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## *Oil Well Blues: African American Oil Patch Songs<sup>1</sup>*

BY JOE W. SPECHT

In 1901, William Joseph Philp was roughnecking at Spindletop, the prolific oil field near Beaumont, Texas, that roared in with the Lucas gusher, and he recounted, "Now one time there was a bunch of colored folks went out there to work and I had a brother in that gang. He says, 'Now, they won't allow no nigger to do oil work. They can drive a truck and go through there with a little lumber and anything like that, you can have nigger drivers. But you can't get out and take the brake and drill for oil. We just won't stand for it.'" <sup>2</sup> Frank Dunn also worked on a rig at Spindletop, noting, "The work [on earthen tanks] was done by the Negroes ... They decided that it would be better off to have the nigger away from the field. They felt like at that time that they were taking up jobs that some white man probably would be glad to have." <sup>3</sup> And for the next half-century, this code of exclusion prevailed in the oil fields of the Gulf-Southwest (Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico).

Employment opportunities for black males in the patch were limited primarily to mule-skinner and teamster jobs hauling equipment and wood to the rigs, doing dirt work, building earthen tanks, and the occasional assignment on a pipeliner crew. <sup>4</sup> At Baytown, Texas, African Americans helped to build the refinery for the Humble Oil & Refining Company, and many of them hired on as unskilled refinery workers, over the protests and resistance of white workers. <sup>5</sup>

With oil and natural gas discoveries in the Permian Basin of West Texas, African Americans found jobs in oil company camps as janitors, cooks, and mechanics. <sup>6</sup> Jim Crow laws and local customs further impeded chances for a black man to roughneck

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on a rig, where mobility and the capability to move from boom to boom were necessities: restaurants and cafes regularly excluded African Americans, and public housing, always in short supply in any boomtown, whether it be a shotgun shack, tent, or flophouse cot, was off limits, too.<sup>7</sup>

Even with racial discrimination deep-seated in the petroleum industry, African American songsters and bluesmen with roots in the Gulf-Southwest were among the first to record songs with petroleum-related themes.<sup>8</sup> Twelve years after the Lucas well blew in at Spindletop, references to the Beaumont field were already circulating. Walter Prescott Webb, then a high school history teacher in Beeville, Texas, transcribed eighty stanzas of what would soon be labeled a “blues” he collected from Floyd Canada, a young black man also living in Beeville.<sup>9</sup> Webb dubbed Canada’s composition “The African Iliad.” He appended a selection of stanzas in an article published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1915, including the following verse.<sup>10</sup>

Train I ride doan burn no coal at all,  
It doan burn nothin’ but Texas Beaumont oil;  
That’s the long train they calls the Cannon Ball,  
It makes a hundred miles and do no stoppin’ at all.<sup>11</sup>

“Texas Beaumont oil” is, of course, a reference to Spindletop, and how the abundant discovery there prompted many industries to convert from coal to oil. Even though Floyd Canada never recorded the so-called “African Iliad,” the verse referring to “Texas Beaumont oil” later turned up in Big Boy Cleveland’s 1927 “Goin’ to Leave You Blues” (Gennett 6108).<sup>12</sup>

One of the earliest known recordings of an oil field-themed song is Blind Lemon Jefferson’s “Oil Well Blues” (Paramount 12771), which dates to 1929.<sup>13</sup> Jefferson was born in 1893 on a sharecropper farm in Couchman, Texas, north of Wortham in Freestone County.<sup>14</sup> The cause of his blindness is unknown, but by the time he had reached his teens, Lemon was an accomplished musician. He started out playing country dances and picnics

in the area and on street corners in Wortham, Streetman, and Grosbeck before venturing north to Dallas and the fabled Deep Ellum district. Jefferson began recording for Paramount Records in late 1925, waxing nearly one-hundred sides over the next four years.<sup>15</sup> His impact and success was instantaneous. As blues scholar David Evans notes, “Jefferson was the first community-based folk blues singer/guitarist to become a star on phonograph records.”<sup>16</sup> Years later Yazoo Records, a company that specializes in reissuing early rural American music, proclaimed him “King of the Country Blues.”<sup>17</sup>

In the early 1920s, Jefferson divided much of his time between Dallas, Wortham, and Mexia.<sup>18</sup> 1920 was also the year the No. 1 Henry well blew in at Mexia, the first of several fields found in the Woodbine Fault-Line that stretched along the Mexia Fault Zone.<sup>19</sup> The strike set off a boom so out of control that Texas Rangers and Federal prohibition agents were summoned, along with support from the Texas National Guard, to quell the corruption and violence.<sup>20</sup> Other discoveries in the Woodbine sand included the Wortham field in 1924. With all this drilling activity going on around him, Lemon incorporated a petroleum-related motif into one of his tunes. “Oil Well Blues” was just one of several of Jefferson’s songs that dealt with the pleasures of the flesh, and he instilled the sexually charged lyrics with irony and humor.<sup>21</sup>

The terminology of the patch readily lent itself to sexual allusions: laying pipe, pump jacks rocking, rotating tool, etc. Author Bill Porterfield, who grew up in the oil fields of Texas in the late 1930s and early 1940s, observed: “A rig was sexual. Male joints fit into female, with the help of pipe dope, and between the hot plug and the hot tube there was a lot of plugging and stabbing and swabbing and gushing. If the jerker pump slipped on a soft rope, you pulled the sucker rod, pronounced it a one-lunger peckernneck with a slack wallop, and stacked it with the dead line and wished for a nipple-up horsecock.”<sup>22</sup>

In “Oil Well Blues,” Jefferson – accompanying himself on acoustic guitar – incorporated references to oil blowing in, long

distance drilling, wildcatting, and the Woodbine sand. This last reference gave the song a pointed, personal flavor as the Woodbine Fault-Line ran through his home counties of Freestone and Limestone.

Ain't nothing, mama, don't get scared at all,  
It ain't nothing, mama, don't get scared at all,  
There's a long distant well and it's blowing in oil, that's all.

Ain't nothing to hurt you, ain't nothing that's bad,  
Ain't nothing can hurt you, honey, ain't nothing bad,  
It's the first oil well that your little farm ever had.

