

# "Forever On My Mind:"

## Blues Songwriting in the 1960s

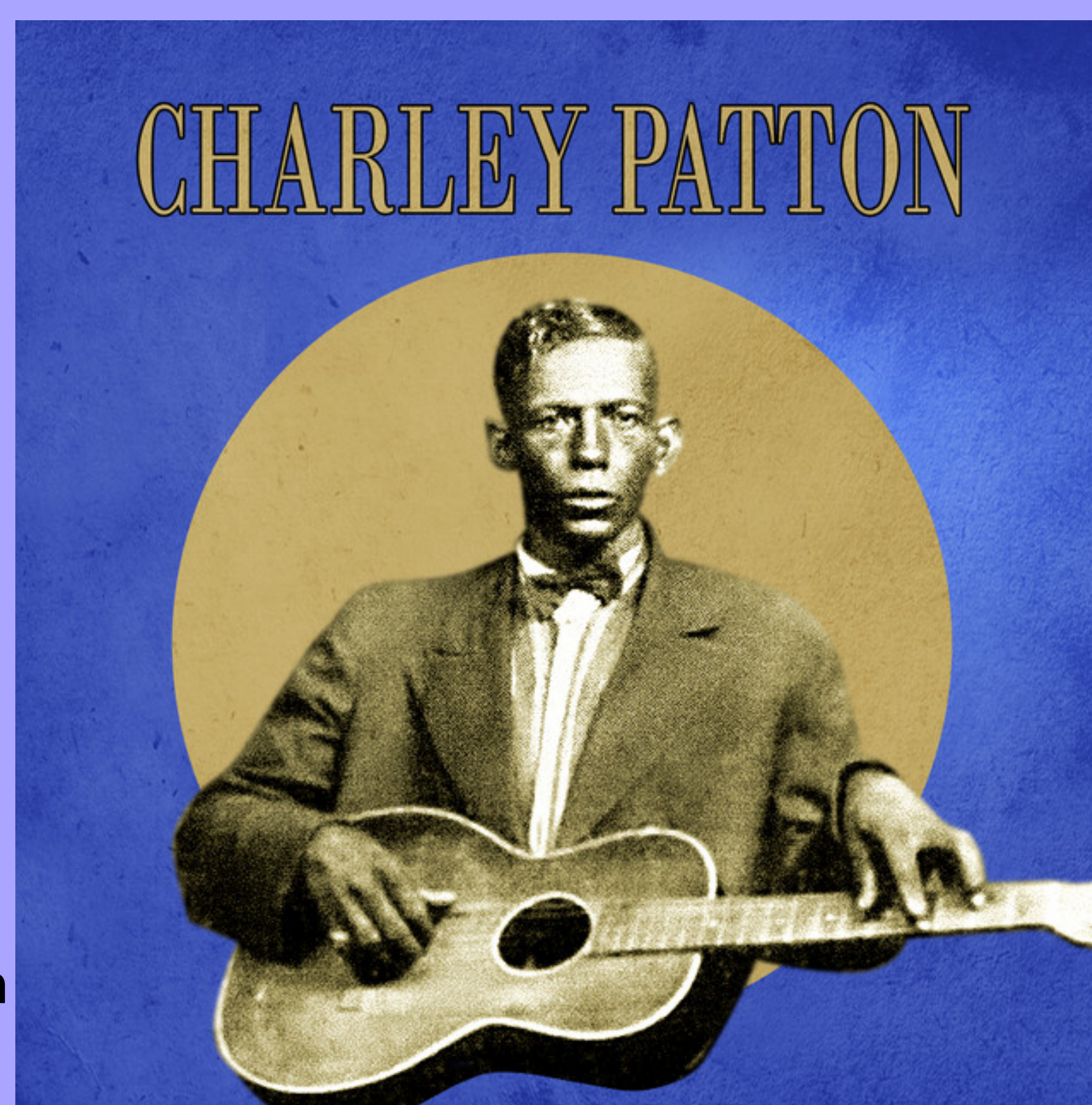


Scan the QR code here to listen to my podcast on SoundCloud!

