

**Marshall,
Texas:
The Birthplace of
Boogie Woogie**

By John Tennison, MD

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What is Boogie Woogie?

- **Traditionally Piano-Based Music with the following 9 elements:**
- **1. Ostinato (Usually occurring at least in the bass line)**
- **2. Swing Pulse**
- **3. Syncopation**
- **4. Polyrhythmic Interplay**
- **5. Highly Percussive, and Often Melodic, Right-Hand Part**
- **6. Left-Hand Part is Frequently Melodic and Contrapuntal to the Right-Hand Part**
- **7. Strong Sense of Tonicity or Tonality (i.e. a sense of musical key)**
- **8. Emphasis of I, IV, and V Chords in Harmonic Progressions**
- **9. Identified with specific intervallic sequences (e.g. T&P Bass, “The Cows”) so strongly that, even when not played as ostinato, the presence of such sequences convey a sense of Boogie Woogie.**
- **Some Audio Examples**

Early Boogie Woogie Recordings

- The unequivocal first recorded examples of what was later called "Rock and Roll."
- Rosetta Tharpe and Albert Ammons - December 23, 1938 – Carnegie Hall
- Boogie Woogie has been rightfully called the "Father of Rock and Roll."

Influence of Boogie Woogie on popular music in general

- Peanuts – Linus and Lucy
- Woo Woo
- Videogames – Bully
- Madonna – “I like to Boogie Woogie.”