I'm a long distance driller and wildcat the country through,  
I'm a long distance driller and wildcat the country through,  
But I'm done wildcatting if I bring in this well for you.

I'm a mean oil well driller, been a driller since I been a man,  
I'm a mean oil well driller, been a driller since I been a man,  
And I don't stop drilling till I strikes that Woodbine sand.<sup>23</sup>

Although Jefferson did not use specific drilling terminology, English blues authority Paul Oliver lists "Oil Well Blues" in the category of blues songs with mechanical and industrial themes.<sup>24</sup> And certainly record buyers could relate directly to the images of the patch, sexual symbolism aside.

Walter Davis' roots were in Mississippi, not the Southwest; Davis was born in 1912 in Grenada, Mississippi. After running away from home, he found his way to St. Louis in 1925.<sup>25</sup> Here he drew the notice of the influential barrelhouse pianist Roosevelt Sykes. In 1930, when Davis began recording for Victor Records and its Bluebird subsidiary, Roosevelt Sykes, under the pseudonym Willie Kelly, provided appropriate piano accompaniment on several early sessions, including one that took place in Dallas.<sup>26</sup> His association with Victor Records offered Davis the opportunity to tour outside of St. Louis, and he made frequent swings into the Lone Star State.<sup>27</sup> As Davis

told Paul Oliver, “We went all round Dallas, Texas ... and then there was, well down in Galveston, Texas and different places on the way.”<sup>28</sup> There were bookings to be had, too, in East Texas oil boomtowns such as Longview, Kilgore, Gladewater, and Tyler. Here Davis could observe firsthand the fast-buck artists and hustlers who swarmed to take advantage of roustabouts with paychecks in their pockets. From these experiences, he crafted “Oil Field Blues” (Bluebird B-5390) in 1933.<sup>29</sup>

Not all boomtowns were teeming with gamblers and prostitutes, but there were plenty of bustling burgs that could accommodate ‘round-the-clock temptations. George Parker Stoker, a physician who practiced medicine in the East Texas oil fields in the early twentieth century, described the gambling house atmosphere: “It was ablaze with light. Pimps, professional gamblers, drillers, gun-men, and business men stood at the bar drinking, arguing, swearing, and telling filthy stories ... Games were being played by tense, excited men ... Earnings of a week were tossed on a number or a roll of the dice and lost ... Stacks of currency, piles of gold and silver stood in front of the eager-eyed players. Numbers were droned. The click of dice, the whirl of the wheel, wild laughter, and oaths filled the air.”<sup>30</sup>

African American card sharps and dice peddlers were also part of the mix. Rembert “Itsie” Collins operated a black juke joint outside of Mineola, Texas, in Wood County, and he could shuffle a deck, too. “Lots of colored people had oil [if they had retained their mineral rights], and they didn’t know what to do with the money. Wherever gamblin’ be at, that’s where I be, and when the East Texas oil field opened up [in 1930], I made my headquarters in Kilgore ... I made so much money there, I was scared to go to sleep.”<sup>31</sup>

Davis’ recordings for Bluebird earned him a reputation as lyrical storyteller.<sup>32</sup> And “Oil Field Blues” – with buoyant piano backing from Roosevelt Sykes – encapsulated the cold calculation, deliberate preparation, and the potential for violence that was all part of the freelance professional gambler’s lifestyle.

I'm going out on that oil field, tell me it's they payday over there  
 I'm going out on that oil field, tell me it's they payday over there  
 Goin' to carry my cards and dice, and I ain't goin' to play nothin' fair.

Goin' to carry my own Winchester, my .38 Special, too  
 Goin' to carry my own Winchester, my .38 Special, too  
 Because I don't know what may happen, I may have some shooting to do."

The discovery at Spindletop set off a frenzy of drilling activity in Louisiana, too. Jennings, now the parish seat of Jefferson Davis Parish, is about ninety miles east of Beaumont. Salt domes here were similar to the ones found at Spindletop, and in September 1901, nine months after the Texas boomer, the first strike in the Jennings field came in. The Louisiana petroleum industry had come of age.<sup>33</sup>

In adjacent Evangeline Parish, Amédé Ardoin was the seventh of seven sons of black Creole parents. Born in 1898 on a farm on Bayou Nezipqué, Amédé learned to play the accordion sitting in a chair before his feet could touch the ground.<sup>34</sup> He tried his hand at sharecropping in his teens but eventually realized he could make a living solely with his music. Dennis McGee, a Cajun fiddler from Eunice, became a willing partner, and the two began playing together for white dances in "Kaplan, at Bayou Noir, Lake Charles, everywhere."<sup>35</sup> Economic times were good with the Jennings field still producing and with ever-growing refining capability at refinery centers at Baton Rouge and Lake Charles.

McGee joined Ardoin for his first recording session in 1929 in New Orleans for Columbia Records. Here the biracial duo cut such classics as "Two Step de Eunice" and "Two Step de Prairie Soileau," tunes that have become standards of the Cajun and Creole (and later zydeco) songbook.<sup>36</sup> Musician and folklorist Michael Doucet describes Ardoin as "perhaps the most elusive and influential of all Louisiana French musicians ... [he] anchored the blues in French folk songs."<sup>37</sup>

Ardoin's Columbia releases, along with those of Joe and Cleoma Falcon, who had recorded for Columbia the previous year, were

popular sellers and convinced the major record companies there was a market for Louisiana French music.<sup>38</sup> Short of stature, Ardoin earned the affectionate nickname “Tite Nègre” or “the little black guy.”<sup>39</sup> And today both Cajun and Creole musical communities claim him as their own.<sup>40</sup>

Ardoin’s brand of African American French music is characterized by a driving, syncopated accordion combined with fervent vocals sung in Louisiana French dialect. Many of the thirty-four songs he recorded are lamentations to women who have done the singer wrong. Roots music historian Tony Russell surmises: “The deepest impression left by Ardoin’s music is of a spirit near the end of its tether ... and, in a phrase that recurs in virtually every song [Amédé is] ‘tout seul’ – all alone.”<sup>41</sup>

“La Vales des Chantiers Pétrolipères” (Decca 17002) or “Waltz of the Oil Fields” certainly fit the pattern: bounding accordion, vibrant vocals, and ‘tout seul.’ Ardoin recorded the song in New York City for Decca Records at his final session on December 22, 1934.<sup>42</sup>

Oh, me, I’m going, me I’m going  
 Me, I’m going to the house all alone  
 Me, I’m going, I’m telling you  
 You, yeah, oh, come on and see me.

