Transcript for
The Land Where the Blues Began

Please use this text as a basis for quoting from the film.

Chapter 1
Introduction

JOHNNY BROOKS:
Ladies and gentlemen, childrens and chaps
Proud-eyed mosquitoes and bow-legged laps
Pull up a seat or either sit on the floor
I'll tell you a story you've never heard before

WALTER BROWN:
See, God taking care of me because I should have been dead forty years ago, but I was a good marksman.

BELTON SUTHERLAND:
Killed the old grey mule
Burned down the white man's barn

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

BUD SPIRES:
Didn't know what town was, did you?

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

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

BUD SPIRES:
Don't get mad with me boys
Buggy don't drive like mine
It's an easy riding buggy
Raring to go all the time

THE LAND WHERE THE BLUES BEGAN
a program by
Alan Lomax
John M. Bishop
Worth W. Long

R.L. BURNSIDE:
Poor boy and I'm a long way from home
Poor boy and I'm a long ways from home
Poor boy and I'm a long way from home
World can't do me no…

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

Chapter 2
Lonnie Pitchford

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.

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.

LONNIE PITCHFORD:
And wrap it around. OK, I nail this in tight. When you tune it, you pulls it down, like so. I don't know if you can hear it too plain, but this is actually tuning it.

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

Chapter 3
Napoleon Strickland

NAPOLEON STRICKLAND:
Lord woke up this morning
Sun shining in my back door
Lord woke up this morning baby
Sun shining in my back door
Yes yes

Wait up baby, don't you see
Shakin that thing, kill poor me
Must I…

I don't like to play this but once in awhile, you know, sometimes I get the blues.

Well burn my house
Ain't no turn around
Don't know 'bout that
Going to break it on down
Must I…

Now, when I first started, started to making them fife, all right, I'll show you. When I started there, I done my fingers like this. Now that's wet. Then I took my knife and swung it out like this: swung that out, now that's wet. I got my fingers like that. Then, I took a knife and swung this out. Then, I swung that out. All right. Got up here. Got my tongue like this.

ALAN LOMAX:
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.

This picnic music is a happy relic of the old time South hidden away in the Mississippi hills. It's like a reservoir of hot rhythms for the later blues. And it's a joyous group thing-

Chapter 4
Work Song

- while the blues tends to be solo and melancholy. It was the song of the individual farmer caught between poverty and prejudice. And you hear the first notes of the blues in the work songs he sang.

CLYDE MAXWELL:
Take it easy all right baby
Early in the morning coming back home
Ain't gonna call me I'll be gone
Down in the bottom where the water rise
Baby I'll be satisfied
Oh baby oh baby
Early in the morning oh baby sun gonna rise
Oh baby hey now

ALAN LOMAX:
Generations of steel muscled black axemen 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.

LUCIUS SMITH:
Well, here we come. Way back yonder all you worked for was your clothes. Way back yonder.

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

LUCIUS SMITH:
They'd pay you fifty cent a day, or forty cent a day. Thirty five. I picked cotton thirty-five cent a hundred. Chopped cotton from sun to sun—two bits and forty cent. My daddy let us—1900—let us chop cotton on a Saturday evening—start at one o'clock and chopped to sundown for twenty cent. That's it.

ALAN LOMAX:
As one old time bluesman told me, *It take a man that have the blues to sing the blues.*

CLYDE MAXWELL:
Will you please tell me tell me tell me tell me baby
Where you stay last night
Yeah will you please tell me tell me tell me
Baby where did you stay last night

ALAN LOMAX:
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.

CLYDE MAXWELL:
Yeah Mama told me Mama told me Mama told me
Way back 'fore I was born
Well gon be a boy child coming coming coming
Oh gonna be a rolling stone

Chapter 5
Jack Owens & Bud Spires

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

BUD SPIRES:
You didn't know what town was, did you?

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

BUD SPIRES:
In the field.

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

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

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

BUD SPIRES:
Boy, we learned something.

ALAN LOMAX:
Have you been a farmer all your life?

JACK OWENS:
All my life, been farming out here all my days. Ain't done nothing but farm…

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

JACK OWENS:
That's right, that's all I do. Nothing but a farmer. Daddys and things was a farmer. That's all I knowed. Raised chickens and a few hogs—something to eat around here. Farm out there in the field. That's all I ever knowed. That's all I ever knowed.

