

The Land Where The Blues Began: 30th Anniversary Edition
Media-Generation.com (DVD)

OH, TO BE IN MISSISSIPPI. Back in the summer of 1978, when every sonic manifestation of the blues boasted a handful of revelators, each with personal firsthand experience. Alan Lomax-godfather of song-catchers; finder of Lead Belly, Fred McDowell, and Muddy Waters-led a film team through the holy land's cotton and kudzu, busily Hoovering up every such performance in its natural habitat. From down in the Delta to up in the Hills, their camera sniffed out raw truths that shed insight into why the music aches so. Lomax's scholarly narration then sewed together all of the sights and sounds-of which there's a virtual menagerie. Witness *a cappella* moans, hollers and yarns delivered by muleskinners, railroad liners, riverboat roustabouts, paroled prisoners, jukehouse toastmasters, and a shake-you-to-the-core bawler by the name of Joe Savage. Dance with Saturday sinners at an all-night picnic, naughtily balling-the-jack to the big bang of fife-and-drums. Then repent with Sunday saints inside fevered chapels and waist-deep in baptismal rivers. Attend Lonnie Pitchford's expert how-to-session on the one-string diddley-bow or Napoleon Strickland's fireside searing of cane fifes. And hang with guitarists who've been the soundtrack for decades of house parties. Such as R.L. Burnside, spooling off knotty one-chord groovers like the barbed wire against which he and his pulsing amplifier rest. And Jack Owens, worthy successor to Skip James' throne of Bentonian bleakness. He, his gold-capped grin, his hi-balling squawk, and wheezy harpist Bud Spires do their damndest to plumb newfound dismal depths from a "Catfish Blues" marathon. First-generation bluesmen crank it too. Like Eugene Powell, who dexterously cut a crate of Bluebird sides during the 1930's as Sonny Boy Nelson, and Sam Chatmon-age 81, über-whiskered, cracking foxy with double-entendres as salty fresh as those frolicking heydays with the Mississippi Sheiks. Yet most haunting is what materialized that particular muggy, buggy night out in the wilds around Canton. Belton Sutherland-never recorded before, never recorded after-gnawed on a hand-rolled smoke and a mouthful of lonesome lyrics, his loafer beating the floorboards as a drum, the drone from his archtop guitar and mudslide voice moving through you. It's trance perfection. Although he's reason alone for

trekking through **The Land Where The Blues Began**, this essential 30th Anniversary Edition DVD makes it impossible not to tag along. New documentaries from original filmmaker John Bishop offer inside scoops, while two bonus hours (!!) of music footage reveal just how extensively Mississippi sang her soul out that August and September.

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