

Muddy Waters

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Early Life

- McKinley Morganfield was born April 4th 1915 in Rolling Fork Mississippi. He was Raised by his Grandmother as his mother died at the age of three.
- Working as a farm laborer for several years at the age of 13 he began to play and master the harmonica. Four years later he would switch to the bottleneck guitar
- Waters was first recorded in 1941 when Alan Lomax visited him for the folk song collection of the Library of Congress.



Early Career

- In 1943 Muddy Waters moved to Chicago and never looked back. He would begin by playing house parties and small taverns across the slums of the City
- Working as a truck driver he was able to persuade the owners of the small independent records to sign and begin to record his first songs
- Waters scored his first hit the singles in 1948 with “I Can't Be Satisfied” and “I Feel Like Going Home” and his career began to take off.

Rise to Prominence

- After Several years Waters was able to assemble one of the most acclaimed bands of blues history in America with Little Walter on harmonica, Crawford on the Bass Water's Bottleneck Guitar and later Jimmy Rodgers.
- He would then subsequently begin to make some of his biggest hits with "I Just Want To Make Love To You," "Hoochie Coochie Man" and "I'm Ready" (1954), "Just To Be With You" (1956) and several others
- All throughout the 50s Waters' sound would be one the dominant post war blues styles. Many would go on to emulate his style and artists that worked with him would go on to have wild success.

Late Career

- The 50's gave way to the 60s and the once popular blues sounds began to take a backseat to the various forms of modern black dance music
- A new young white middle class audience would become enchanted with blues along with the blues boom in Britain keeping Water's music popular.
- He would continue to perform uninterrupted until he died quietly in his sleep on April 30th 1983 in Westmont, Illinois

Musical Style of Muddy Waters



- Was a modern Blues icon singing "Mississippi-Delta" styled music
- Came out with a 78-rpm single (1948) that contained instant hit songs such as "I Can't Be Satisfied" and "I Feel Like Going Home"

Why Was Muddy Waters Successful with His Music Style?

- Muddy Waters' use of guitar amplification was a new technique in the 1950's
- This new style of music accompanied by the sharp, powerful, exciting vocals of Muddy Waters dragged in listeners
- The postwar Blues that he sang with a touch of bitterness in his voice hit home to audiences around the country
- He expressed the emotions of many in the South with his characteristic, pain-filled voice

Timeline of Muddy Waters Style Changes

- Began playing the harmonica at the age of thirteen (1938)
- Picked up the guitar in 1942 and quickly mastered the bottleneck guitar style that fit so seamlessly with his vocals
- Honed his talents in the guitar and deep, powerful singing playing at any venue he could find over the next couple of years
- Early 1950's he hooked up with other musicians and made a few immediate hits playing the harmonica and singing while accompanied by a bottleneck guitar style

Timeline Continued

- In the mid-1950's Waters' song-writing was almost strictly urban
- He was accompanied throughout the rest of his career by multiple now-famous artists, all who adapted to his postwar Blues style and learned from him
- Many successful pianists, guitarists, harmonic players and singers owe their careers to the deep, powerful singing and pain-driven, exceptional guitar playing of the great Muddy Waters

Influences on Muddy Waters

- Main influences on Muddy Waters
 - Son House, Robert Johnson - Delta "bottleneck" style of guitar playing that Waters picked up around age 13
 - Johnson influence can be heard in Waters' earlier commercial recordings
 - Delta blues musicians had influence on Waters' voice
 - Delta blues musicians include Charley Patton, Robert Johnson, Son House, Tommy Johnson
- Charlie Patton
 - Muddy Waters listened to Patton's records a lot when he was young

Muddy Waters' Influence on R&R/Blues

- Eric Clapton
 - said in an interview with NPR that he was greatly influenced by Waters' guitar playing - it's what kept him playing
- The Rolling Stones
 - Named their band after Waters' hit "Rollin' Stone"
- *Rolling Stone* magazine
 - Also named after Waters' song "Rollin' Stone"
- Buddy Guy, Magic Sam, Otis Rush
 - Among other artists who have been influenced by Waters' style
- Bob Dylan's hit "Like a Rolling Stone"

Muddy Waters' Influences on R&R/Blues, Con't

- Many Muddy Waters band members went on to form their own separate groups, which spread the Muddy Waters' style further
 - All of these groups were indebted to Waters' style in some aspect
 - Some former band members include Jimmy Rogers, Luther Johnson, Otis Spann, James Cotton, among others
- Chicago-style Blues (postwar blues) remains indebted to Waters - his music is the "yardstick" for which to compare other groups to.

Other Music of the 1950s

- Some other important R&R figures in the 50s:
 - Chuck Berry
 - Elvis Presley
 - Little Richard
 - Fats Domino
 - Buddy Holly
- The rock and roll style of artists such as Chuck Berry, who also was black and played the guitar, show some similarity to the blues style of Muddy Waters
- The subcategory of Gospel Rock is similar to the music of Muddy Waters, as it was also derived from R&B music as was Muddy Waters' music background

The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927

- Heavy rains throughout the winter and spring of 1927 caused levees along the Mississippi River to fail, flooding 27,000 square miles of land
- Relief efforts in the Mississippi Delta (home of the heaviest flooding) strongly favored the white and wealthier residents
- Blacks in Greenville, MS were forced to work on rebuilding the levees without pay, and were even driven back at gunpoint by the National Guard if they tried to leave
- President Coolidge ignored the disaster area, refusing to visit



Racial Tensions and Fallout of the Flood

- Herbert Hoover, Secretary of Commerce, became a “hero” by assembling a special committee to handle the emergency and also gain publicity for himself
- Hoover became the 1928 Republican nominee for president largely based on this, but...
- Hoover kept reports from the Colored Advisory Commission secret from the media as he refused to do anything about the unfair treatment of blacks until after the election

Impact of the Flood on the Black Population

- The commission called on blacks to switch allegiance from Hoover's Republicans to FDR and the Democrats due to Hoover's lack of help for the black community
- Blues scene shifted northward to Chicago as blacks attempted to leave the Delta and farming jobs for industry to the north, where Muddy Waters would acquire his fame as a blues legend



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