Oh hard times here every where I go
Lord hard times baby gal drive me to the door
Hard times baby gal drive me to the door
Door door drive me to the door
Hard times drive me to the door

I ain't gwine no higher baby
Lord blow yours down
Lord stay right here baby gal 'til you drag me
Stay right here baby gal' til you drag me down
Drag me down 'til you drag me, stay right here 'til you drag me

Lord hard times here every where I go
Hard times baby gal drive me to the door
Hard times baby gal drive me to the door
Hard times drive me to the door
Hard times baby gal drive me to the door

ALAN LOMAX:

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.

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's this old white man wasn't staying too far from us. All of them was be in the field but me; and he asked me what I was crying for. I told him I was crying because I wanted to go and 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—farmed. Twelve years. Didn't have no men help at all. And I made it.

Chapter 6
The River

SAM CHATMON:

I run down to that river
Yeah I took me a rocking chair
Now if the blues don't leave me
I'm going rock away from here
Oh yes I is baby

ALAN LOMAX:

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.

SAM CHATMON:

That's what I'm talking about boys
You know I'm gonna leave you

ALAN LOMAX:
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.

WALTER BROWN:
Come here dog and let's get your bone
Tell me what shoulder that you want it on

ALAN LOMAX:
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.

WALTER BROWN:
Everybody talk about heist it high
Nobody knows about the roustabout
Tell me gal what you been waiting on
I been away from home too long

One, me and one man would take it, he had it on one end and I had it on the other, going down the gangplank…going 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, the Kate Adams. When she used to get along yonder, she would make that blow. And that levee there would be lined with women, meeting us.

ALAN LOMAX:
What would the blow be?

WALTER BROWN:
Whoooa—whooa—whooa—whoo.

BILL GORDON:
You know what she be saying…

ALAN LOMAX:
What would happen then?

WALTER BROWN:
You would see women coming from everywhere.

ALAN LOMAX:
What did they come out there for?

WALTER BROWN:
Meeting the men!

BILL GORDON:

Payday!

WALTER BROWN:

Payday. Women be takin care of men a whole month. They put them out then 'cause that man off the boat would come in. He ain't going to be there but two or three days, then they going to take him on. When that boat blow, they'd put him out. And he would have to stay gone until the boat go back out.

BILL GORDON:

He was a playboy.

WALTER BROWN:

Playboy!

JACK OWENS & BUD SPIRES:

Lord I went to to her house
And I sat down on her steps
Come right in pretty boy
My good man just now left
Good man just now… Good man just… Good man just
Good man just… Good man just
Good man just now left
Good man just…

ALAN LOMAX:

Did you guys on the boat know about those men?

WALTER BROWN:

No.

BILL GORDON:

No, they didn't know about it.

WALTER BROWN:

No, they didn't know about it. I caught one at my house one time.

ALAN LOMAX:

What happened?

WALTER BROWN:

Huh? I left him right there, him an her. I just got my clothes and left them there.

JACK OWENS & BUD SPIRES:

Well if I can't come in
Let me sit down 'fore your door

Lord I'll leave so easy baby gal
Your good man never know
good man never… good man never, good man never…good man never…good man never

ALAN LOMAX:
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 got a home everywhere I go.*

Chapter 7
Eugene Powell

EUGENE POWELL ("SONNY BOY NELSON"):
If I see a woman that I wanted, and she just absolutely—her husband couldn't carry her home. I pick that guitar hard. I play that guitar hard and sing hard. And I've had women come and kiss me and didn't ask could they kiss me— kiss me right then. Just grab me and kiss me.

I said tell me now sweet mama
Gal how you want your rolling done
Tell me sweet mama gal
How you want your rolling done
She said slow and easy
Like my old time rider done

Roll my belly mama
Roll it like you roll my dough
Want you to roll my belly
Gal like you roll my dough
I want you to roll me sweet mama
Til I tell you I don't want no more

ALAN LOMAX:
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.

Chapter 8
Sam Chatmon

SAM CHATMON:
I told you you could go
Oh don't come back to Sam no more.
Woman, it's your last time
Shakin' 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
Shakin' 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 sure ain't none of mine

I told you in the spring
When the birds all began to sing
Woman, it's your last time
Shakin' it in the bed with me

Well, you kicked all my cover off the bed 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 more
Woman, it's your last time—
Shakin' it
I mean twisting it
Doing that monkey dog
And that slop in the bed with me
Oh go baby

I said, well, the blues is about a woman. If you have the blues about a woman, your wife or anybody, and they misuse you, then you go along 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.

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

Chapter 9
Railroad

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"

ALAN LOMAX:
The railroad was another escape route away from the plantation system. It also brought jobs with a new sense 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 the job. It pays pretty good—nowadays. I started out here—course the rate of things back in then, you didn't make too much money, but it was enough, you know, to have a job, to support your family off of. 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, it dissolves it all. So, we just about doing about as good as we did in '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.