I’m going because of what you did  
 Me, I’m going to the oil wells  
 To go to the dance, to see the pretty women  
 Oh, it’s over there you’ll have to go.

Oh, it’s beautiful!  
 Oh, for what you’ve done I’m going off to the oil field

For me to be able to go walk  
 I’m going to the dance to see the pretty women  
 Oh, it’s over there you have to go to have a good time.

You, for what you’ve done, doll,



Me, I'm all alone, me, I'm going to the oil wells  
I'm never gonna' come back  
To see you, because of all you've done to me."<sup>43</sup>

As the title indicated, the "oil field" and "oil wells" are interwoven into Amédé's narrative of recrimination: "Oh, for what you've done I'm going off to the oil field." At the time, a black man would have been an oddity working on a rig, but for Ardoin's listening audience, white or black, no one was immune from the specter of derricks sprouting throughout the region. "La Valse des Chantiers Pérolipères" provides further evidence of how the ubiquity of petroleum in the Pelican State had literally oozed into the public conscience.

In 1940, folklorist John A. Lomax arrived in Shreveport, Louisiana, with plans to record some of the local talent for the Folksong Archive of the Library of Congress. He also drove to Mooringsport, located north of Shreveport in Caddo Parish, in an attempt to contact the family of Huddie Ledbetter (Lomax had first encountered Ledbetter – aka Leadbelly – in 1933 when Ledbetter was an inmate in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola). Here he met Huddie's uncle, Bob Ledbetter, who took Lomax to Oil City to see his thirty-three year old grandson Noah Moore.<sup>44</sup> Noah worked in and around Mooringsport as a sharecropper, playing music on the side.<sup>45</sup> Lomax described Moore as "resemble[ing] Leadbelly physically (he would like to imitate him as a guitar player, but Noah works at his job too closely, he doesn't practice pickin' enough)."<sup>46</sup> Lomax decided to record both Uncle Bob and his grandson Noah on October 10, 1940, in a hotel in Oil City.<sup>47</sup>

Oil City, Louisiana, was one of the boomtowns that popped up near Caddo Lake after the discovery of oil there in 1906.<sup>48</sup> Flaming gas wells lit the sky at night, and one well is reported to have burned uncontrolled for five years.<sup>49</sup> Neighboring Mooringsport acquired the sobriquet "City of Derricks."<sup>50</sup> Camp followers, speculators, and oil field workers quickly descended on Caddo Parish. African Americans were part of the

rush, too, although their job opportunities were confined largely to domestic and menial work.<sup>51</sup>

Noah Moore entitled one of the songs he recorded “Oil City Blues” (AFS 3993 B 1). Clocking in at nine minutes, “Oil City Blues” offered a unique chance to sample a blues song that ran beyond the confines of the three-to-four minute limitation of the 78 rpm record.<sup>52</sup> Moore’s narrative combined phrases from a variety of sources, but in selected verses, he still called forth a sense of place: Oil City, Louisiana, a town on the edge, overflowing with opportunities for good times.<sup>53</sup>

Baby, here I am sittin’ in your Oil City town  
 Baby, here I am sittin’ in your Oil City town  
 And every time some other man come around,  
 baby, you try to turn me down.

I say Oil City town is the place I’m longin’ to be  
 I say Oil City town is the place I’m longin’ to be  
 I got a brown skin woman waitin’ there for me  
 I say I got a brown skin gal a waitin’ there for me.

I stood on the corner, ‘til my feet got soakin’ wet  
 I stood on the corner, ‘til my feet got soakin’ wet  
 I was tryin’ to make friends with every Oil City girl I met.

When he was eight years old, Sam “Lightnin” Hopkins saw Blind Lemon Jefferson perform at a church social in Buffalo, Texas, and he received some impromptu guitar instruction from the bluesman.<sup>54</sup> Hopkins was born in 1912 on a farm outside of Centerville, Texas, in Leon County.<sup>55</sup> In his early twenties, he partnered with an older cousin, Alger “Texas” Alexander, who had been recording since 1927.<sup>56</sup> The pair wandered around the east central part of Texas playing for house parties and picnics in places such as Crockett, Grapeland, Patterstein, Oakwood, Normangee, Flynn, and Marquez.<sup>57</sup> Hopkins continued to master his craft, eventually moving to Houston and the Third Ward in 1939.<sup>58</sup>

Houston in 1939 was a burgeoning oil supply and equipment center. It was also a petroleum transportation hub with the presence of the Houston Ship Channel and converging railroads and pipelines. And the city was headquarters to major and independent oil and natural gas producers.<sup>59</sup> Although Hopkins stuck close to his home turf in the Third Ward busking on Dowling Street, he did have occasion to interact with Bayou City oilmen. In the early 1940s, according to Mack McCormick, who recorded and managed Hopkins for a time, the bluesman performed in the guise of “a jester by the swimming pool for the parties of the oil rich.”<sup>60</sup>

By 1946, Hopkins’s local reputation on Dowling Street as picker and singer earned him an audition with Aladdin Records in Los Angeles. Here he acquired the moniker “Lightnin’” (the record company teamed him with fellow Houstonian Wilson “Thunder” Smith and decided to promote the two as “Thunder” and “Lightnin’”).<sup>61</sup> At the initial session, Hopkins and Smith recorded “Katie Mae Blues” (Aladdin 167).<sup>62</sup> “Katie Mae Blues” was Lightnin’s homage to a “good girl ... she don’t run around at night ... Katie Mae will treat you right.” It proved to be a regional jukebox favorite.<sup>63</sup> One verse is especially relevant here.

You know she walks just like  
She got oil wells in her backyard.  
Yes, you’ll never hear that woman whoop and holler  
And cry talking ‘bout these times being hard.

