‘Cause what did God say? God said you are just a steward and he lended it to you for a few days.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: You know, it is not yours.

[Segues to later in the sermon. The fervor is building]

REV. SMITH: I remember one Friday morning,

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: Out there on Calgary,

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: They hung the…they hung the S-O-N on the cross.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: And the S-U-N peaked up and looked at the S-O-N

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: And the S-U-N told the S-O-N, “Two suns can shine together.”

Yes he did.

And the reason that the sun…

And now the reason that the sun don’t blind His eyes

Because He is the sun’s creator tonight.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: And what about my God tonight

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: To step out that morning and (inaudible) a universe into existence.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: God didn’t need no hammer and nail

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: God didn’t need no pliers and no screwdriver

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: God didn’t need no cement mixer and (inaudible)

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: Oooh, my God said, “Let there be.”

[Segues into later in the sermon. The fervor is at it’s climax and Rev. Smith’s words are more difficult to discern]

REVEREND CAESAR SMITH: Aaah, when God comes back

He’s goin to throw away

The (inaudible)

He’s going to take away

And leave the compassion

He’s going to take away

(inaudible)

And there ain’t goin to be left of a man

Except the Bible and (inaudible)

Ain’t nothing goin to be left of a man

But the sharp stick of His mighty (inaudible)

Lord have mercy tonight

(00:51:10)

[Congregational singing]

REVEREND CAESER SMITH [addressing the congregation]:

If shouting,

If whooping,

If moaning,

If singing was good enough for my grandmamma, I don’t care what school I finish, I’m going to do the same thing.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: Amen?

CONGREGATION: Amen!

REV. SMITH: Amen.

If it was good enough for them, it is good enough for me.

CONGREGATION: Yeah!

REV. SMITH: It brought them a long ways.

CONGREGATION: Yes it did!

REV. SMITH: It brought them a long ways.

CONGREGATION: Yes it did!

(00:52:19)

NARRATOR: Many black sermons are poems of epic beauty and their makers are magnificent orators in an African vein. In the secular world, one finds other masters of language and wit among the bluesmen and among the modern street poets. The bards of ballrooms and cafes who make and recite long fanciful poems called “toasts” in the places where the people gather for their good times.

(00:53:08)

[James Hall reciting a toast]

*December the seventh, forty-one*

*That’s when the Second World War had just begun.*

*The Italian Mussolini was holding out his part*

*And trying to get the European countries under Hitler’s law.*

*Have a little patience I will tell it to you*

*The first thing they done, they got rid of the Jews*

*But Great Britain got trouble in mind*

*She rushed the po’ boys to the foreign line*

*Better than that, the gentlemen bombed (inaudible) late one night*

*They had to look to America for to get supplies*

*They loaded up the vessel and started to cross*

*But you knew just right that the vessel was lost.*

*Mr. Roosevelt (inaudible), he said “I just can’t see*

*Why Adolph Hitler trying to rule the sea.”*

*He sent him a message (inaudible) tape on the phone*

*He say, “Hey Hitler listen, leave my vessel alone.” (inaudible)*

*But Old Toe Joe was back in the States*

*Him and (inaudible) could not communicate*

*(inaudible)*

*But she wouldn’t fight on either side.*

*She was a nation not (inaudible)*

*You know what she did, she turned to drowning*

*(inaudible) for her life*

*I don’t know it, but I was told*

*That’s the report of how our base got stole*

*And when we came in,*

*Negro soldiers standing at attention*

*They were the po’ boys never to mention.*

*But I’m a tell you about a colored man*

*December the seventh, forty-one*

*That’s when (inaudible) started manning the gun*

*He stepped on deck and he got dead aim*

*He brought a Japanese bomber down in flames.*

*Some got wounded*

*Some got killed*

*But naturally we know*

*God’s Holy Bible got fulfilled.*

*I found out later that his wife’s (inaudible)*

*I’d got my black head in the Philippines. (Laughing)*

(00:54:43)

[Johnny Brooks reciting the famous toast “Signifying Monkey”]

*Well, back in the jungle it would be*

*The bad lion stepped on the signified monkey’s feet.*

*That monkey say, “Look lion, can’t you see?*

*Why you stand yourself on my got-durn feet?”*

*So, the lion say, “I didn’t hear a got-durn word you said,*

*But you say two more and I’ll be stepping on your got-durn head.”*

*Well, everyday before the sun goes down*

*The lion was kicking butt all through the jungle town.*

*But the monkey got wise and thought to use a little his wit*

*He say he’s goin’ to put a stop to that ol rock kickin’…stuff.*

*So the lion jumped up in a bad rage*

*Like a young gangsta, full of (inaudible).*

*He let out with a roar,*

*His tail shot back like a forty-four.*

*He went off through the jungle, knocking down trees.*

*Kicking giraffe until he fell down to his knees.*

*So, he ran up on the elephant talking to the swine*

*He said, “Alright you big bad joker, it’s going to be yours or mine.”*

*So the elephant looked at the lion out the corner of his eyes*

*He said, “Go ahead on you funny bunny (inaudible),*

*and pick on somebody your own size.”*

*So the lion jumped up and made a (inaudible)*

*The elephant side stepped and kicked him dead in the grass.*

*It messed up his neck. It messed up his face.*

*Broke all four legs and snatched his you-know-what out of place.*

*He picked him up and slammed him into the trees*

*Nothing but that stuff as far as you could see.*

*So he drug his butt back to the jungle more dead than alive.*

*(inaudible) that rhyme to that monkey for some more that signified jive. (Laughing)*

[Closing Credits]

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