WILBUR PUCKETT:
Right, I had seventeen of 'em.

J.T. TUCKER:
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.

RAILROAD CALLER:
All right, now
Up under the railing
Up under the tie
Up under the rail
Where the tie lie
Up under the rail
Where the tie lie
Up under the rail
Up under the tie
Up under the rail
Where the tie lie

WILBUR PUCKETT:
A lot of mens have got hurt handling steel. Steel is very dangerous. It's heavy and if they hadn't devised some method of handling that steel with a big bunch of men, they'd always be putting out money on hospital bills and injuries. And they had to have some system to protect that, you know, prevent it from happening all the time. And at its best, we have accidents with it.

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 the time and getting the track lined like the boss man wanted. But now, singing—wasn't no joy in it whatsoever. I mean, that was just a part of the way we men set up to work. To get the job done.

GEORGE JOHNSON:
What the old lady say when she come to die
She put a hand on her hip and one on her thigh
Good Lord, have mercy
Good Lord, have mercy
Good Lord, have mercy
All right, quarter back

All right, all right
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

FOREMAN:
Give it to me in the center.

GEORGE JOHNSON:
What did the hen duck say to the drake
No more crawfish in this lake
Just dive other side, dive other side
Dive other side, dive
Dive

FOREMAN:
All right, that'll get it? Move ahead a little bit.

CREW:
Move ahead there one eye. Come on there. Talk loud George.

GEORGE JOHNSON:

All right, all right
Jack the Rabbit, Jack the Bear
Just a little bit, just a hair

FOREMAN:

All right, that'll do. Clear the track; train's coming.

RAILROAD GANG:

Talk loud and draw a crowd. I want to work twenty more years.

SAM CHATMON:

I'm going down to that railroad
Lay my head on that railroad track
I'm gon think about the woman I'm loving
And man I'm gonna snatch it back

Chapter 10
Levee Camp

JOE SAVAGE:

You go down in them quarters
Tell my buddy Will
That long tall gal he's been loving
She gonna get him killed
Boys if I ever get lucky in the world again
Ain't gonna fool with no more bad women
And mighty few men

ALAN LOMAX:

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 in 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 songs that, African style, they used to encourage their mule teams.

JOE SAVAGE:

Well my wheel mule's crippled,
And my lead mule's blind
Lord, I'm want need somebody
I can't shake a line

ALAN LOMAX:

How many people would be singing at one time?

WALTER BROWN:
Oh, everybody near about. You couldn't hear your ears. And some of them could sing so good, 'til the mules would go to hollering. They'd just holler—just holler , like it was twelve o'clock or something.

WILLIAM S. HART:
I'd get out there and got my team, then. Get way back on the end of my line, you know. Two great big old mules, trace straps all on them. Their heads up in the air like that with them harnesses on them. Wearing tassels hanging all down the side of them. Just taking my time, just walking and walking.

I'm gonna be late in the morning,
I'm gonna be late all day,
I'm gonan be late all day,
I'm gonna be late all day,
Hey, hey, hey, hey
I'm gonna be late all day
With old Freddie Mae

Them big son of a guns just stepping, just stepping with me. They pulling me up the levee! They pulling me up the levee! I'm just raring back on the lines.

WALTER BROWN:
Oh, everybody try to call me mean
'Cause they see me whipping on my old mule team.

ALAN LOMAX:
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:
You know, 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'd be so cold out there, they wouldn't let you go to the fire. You'd have to let your lines slip through your hands.

ALAN LOMAX:
I don't understand. Tell me how that was exactly.

BILL GORDON:
Like your wheeler'd be going along—you have two mules to it, and the mules be going along you'd walk along and get up to the fire and...

ALAN LOMAX:

What was the fire doing there?

BILL GORDON:

They'd 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-going and let the lines slide through your hands till you get to the end, then you got to catch 'em. You couldn't never just say, "stop" at the fire and warm.

ALAN LOMAX:

What would they do to you?

BILL GORDON:

Cut your head! Beat it with a pistol, stick or something.

WALTER BROWN:

They'd ride right in the middle of the pit and old 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 gonna whip you if you stand and I'm gonna kill you if you run. I want ya'll 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… And is there any questions?" When he asked you that, he'd have his hand on that pistol.

WILLIAM S. HART:

Kill a nigger, hire another one
Kill a mule, buy another one.

BILL GORDON:

Plenty of mornings you had to wait until it get light enough to go to work. You be standing there in the dark. Then when it get light enough, then you go to work. Then you'd work in the evening, 'til you couldn't see how to come in.