“Katie Mae Blues” was a song with attitude, not only how one carried oneself but also attitude as a state of mind or disposition, and the phrase – “you know she walks just like she got oil wells in her backyard” – still resonates.<sup>64</sup> Chris Strachwitz, the owner of Arhoolie Records, met Hopkins in 1959. “To me, he was the only real folk poet, the deepest bluesman I ever knew,” Strachwitz recalled. “His mind was just full of images.”<sup>65</sup> There is also a hint of reality in the image depicting “oil wells in her

backyard.”

The oil and natural gas discoveries in East Texas provided opportunities for African American landowners to profit. Novelist and literary critic Ralph Ellison could even facetiously conjure up “a white-skinned Negro with brown freckles who owns sixteen oil wells sunk in a piece of Texas land ....”<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, however, many black farmers who owned their own property were persuaded or duped into selling the mineral rights.<sup>67</sup> Others held on and leased the land instead. In 1958, Sally Williams Crawford of Lodi, Texas, reported proudly that she was worth nearly \$250,000. She told *Jet* magazine when her first well came in, “I was so happy about it I went and bought me a brand new car for \$2,530 cash. Now I’m going to build the finest house in Texas.”<sup>68</sup> Yes, she truly walked like she had oil wells in her backyard.

Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson also came from Houston. Born in 1917, he was raised in a musical household (his parents were both accomplished pianists), and at Jack Yates High School, Eddie played alto sax in the school band. After serving an apprenticeship in the Houston-based Chester Boone Band, he joined Milt Larkin in 1936.<sup>69</sup> The Larkin aggregation has been described as “probably the last of the great Texas big bands.”<sup>70</sup> In addition to holding residency at the Aragon Ballroom in the Bayou City, Larkin toured extensively along the Texas Gulf Coast into Louisiana, Oklahoma, and on into the Midwest. Vinson received his nickname, “Cleanhead” or “Mr. Cleanhead,” in the late 1930s, when he started shaving his head after a lye-induced accident in an attempt, as he later told the story, to make his hair “look like white folks’ hair ... I [was] the first [to shave my head]. Yul Brynner and all of them came after me.”<sup>71</sup>

Vinson first gained national recognition in the early 1940s with the Cootie Williams Orchestra as a hard-tone, swinging alto saxophonist who “bawled the blues ... with a whooping falsetto like a piglet’s squeal.”<sup>72</sup> In 1945, he formed his own band and signed with Mercury Records. Several of the Mercury recordings, including the 1947 “Oil Man Blues” (Mercury 8067),

featured a small hot R&B ensemble with a frontline of alto, tenor, and baritone sax, the lyrics accentuated by Cleanhead's ribald, salacious sense of humor.<sup>73</sup> Readymade for jukebox consumption, these songs were considered too "raunchy" for airplay on the radio.<sup>74</sup>

I'm an oil drillin' daddy, and your ground looks very rich.  
 I'm an oil drillin' daddy, and your ground looks very rich.  
 I'm the best driller in these parts, and I've got the tools to work it with.

When you see me comin', baby, I've got my drillin' wrench.  
 When you see me comin', baby, I've got my drillin' wrench.  
 Your soil looks very fertile, striking oil will be a cinch.

When your oil starts to flowin', baby, please don't close your door.  
 When your oil starts to flowin', baby, please don't close your door.  
 'Cause everything is mellow, and I'll be back for more.

Now that you rich, baby, it's no use in savin' that gold.  
 Now that you rich, baby, it's no use in savin' that gold.  
 Come on let's have a ball before that oil starts gettin' cold.

"Oil Man Blues" offered yet another example of African American "self-assertiveness" cloaked in the context of an erotically-themed refrain.<sup>75</sup> The song also harkened back to Vinson's days with Milt Larkin, when the band played regular gigs in Houston and on the road in petroleum-rich East Texas and northwestern Louisiana in towns like Beaumont and Shreveport. Once again, the lingo of the oil patch served its purpose to produce a song that fit author and cultural raconteur Nick Tosches's yardstick for "wet metaphor [and] crypto-lubricities."<sup>76</sup>

Freddie King was born Freddie Christian in 1934 in Gilmer, Texas, the county seat of Upshur County. Along with Rusk, Gregg, Smith, and Cherokee counties, Upshur County sat atop most of the huge East Texas oil field that was discovered four years before Freddie was born.<sup>77</sup> For professional purposes,

he later adopted his mother's maiden name of King.<sup>78</sup> At age six, Freddie learned to play the guitar from his mother and uncle, Leon King, and he cited Lightnin' Hopkins as an early influence.<sup>79</sup>

Christian relocated to Chicago when he was sixteen and went to work at a steel mill. He also became active in the South Side club scene. By the time he began recording as "Freddy" King in 1960 for Federal Records, a subsidiary of King Records, he had developed a distinctive "harsh, rough-edged" guitar style, using a metal fingerpick and plastic thumbpick.<sup>80</sup> In the studio, Alfonso "Sonny" Thompson produced, arranged, and played piano on Freddie's sessions.<sup>81</sup> The combination paid off in 1961, when "Hideaway (Hide Away)," a crackling, gritty instrumental that inspired many a future guitar slinger (including Eric Clapton), reached the Top-10 of Billboard's Hot R&B Singles while also charting on *Billboard's Hot 100*.<sup>82</sup> Other instrumentals followed: "Butterscotch," "Sen-Sa-Shun," "San-Ho-Zay," "Swooshy," and "Texas Oil."

In a 1972 interview with *Living Blues* magazine, King commented on the titles of his instrumental compositions: "I wrote all the tunes, but the studio put the names to 'em. Some of 'em, I don't even know ... They got some heck of a names in there."<sup>83</sup> It's possible in the case of "Texas Oil" (Federal 12462) that Sonny Thompson came up with the title, since he is also listed as co-writer along with King and Beverly Bride. And if the name were less exotic than some of King's other instrumental titles, "Texas Oil" was still evocative and more than appropriate.

Recorded in 1962, drums were mixed upfront, rolling and tumbling with a thunderous tom-tom beat. Freddie's finger picking was steady and repetitive, driving home the pounding pulse of the oil rig floor. For brief moments, he breaks into biting, chicken-scratching licks, capturing a sense of exhilaration and expectation of a potential gusher in the works. "Texas Oil" was a fitting tip of the hat, then, to the colossal East Texas oil field that forever changed the lives of individuals in the region, including many residents of Upshur County.