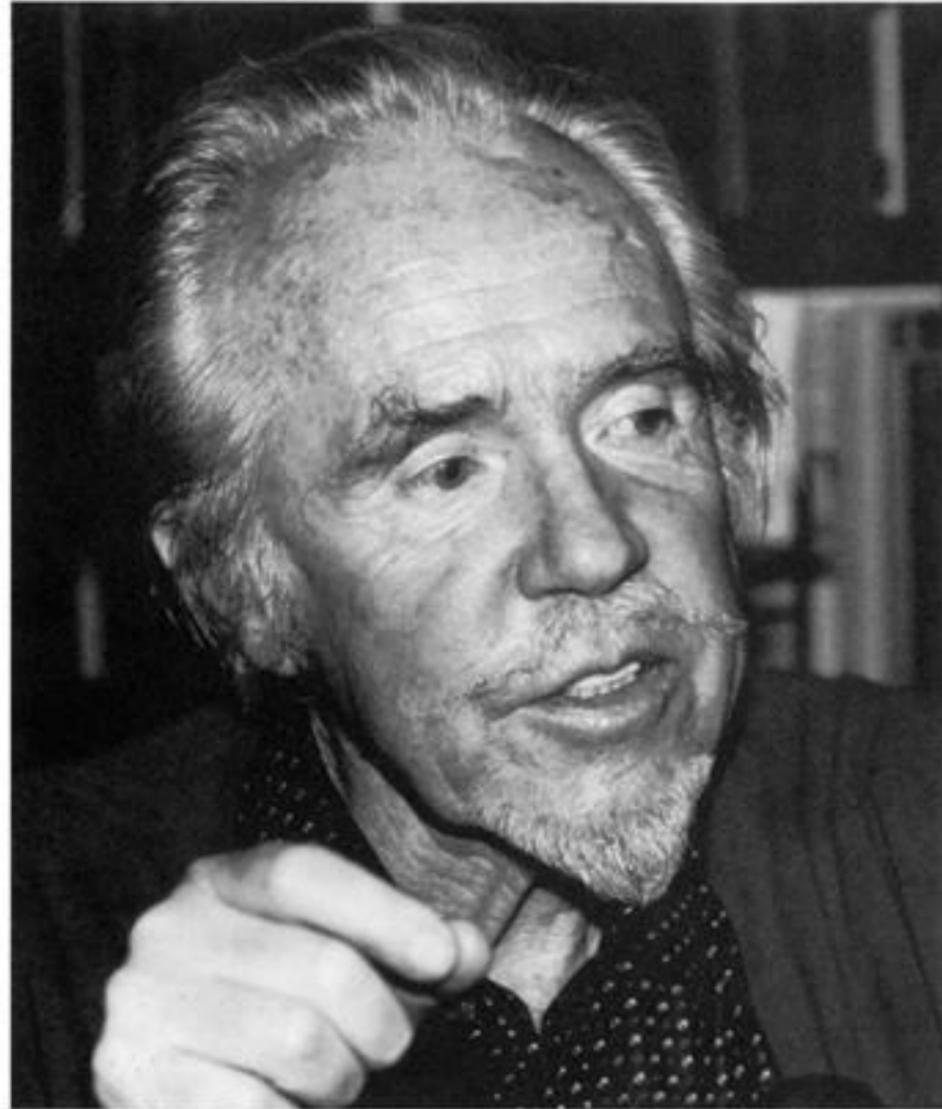
Influence of Boogie Woogie on Jazz

- Oscar Peterson
- Claude Bolling
- Many, many others

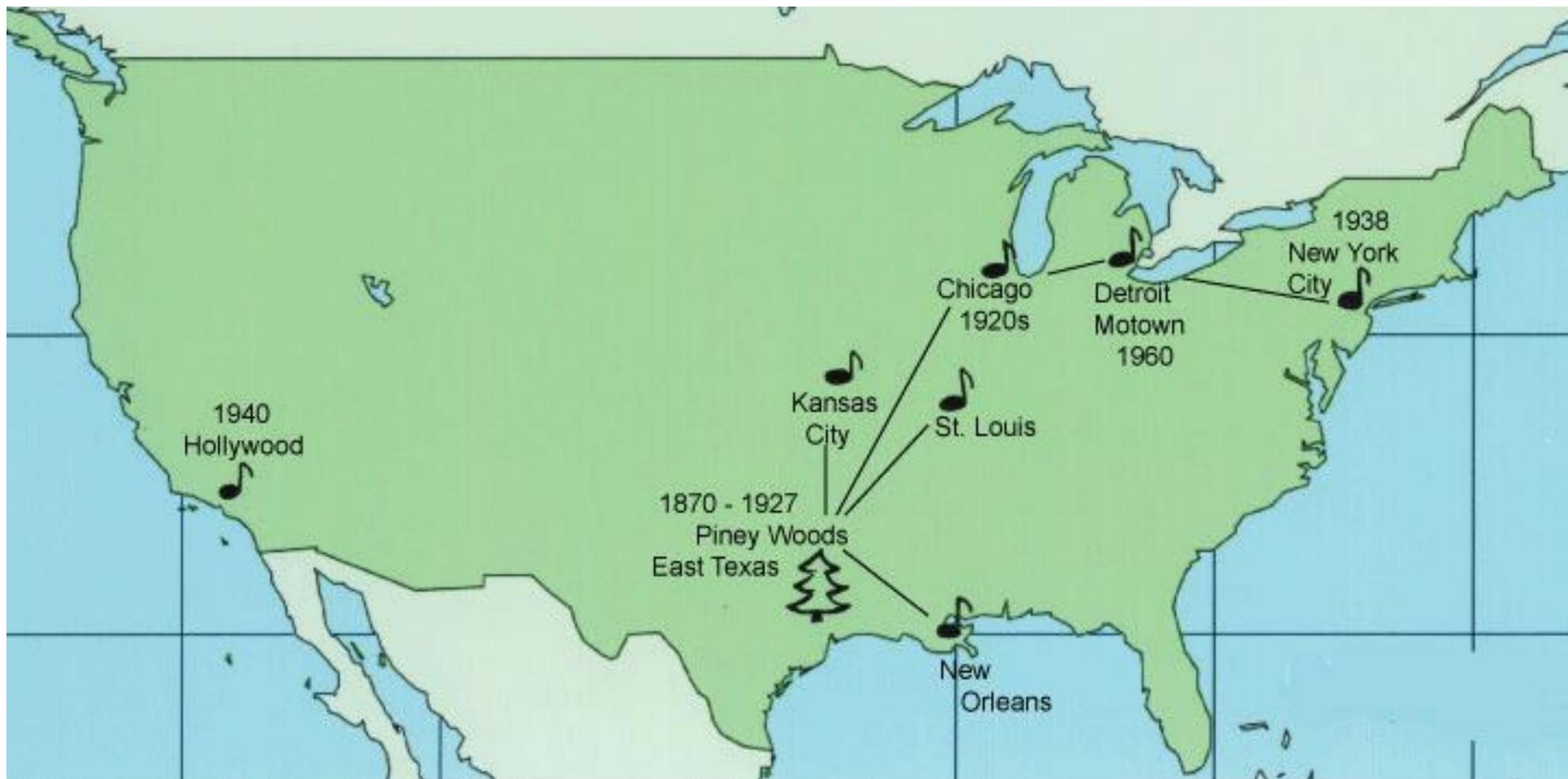
Influence of Boogie Woogie on Classical Music