WALTER BROWN:

('Til it get too dark to see.)

You wasn't locked up, but other than that it was just like the penitentiary. They paid you what they wanted. They gave you what they wanted you to have. If you didn't do it, somebody's going to beat you up.

ALAN LOMAX:

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

BILL GORDON:

We didn't know no better.

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

BILL GORDON:
Yeah, you get out there and they'd say they were going to give you fifteen dollars a week, that's two and a half a day. And payday, he may pay you off and then he may not pay you off. He just work you out there sometimes two and three months, just give you a drag, like ten or fifteen dollars, something to gamble around in the camp with.

JOE SAVAGE:
Mister Charlie gave 'em payday boys,
Instead he give a drag.
Wasn't no difference in the money that the two men had.

Chapter 11
Prison Songs

BELTON SUTHERLAND:
Killed that old grey mule
Burned down a white man's barn
Killed that old grey mule
Burned down a white man's barn
I didn't mean no trouble
I didn't mean no harm

I want you to love me or leave me girl
Anything you want to do
I want you to love me or leave me girl
Anything you want to do
Well it's strange things happening
Someday might happen to you

ALAN LOMAX:
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 have 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 of working and singing together that kept their hearts alive under the Mississippi sun.

WORK GANG:
Oh Rosie oh Lord gal
Oh Rosie oh Lord gal
I've been callin' you for twelve long years, Rosie

You won't answer, wonder do you hear
Oh Rosie oh Lord gal
Oh Rosie oh Lord gal
Go ahead and marry don't you wait on me
Long haul over and I can't go free.
Oh Rosie oh Lord gal
Oh Rosie oh Lord gal
Look on your finger gal and think of me
Ring I bought you when I was free
Oh Rosie oh Lord gal
Oh Rosie oh Lord gal

JOE SAVAGE:

Big leg Rosie with her big leg drawers
Got me wearing these striped overalls
Overalls Lordy overalls
Got me wearing striped overalls
Jump in the bushes, they gonna break my leg
Catch you fooling with my woman
I kill you dead
Kill you dead
Kill you dead

It was seven of us broke jail together. We broke this county jail. They caught me; they caught me five-and-a-half years later.

ALAN LOMAX:

Did they still use the "bat" in Parchman when you were there? Did they whip the prisoners when you were there?

JOE SAVAGE:

They whipped us with big, wide strops. They whipped us with big, wide strops.

ALAN LOMAX:

How many blows did they give?

JOE 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. Had two men to hold you.

WALTER BROWN:

Four!

JOE SAVAGE:

As many as they need.

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

ALAN LOMAX:
Did they ever injury anybody that way?

WALTER BROWN:
Oh yeah! They'd kill um like that.

JOE SAVAGE:
Got me accused of thieving
I can't see a thing
They got me accused of forgery
And I can't even write my name
Bad luck bad luck is killing me
Boys I just can't stand no more of this third degree

Now looka here boy
I wanna tell you something
They got me accused of taxes
And I don't have a lousy dime
They got me accused of children
And ain't not one of them mine
Bad luck bad luck is killing me
Boys I just can't stand no more of this third degree
I'm gone so baby so long

Chapter 12
Religion

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

REVEREND HART:
Lie down thy weary one lie down

CONGREGATION:
Lie down thy weary one…

REVEREND CAESAR SMITH:
Do you not know tonight
One thing I like about God?
He's so just tonight.
God is a just God.

God is so just tonight
Kennedy's got to stand before God.
I said, Rockefeller's got to stand before God
And that means your money can't buy you nothing.
No matter how much money you got,
That can't buy it with God.
So look what God said.
God said—you are just a steward
And He lended it to you for a few days.
Amen. It's not yours.

I remember one Friday morning,
Out there on Calvary,
They tell me that they hung the S-O-N on the cross.
And tell me that the S-U-N peeped up and looked at the S-O-N
And say that the S-U-N told the S-O-N
"Two suns can shine together."
Yes he did.
And the reason that the sun, amen
The reason that the sun don't blind His eyes is because
He is the sun's creator tonight.