Across the Sabine River in Louisiana, black musicians continued to savor the sights and sounds of the state's ever-expanding oil and natural gas industry. Joe Johnson was born in 1942 in Independence, Louisiana.<sup>84</sup> Wildcatters were drilling in Tangipahoa Parish as early as 1921, but the state's onshore oil and gas reserves were located largely west of the Mississippi River.<sup>85</sup> Johnson grew up in Greensburg in neighboring St. Helena Parish. In high school, he sang with a gospel group before joining Guitar Grady's Strings of Rhythm. During much of the 1960s, the Strings of Rhythm – with Johnson featured on lead vocals and harmonica – were fixtures on the club scene in the Greensburg area.<sup>86</sup>

Johnson also came to the attention of J. D. "Jay" Miller, a South Louisiana independent record man. Miller headquartered in Crowley, in Acadia Parish, the heartland of Cajun and Creole country, where he owned a record store and operated a small recording studio. In addition to Cajun and hillbilly performers, Miller recorded blues and R&B singers primarily for distribution on Excello Records in Nashville.<sup>87</sup> As he boasted to Paul Oliver, "Around here in this part of Louisiana, I'd say within a hundred mile radius of Crowley, we've got more blues singers than any other spot in the United States."<sup>88</sup> Crowley also fell midway between the petrochemical plants and refineries in Baton Rouge to the east and Lake Charles to the west.<sup>89</sup>

Joe Johnson waxed two sessions at Miller's studio. He recorded "Got My Oil Well Pumpin'" (Cry 1100) in late 1967 or early 1968 with Guitar Grady and His Strings of Rhythm.<sup>90</sup> Miller chose to release it on his own Cry label as the flipside of "Otis Is Gone," a heartfelt tribute to the soul singer Otis Redding, who died in a plane crash on December 10, 1967.<sup>91</sup> In the first verse and third verses of "Got My Oil Well Pumpin'," Johnson neatly mixed and matched his metaphors: oil wells, sex, and Cadillacs, along with an implied sense of wealth and power.

I got my oil well pumpin', baby, I got my baby's sign.  
I got my oil well pumpin', baby, I got my baby's sign.

I've got a brand new Cadillac, honey, all you got to do is ride.

And the Strings of Rhythm created the proper atmosphere with a funky, down home, out-in-the-country groove: Guitar Grady's chunky guitar, droning organ, burbling bass, and Johnson's bawling harp.

Lawtell, St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, was home to Joseph Roy Carrier. The Carriers were black Creoles who sharecropped for a living, and the family's musical roots reached back to pioneering Creole fiddler Joseph Bébé Carrière. As a youth, Roy, who was born in 1947, joined his father playing at house parties first on rubboard (*frottoir*), then drums and guitar before taking up the accordion. He lost part of an index finger in a farming accident, which forced him to perfect a unique "crossing chords" technique.<sup>92</sup>

By the time Roy was eighteen, he had his own zydeco band. Zydeco is the "traditional dance music – and the dance" of black Creoles, blending Creole folk music or "la-la" with blues and rhythm & blues.<sup>93</sup> Music historians and folklorists now recognize that the music developed not only on the bayous and prairies of Southwest Louisiana but also along the Texas Gulf Coast, where Creoles migrated in numbers in the 1940s and 1950s to work in the shipyards and refineries of Port Arthur, Beaumont, Orange, and especially Houston.<sup>94</sup>

Drilling for oil and natural gas off the coast of Louisiana began in earnest in 1946, and the state soon became the world's primary venue for offshore exploration.<sup>95</sup> With the Mideast oil embargo of 1973-1974, southern Louisiana was awash in petroleum-related jobs: offshore assignments as well as platform construction, ship and boat building and repair, and water transportation.<sup>96</sup> A black man could share in the moment, too, so Carrier left the rice farm in 1973 and hired to work on an offshore rig with a schedule of seven days on and seven days off.<sup>97</sup>

In 1980, Carrier purchased an old dancehall in disrepair on the north side of the railroad tracks in Lawtell and named it, appropriately enough, Roy's Offshore Lounge. The Offshore



Lounge quickly became a gathering place for young zydeco musicians.<sup>98</sup> Seven years later, Roy quit his job: “I gave up the oil field in ‘eighty-seven and started doing jam sessions every Thursday night [at the Offshore Lounge].”<sup>99</sup> He also started recording and touring the Gulf Coast zydeco corridor, or Crawfish circuit, which stretched from Lafayette to Galveston.

“Offshore Blues” is the first song on Carrier’s 2006 compact disc *Zydeco Soul* (Mardi Gras 1108), and it showcased his own brand of zydeco, flush with the blues.

Well, I’m an oil field worker, baby, Lord, I just can’t help myself.  
 Well, I’m an oil field worker, baby, Lord, I just can’t help myself.  
 Well, you know it so hard, so hard, baby, to love someone but I do.

They got somebody, somebody to be my baby.  
 They got somebody, somebody to be my baby.  
 Well, you know it so hard, so hard, baby, to love someone but I do.

“Offshore Blues” captured a sense of the loneliness that comes with toiling on a platform located miles out in the Gulf of Mexico, but the song is fragmentary, with Carrier more interested in creating a mood rather than telling a complete story. Roy’s slow, bluesy accordion complete with trill provides a swampy groove for his high-pitched, plaintive vocals, invoking the wails of Blind Lemon Jefferson.

Since the 1920s, then, the petroleum industry has inspired and continues to imbue the imaginations of African American songwriters and recording artists. However, the complexion of the workforce in the oil field has gradually changed.<sup>100</sup> In the twenty-first century, particularly in Texas, Latinos constitute the majority of workers employed on the rig floor.<sup>101</sup> But even though employment opportunities for African Americans in the patch are now a reality, longtime prejudices linger. In 2009, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) filed complaints of racial harassment and discrimination against a Houston-based oil and gas drilling company. The Associated

Press reported that white employees hung a noose in a work area and used “racial epithets.”<sup>102</sup> When a black employee complained, he was told “it is always going to be a white man’s oil field.”<sup>103</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This paper was presented in different form at the joint meeting of the West Texas Historical Association and the East Texas Historical Association in Fort Worth on February 27, 2010. For input and suggestions along the way, thanks to Barry Jean Ancelet, John Broven, Ron Brown, David Coffey, Scott Downing, Diana Davids Hinton, Charlie Hukill, Melody Kelly, Christopher King, Richard Nevins, Mike Pierce, Chris Smith, Tyler Smith, Alice Specht, Mary Helen Specht, Chris Strachwitz, John Tefeller, and Terry Young.