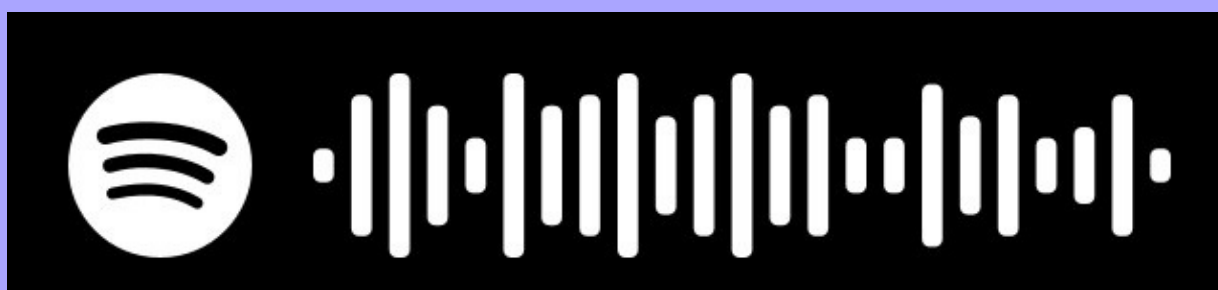
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### Abstract

My IS looks at Blues songwriting in the 1960s and argues that themes in lyrical expression shifted as a result of Blues musicians' popularity and the tense political aspects of the decade. Lyrics deepened an exploration of personal emotional expression and stories relating to songwriters' lived experiences. In existing scholarship, Blues musicians' lives, performances, and contributions to the genre have been explored. I bring a different approach to the scholarship by looking at the genre from specifically a songwriting perspective. The main primary sources I used were songs that the musicians wrote along with liner notes, interviews, and television specials. Quite a few of the songs I analyze have not been interpreted before. Additionally, this project was inspired by my own personal experience and interest in Blues songwriting, listening, and performance. I chose a podcast format because of the sonic and storytelling aspects of my topic, and I felt that my own skills in public speaking and creativity fit the development of the project.



Scan this code in the Spotify app to listen to all of the songs mentioned in my IS!



### Historiography

The historiography for the Blues is very unique. Much of the academic writing on the genre is very casual in tone, and has been published and written by journalists in a very publically accessible manner. These writers are extremely personal and at times purely stream of consciousness, and it shows how connected they are to this intensely emotional genre of music. The Blues scholarship starts with a journalist named Samuel Charters, who published his work *The Country Blues* in 1959 just before the genre's big boom in popular. The newest bit of scholarship I used was from 2021, which was titled *Poetic Song Verse: Blues-Based Popular Music and Poetry* which argued that a lot of popular 1960s songwriters (such as Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, or Leonard Cohen) combined the songwriting and creative processes of Beat poetry and Blues.

### Evidence

For my evidence, I looked at the 1960s discography and lyrics of Son House, Howlin' Wolf, and John Lee Hooker (Pictured on the right).

I chose these three musicians for a couple of reasons:

- All three were Black male Blues musicians from the Mississippi Delta, and were all popular during the 1960s and each had distinct songwriting styles and topics that they addressed.
- They all eventually left the Mississippi Delta and lived and toured all over the U.S. and also were all three very successful in Europe.
- I specifically looked at the lyrics of songs they recorded and wrote during the 1960s, along with interviews, television specials, and album liner notes.



#### Son House (1902 - 1988)

- Born in Lyons, Mississippi. Grew up religious and started playing the Blues in the 1930s
  - Disappeared in the 1940s and was rediscovered by Dick Waterman in the 1960s in Rochester, New York
- Recommended albums: *Father of the Folk Blues* (1965) and *Son House Library of Congress Recordings 1941-1942* (1942)

#### Howlin' Wolf (1910 - 1976)

- Born in White Station, Mississippi. Ran away from home at a young age
  - Was a rockstar in Memphis in the 1940s. Eventually moved to Chicago where he grew even bigger in the 1960s
- Recommended albums: *Moanin in the Moonlight* (1959) and *Howlin' Wolf* (1962)



#### John Lee Hooker (1917/1922 - 2001)

- Born in an unknown location in the Mississippi Delta, never stayed in one place his entire life
  - Spent a lot of time in Detroit where he started recording in 1949. Recorded nearly 100 albums his entire life, most of them being from the 1960s
- Recommended albums: *It Serves You Right To Suffer* (1966) and *Live at Cafe Au-Go-Go* (1967)