Look at my God.
Look at my big old God tonight
That step out that morning and spoke a blooming universe into existence.
God didn't need no hammer or no nail
God didn't need no pliers or no screwdriver
God didn't need no cement mixer to pour the foundation
All my God said is , "Let there be…"

So when God come back
He gonna to throw away the straw of pity
He gonna to take away the leaves of compassion
He gonna to take away, I say, the feathers of his mercy
Ain't gonna be nothing left in the nest
But the briars of indignation
Ain't nothing gonna be left in the nest
But the sharp stick of His mighty wrath
Lord have mercy tonight
Let me close here, brethren

I say, God will stir you up tonight. I say He'll stir you up.
He stirred me up one day. He'll stir you up
I say, can He stir you up?
Oh yes, if you know it say "Yes" children."
Yes, yes, oh yes

If I was you I'd come tonight.
I say I tried Him tonight.
How many of y'all tried Him? Have you tried Him?
Yeah, ain't He all right? Ain't He all right tonight children?
He all right tonight.
The reason I know is He's all right. He's all right.
He's all right. Have you heard about Him? Have you heard about Him?
Don't worry.

SHOUTER:

Do what the spirit say do
If the spirit say pray
You ought'a pray oh Lord
Do what the spirit say do
You ought'a do what the spirit say do
If the spirit say do
You ought'a do oh Lord
Do what the spirit say do

If the spirit say moan
You ought'a moan oh Lord
Do what the spirit say do
You ought'a do what the spirit say do
If the spirit say do
You ought'a do oh Lord
Do what the spirit say do

REVEREND CAESER SMITH:

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. Amen. Amen. If it were good enough for them, it is good enough for me. It brought 'em a long ways. It brought 'em a long ways.

Chapter 13
Toasts

ALAN LOMAX:

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 bar rooms and cafes who make and recite long fanciful poems called "toasts" in the places where the people gather for their good times.

JAMES HALL:

December the seven, forty-one
That's when the Second World War had just begun.
They tell me Mussolini was holding out his paw
And trying to get the European countries under Hitler's law.

First have a little patience I'm gonna 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 poor boys to the firing line
Better than that, the Germans bombed beautiful Paris late one night
They had to look to America for to get supplies
They loaded up the vessel and started across
But the news reached back that the vessel was lost.

Mr. Roosevelt didn't say that, he said "I just can't see
Why Adolph Hitler trying to rule the sea."
He sent him a message right straight from the phone
say, "Looka here Hitler, leave my vessel alone."
But ole Tojo looked back in the States
Him and Mussolini could not communicate
Old Japan went a hushing by
she wouldn't fight on either side.
She was a nation that wouldn't argue
But you know what she done, turned around and bombed Pearl Harbor
I don't know, but I was told
That's the way Pearl Harbor base got stole.

Well here's where we came in at.

Negro soldiers standing at attention
They were the poor boys in every dimension.
But I'm gonna to tell you about a colored man
December the seven, forty-one
That's when the Yanks started mighty 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 to fulfill.

I found out later there was a ration on rubber, so was gasoline
I had to get my black head in the Philippines.
That's where I was, so help me God.

JOHNNY BROOKS:

Well, back in the jungle it woods deep
The bad lion stepped on the signifying monkey's feet.
That monkey say, "Look lion, can't you see?
Why you standing yourself on my God-durn feet?"
So, the lion said, "I don't hear a God-dern word you said,
But you say two more and I'll be stepping on your God-dern head."
Well, everyday before the sun go down
The lion would kick his butt all through the jungle town.
But the monkey got wise and started using a little of his wit
He say I'm gonna to put a stop to this old rot-kicking stuff.

So the lion jumped up in a bad rage
Like a young gangsta, full of gauge
He lit out with a roar, his tail shot back like a forty-four.
He went off through the jungle, knocking down trees.
Kicking giraffes til they fell down to their knees.
So, he ran up on the elephant talking to the square
Said, "Alright you big bad joker, gon be yours or mine."
So the elephant looked out at the lion with the corner of his eye
Said, "Go ahead on you little funny bunny mother and pick on somebody your own size."

So the lion jumped up and made a fancy pass
The elephant side-stepped and kicked him dead in the grass.
It messed up his neck, messed up his face.
Broke all four legs, snatched his you-know-what out of place.
He picked him up and slammed him through 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.
Just to run into that monkey with some more of his signifying jive.

Chapter 14
Credits

THE LAND WHERE THE BLUES BEGAN

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"SHAKE IT IN THE BED" COMPOSED BY SAM CHATMON
A production of
The Mississippi Authority for Educational Television
&
Alan Lomax

This speech was a compromise that Alan never liked and which killed the momentum in the opening of the film. So it was removed from the film as presented in this DVD. It is a good speech, and is on the DVD as an extra—

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.

WORK GANG:

Oh Rosie oh Lord gal
Oh Rosie oh Lord gal

ALAN LOMAX:

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 farm, river, railroad and levee, creating a new music out of their loneliness and their deprivation. Music that, once heard, can never be forgotten.