<sup>2</sup>Mody C. Boatright and William A. Owens, *Tales from the Derrick Floor: A People’s History of the Oil Industry* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 69.

<sup>3</sup>Boatright and Owens, *Tales from the Derrick Floor*, 68-69.

<sup>4</sup>Diana Davids Olien and Roger M. Olien, *Oil in Texas: The Gusher Age, 1895-1945* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 71, 176-178; Walter Rundell Jr., *Oil in West Texas and New Mexico: A Pictorial History of the Permian Basin* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 164; Bobby D. Weaver, *Oilfield Trash: Life and Labor in the Oil Patch* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 35, 44, 49, 150, 154.

<sup>5</sup>Olien and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 134-135; Walter Rundell Jr., *Early Texas Oil: A Photographic History, 1866-1936* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1977), 123. Similar discrimination existed for Latino refinery workers. See Emilo Zamora, “The Failed Promise of Wartime Opportunity for Mexicans in the Texas Oil Industry,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 95 (January 1992); 323-350.

<sup>6</sup>Roger M. Olien and Diana Davids Olien, *Oil Booms: Social Change in Five Texas Towns* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 118-119; Diana Davids Hinton, “Creating Company Culture: Oil Company Camps in the Southwest, 1920-1960,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 111 (April 2008); 378; Roger L. Goertz, “Life in Texon, Regan County,

Texas,” *Permian Historical Annual*, 46 (2006): 96-97; Barbara Brown Spratt, “Growing Up in Continental [Conoco] Oil Camp in Regan County, Texas: The Life of a Black Child,” *Permian Historical Annual*, 48 (2008): 41.

<sup>7</sup> Carl B. King and Howard W. Risher Jr., *The Negro in the Petroleum Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 26.

<sup>8</sup>With the primary focus on performers from the Gulf-Southwest, the following were not included in the current discussion: St. Louis Jimmy Oden’s “Pipe Layin’ Blues” (1934), Johnny Shines’s “Pipeline Blues” (1968), and Big Jack Johnson’s “Oil Man” (1987). Petroleum-related songs can also be found in the recorded repertoire of country music, rock ‘n’ roll, and Cajun performers. The author plans to explore this topic further in *Smell That Sweet Perfume: Oil Patch Songs on Record*.

<sup>9</sup>David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in Folk Blues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 37-38.

<sup>10</sup>W. Prescott Webb, “Notes on Folk-Lore of Texas,” *Journal of American Folklore*, 28 (July-Sept. 1915); 291-292; Necah Stewart Furman, *Walter Prescott Webb: His Life and Impact* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), 55-57.

<sup>11</sup>Webb, “Notes on Folk-lore of Texas,” 293.

<sup>12</sup>Robert M. W. Dixon, John Godrich, and Howard Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 165.

<sup>13</sup>Dixon, Godrich, and Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records*, 445.

<sup>14</sup>Census records indicate 1893 as the year of Jefferson’s birth, but the actual date is still in question with some sources giving 1897. See Alan Govenar, “Blind Lemon Jefferson: The Myth and the Man,” *Black Music Research Journal*, 20 (Spring 2000): 7; Govenar provides a succinct summary of what is known about the bluesman and the “numerous contradictory accounts of where Jefferson lived, performed, and died.”

<sup>15</sup>Govenar, “Blind Lemon Jefferson,” 8, 12.

<sup>16</sup>David Evans, “Blind Lemon Jefferson,” in *International*

*Dictionary of Black Composers*, ed. Samuel A. Floyd Jr. (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 1: 607.

<sup>17</sup>Blind Lemon Jefferson, *King of the Country Blues* (Yazoo L-1069, 1985). As roots music historian Tony Russell points out, however, “Country blues is a pigoenholer’s term ... Historians and the makers of browser-dividers have forced the phrase into our vocabulary ... [that said] ‘country blues’ is represented by singers playing guitars – mostly (but not exclusively) acoustic, mostly (but not exclusively) on recordings made more than half a century ago.” See Tony Russell, “Country Blues: The Blues Pantheon,” *MOJO*, no. 197 (April 2010), 138.

<sup>18</sup>Govenar, “Blind Lemon Jefferson,” 9.

<sup>19</sup>Rundell, *Early Texas Oil*, 181-183; Carl Coke Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 169-180; Julia Cauble Smith, “Woodbine Fault-Line Fields,” *The Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook> [accessed November 1, 2009].

<sup>20</sup>Oilen and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 121-123; Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 179.

<sup>21</sup>Although “Oil Well Blues” was clearly written by Jefferson, “Lamoore,” not Jefferson, received composer credit on the label. Lamoore or LaMoore was the nom de plume of Alex Robinson, a sometime pianist and arranger for Paramount Records, who also took copyright credit on recordings by Papa Charlie Jackson, Hattie McDaniel, and George Carter. See Paul Swinton, “A Twist of Lemon,” *Blues & Rhythm*, no. 121 (August 1997); 7. “Black Snake Moan” (OKeh 8455), “Low Down Mojo Blues” (Paramount 12650), and “Bakershop Blues” (Paramount 12852) offer other examples of Jefferson’s compositions with strong sexual themes.

<sup>22</sup>Bill Porterfield, *Diddy Waw Diddy: Passage of an American Son* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 351.

<sup>23</sup>Because the production and technical quality of the Paramount recordings leave much to be desired, it is often difficult to understand exactly what Jefferson is singing. The accuracy of this transcription was verified with Luigi Monge and David Evans, “New Songs of Blind Lemon Jefferson,” *Journal of Texas Music History*, 3 (Fall 2003); 25.

<sup>24</sup>Paul Oliver, *Screening the Blues: Aspects of the Blues Tradition*

(New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), 212.

<sup>25</sup>Kevin Belford, *Devil at the Confluence: The Pre-War Blues of St. Louis, Missouri* (St. Louis: Virginia Publishing, 2009), 122-123; Sheldon Harris, *Blues Who's Who* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1979), 150.

<sup>26</sup>Dixon, Godrich, and Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records*, 204-206.

<sup>27</sup>Harris, *Blues Who's Who*, 150.

<sup>28</sup>Paul Oliver, *Conversation with the Blues* (New York: Horizon Press, 1965), 120.

<sup>29</sup>Dixon, Godrich, and Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records*, 205.

<sup>30</sup>Dr. George Parker, *Oil Field Medico* (Dallas: Banks Upshaw and Company, 1948), 20.

<sup>31</sup>James Richardson, *Willie Brown: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>32</sup>Neil Slaven, "Walter Davis," in *The Penguin Guide to Blues Recordings*, Tony Russell and others (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 158.

<sup>33</sup>Kenny A. Franks and Paul F. Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil: A Pictorial History* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 5, 17-33; Rister Oil! Titan of the Southwest, 71-75.

<sup>34</sup>Michael Tisserand, *The Kingdom of Zydeco* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), 55-56.

<sup>35</sup>Ann Allen Savoy, *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People* (Eunice, LA: Bluebird Press, 1984), 67.

<sup>36</sup>Tisserand, *The Kingdom of Zydeco*, 58.

<sup>37</sup>Michael Doucet, "Amédé Ardoin's Blues," Notes, Amédé Ardoin, I'm Never Comin' Back (Arhoolie Records CD 7007, 1995).

<sup>38</sup>Tisserand, *The Kingdom of Zydeco*, 58.

<sup>39</sup>John Broven, *South to Louisiana: The Music of the Cajun Bayous* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1983), 102.

<sup>40</sup>Doucet, "Amédé Ardoïn's Blues;" Savoy, *Cajun Music*, 66; Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 103.

<sup>41</sup>Tony Russell, "Amédé Ardoïn," in *The Penguin Guide to Blues Recordings*, 12.

<sup>42</sup>Tony Russell, *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 62; Savoy, *Cajun Music*, 68.

<sup>43</sup>The transcription and translation of "La Valse des Chantiers Pérolipères" is printed in the booklet notes which accompany Ardoïn, I'm Never Comin' Back; the spelling of "pérolipères" has been corrected to "pétroliers."

<sup>44</sup>Paul Oliver, "Jerry's Saloon Blues: 1940 Field Recordings," in *Shreveport Sounds in Black & White*, eds. Kip Lornell and Tracey E. W. Laird (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 185-188.

<sup>45</sup>Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 92.

<sup>46</sup>Oliver, "Jerry's Saloon Blues," 186.

<sup>47</sup>Dixon, Godrich, and Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records*, 517, 660.

<sup>48</sup>Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 96-101; Franks and Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil*, 35-67.

<sup>49</sup>Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 97.

<sup>50</sup>Wolfe and Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*, 6-7.

<sup>51</sup>Franks and Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil*, 43.

<sup>52</sup>Tony Russell, "Field Recordings," in *The Penguin Guide to Blues Recordings*, 761.

<sup>53</sup>"Oil City Blues" was not commercially released until 1978

when it and other recordings from the Oil City hotel session appeared on Jerry's Saloon Blues: 1940 Field Recordings (Flyright LP 260, 1978); it has subsequently been reissued on compact disc, I Can Eagle Rock: Juke Joint Blues from Alabama and Louisiana (Travelin' Man TM CD 09, 1996).

<sup>54</sup>Michael Hall, "Let There Be Lightnin'"; How Sam Hopkins Lived the Blues," *Texas Monthly*, 35 (June 2007), 149; Alan Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins: His Life and Blues* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>55</sup>Alan Govenar has found evidence that Hopkins might have been born in 1911, not 1912. See Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins*, 2.

<sup>56</sup>Although it has long been assumed that Alexander was related to Hopkins, Alan Govenar suggests otherwise: "Sam claimed that Alexander was his cousin, but no direct kinship has ever been established. Sam had a very loose definition of the term 'cousin' that he tended to use more as an expression of endearment than a statement of fact." See Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins*, 22.

<sup>57</sup>Samuel Charters, *Walking a Blues Road: A Selection of Blues Writing, 1956-2004* (New York: Marion Boyars, 2004), 220.

<sup>58</sup>Michael Hall has Hopkins in Houston in 1939 "settling in at a rooming house in the Third Ward." See Hall, "Let There Be Lightnin'," 264. Alan Govenar places the date for the move six years later or possibly somewhere in between. See Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins*, 35-36.

<sup>59</sup>David G. McComb, *Houston, the Bayou City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 113-116; Olien and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 59-62.

<sup>60</sup>Mack McCormick, *Liner Notes, Lightnin' Hopkins, Walkin' This Road By Myself* (Bluesville BV 1057, 1962).

<sup>61</sup>Hall, "Let There Be Lightnin'," 264-265; Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins*, xiii-xiv, 43.

<sup>62</sup>Les Fancourt and Bob McGrath, *The Blues Discography, 1943-1970* (West Vancouver: Eyeball Productions, 2006), 227. Hopkins also recorded "Katie Mae Blues" in 1960 for Bluesville Records as simply "Katie Mae," and this version was released on single (Bluesville 825) and album ("Lightnin'" *The Blues of Lightnin' Hopkins*, Bluesville BV 1019). The Grateful Dead, with growling vocals by Pigpen, made "Katie Mae"

a staple of their concerts in the early 1970s. See *History of the Grateful Dead*, Vol. 1 (Bear's Choice) (Warner Brothers 2721-2, 1973).

<sup>63</sup>Alan Govenar speculates that sales of Hopkins's early Aladdin records "didn't do very well;" yet, he also identifies "Katie Mae Blues" as "[a] hit" for Hopkins. See Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins*, 44, 116.

<sup>64</sup>In 1988, Nashville wordsmiths A. L. "Doodle" Owens and Dennis Knutson used a similar image – "For that pretty little lady from Beaumont, Texas with oil wells in her yard" – as the theme for their "Pretty Little Lady from Beaumont, Texas," and appropriately enough George Jones, who grew in the Beaumont area, decided to record the song (Epic 34-08509).

<sup>65</sup>As quoted in Alan Govenar, *Living Texas Blues* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1985), 36.

<sup>66</sup>Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 252. Beat novelist and poet, Jack Kerouac, raised a similar image in the "12<sup>th</sup> Chorus" of his *San Francisco Blues*: "The furtive whore/Looks over her shoulder/While unlocking the door/Of the tenement/Of her pimp/Who with big Negro Arkansas/Or East Texas Oilfields/Harry Truman hat's/Been standin' on the street/All day." See Jack Kerouac, *Book of Blues* (New York: Penguin Poets, 1995), 13.

<sup>67</sup>James A. Clark and Michel T. Halbouty, *The Last Boom* (Bryan, TX: Shearer Publishing, 1984), 133; Alex Poinsett, "Texas Negroes Share in Nation's Richest Oil Field", *Jet*, 12 (March 27, 1958); 15; Gerald Forbes, *Flush Production: The Epic of Oil in the Gulf-Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), 210-211.

<sup>68</sup>Poinsett, "Texas Negroes Share in Nation's Richest Oil Field," 14-15.

<sup>69</sup>Harris, *Blues Who's Who*, 522; Dave Oliphant, *Texan Jazz* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 219.

<sup>70</sup>Albert McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1977), 109-110.

<sup>71</sup>Hugh Merrill, *The Blues Route* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990), 187.



<sup>72</sup>Tony Russell, *The Blues: From Robert Johnson to Robert Cray* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 179.

<sup>73</sup>Fancourt and McGrath, *The Blues Discography*, 549.

<sup>74</sup>James Hand, "Eddie Vinson," *The Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook> (accessed April 15, 2007).

<sup>75</sup>Paul Oliver, *The Story of the Blues*, New ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 116.

<sup>76</sup>Nick Tosches, *Country: The Twisted Roots of Rock 'N' Roll* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 123.

<sup>77</sup>Olien and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 170-171; Rundell, *Early Texas Oil*, 225.

<sup>78</sup>Kenny Mathieson, "Freddie King," in *Encyclopedia of the Blues*, ed. Edward Komara (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2: 772.

<sup>79</sup>Harris, *Blues Who's Who*, 305; Jim O'Neal and Amy van Singel, eds., *The Voice of the Blues: Classic Interviews from Living Blues Magazine* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 365-366.

<sup>80</sup>Rich Kienzle, *Great Guitarists* (New York: Facts on File, 1985), 33.

<sup>81</sup>Randy McNutt, *King Records of Cincinnati* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 30.

<sup>82</sup>Kienzle, *Great Guitarists*, 32; Joel Whitburn Presents Top R&B/Hip-Hop Singles, 1942-2004 (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 2004), 326; Joel Whitburn's Top Pop Singles, 1955-1996, (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 1997), 336.

<sup>83</sup>O'Neal and van Singel, eds., *The Voice of the Blues*, 367.

<sup>84</sup>Harris, *Blues Who's Who*, 283.

<sup>85</sup>Franks and Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil*, 186.

<sup>86</sup>Harris, *Blues Who's Who*, 283.

<sup>87</sup>John Broven, *Record Makers and Breakers: Voices of the Independent Rock 'N' Roll Pioneers*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 166-171.

<sup>88</sup>Oliver, *Conversation with the Blues*, 190.

<sup>89</sup>Franks and Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil*, 173-175, 225-226.

<sup>90</sup>Fancourt and McGrath, *The Blues Discography*, 269.

<sup>91</sup>Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 149.

<sup>92</sup><http://www.roycarrier.com> (accessed May 11, 2009).

<sup>93</sup>Tisserand, *The Kingdom of Zydeco*, 2.

<sup>94</sup>John Minton, "Houston Creoles and Zydeco: The Emergence of an African-American Urban Popular Style," *American Music*, 14 (Winter 1996): 480-526; Lorenzo Thomas, "From Gumbo to Grammys: The Development of Zydeco in Houston," in *Juneteenth Texas: Essays in African-American Folklore*, ed. Francis Edward Abernethy (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1996), 139-150; Roger Wood, "Black Creoles and the Evolution of Zydeco in Southeast Texas: The Beginnings to 1950," in *The Roots of Texas Music*, eds. Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 192-216. Roger Wood later expanded his essay into *Texas Zydeco* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

<sup>95</sup>Robert Gramling, *Oil on the Edge: Offshore Development, Conflict, Gridlock* (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 43-44, 64; Franks and Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil*, 207-212.

<sup>96</sup>Gramling, *Oil on the Edge*, 108-109.

<sup>97</sup><http://www.roycarrier.com> [accessed May 11, 2009].

<sup>98</sup><http://www.roycarrier.com>

<sup>99</sup>Tisserand, *The Kingdom of Zydeco*, 314.

<sup>100</sup>A perfect illustration of the integrated oil patch in action

is provided in Kermit Oliver's *Drillheads* (1973). Oliver, an African American artist and longtime resident of Waco, Texas, used acrylic and masonite (48" x 48") to depict three roughnecks – two white and one black – changing out a drill bit. The men are focused on the job at hand, three professionals each equal to the task. See *Drawing on the Past: Selections from the Bobbie and John Nau Collection of Texas Art* (Abilene, TX: The Grace Museum, in association with Bright Sky Press, 2010), 28.

<sup>101</sup>Diana Davids Olien, "Exploitationists and Depletionists," in *The Future of the Southern Plains*, ed. Sherry L. Smith. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 164; Jane Van Ryan, "Hispanic Energy Workers in Washington," <http://blog.energytomorrow.org/2009/09/hispanic-energy-workers-in-washington.html> (accessed October, 27, 2009). However, preliminary research by the author has turned up no petroleum-related recordings by Latino performers with roots in the Gulf-Southwest.

<sup>102</sup>P. Solomon Banda, "EEOC Looks Into Racial Complaints," *Abilene Reporter-News*, November 19, 2009, 9A.

<sup>103</sup>"EEOC Looks Into Racial Complaints," 9A.