- [Conlon Nancarrow](#) (United States)
- [Nikolai Kapustin](#) (Russia)
- [Louis Andriessen](#) (The Netherlands)

Conlon Nancarrow



The National Spread of Boogie Woogie



Dangerous Environments of Early Boogie Woogie

- African Americans created Boogie Woogie in dangerous environments that literally put their lives at risk.
- Boogie Woogie was played in “underground” establishments (AKA barrelhouses), where violence was common, and also, where drinking, gambling, and sexual activity could potentially lead to social conflicts which resulted in death.

A Typical Barrelhouse Scene



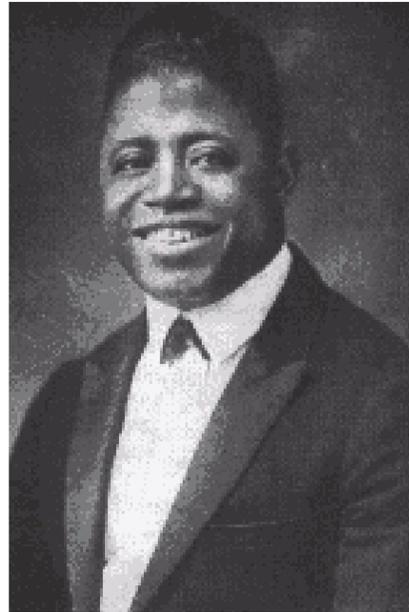
Boogie Woogie dates from the Early 1870s

- **"The first Negroes who played what is called boogie woogie, or house-rent music, and attracted attention in city slums where other Negroes held jam sessions, were from Texas. And all the Old-time Texans, black or white, are agreed that boogie piano players were first heard in the lumber and turpentine camps, where nobody was at home at all. The style dates from the early 1870s. Even before ragtime, with its characteristic syncopation and forward momentum, was picked up by whites in the North, boogie was a necessary factor in Negro existence wherever the struggle for an economic foothold had grouped the ex-slaves in segregated communities (mostly in water-front cities along the gulf, the Mississippi and its tributaries)." – Elliot Paul, 1957**

E. Simms Campbell, 1939:

- **“Boogie Woogie piano playing originated in the lumber and turpentine camps of Texas and in the sporting houses of that state. A fast, rolling bass—giving the piece an undercurrent of tremendous power—power piano playing.”**
- **“Neither Pine Top Smith, Meade Lux Lewis nor Albert Ammons originated that style of playing—they are merely exponents of it.”**
- **“In Houston, Dallas, and Galveston—all Negro piano players played that way. This style was often referred to as a 'fast western' or 'fast blues' as differentiated from the 'slow blues' of New Orleans and St. Louis. At these gatherings the ragtime and blues boys could easily tell from what section of the country a man came, even going so far as to name the town, by his interpretation of a piece.”**

Clarence Williams, 1940:



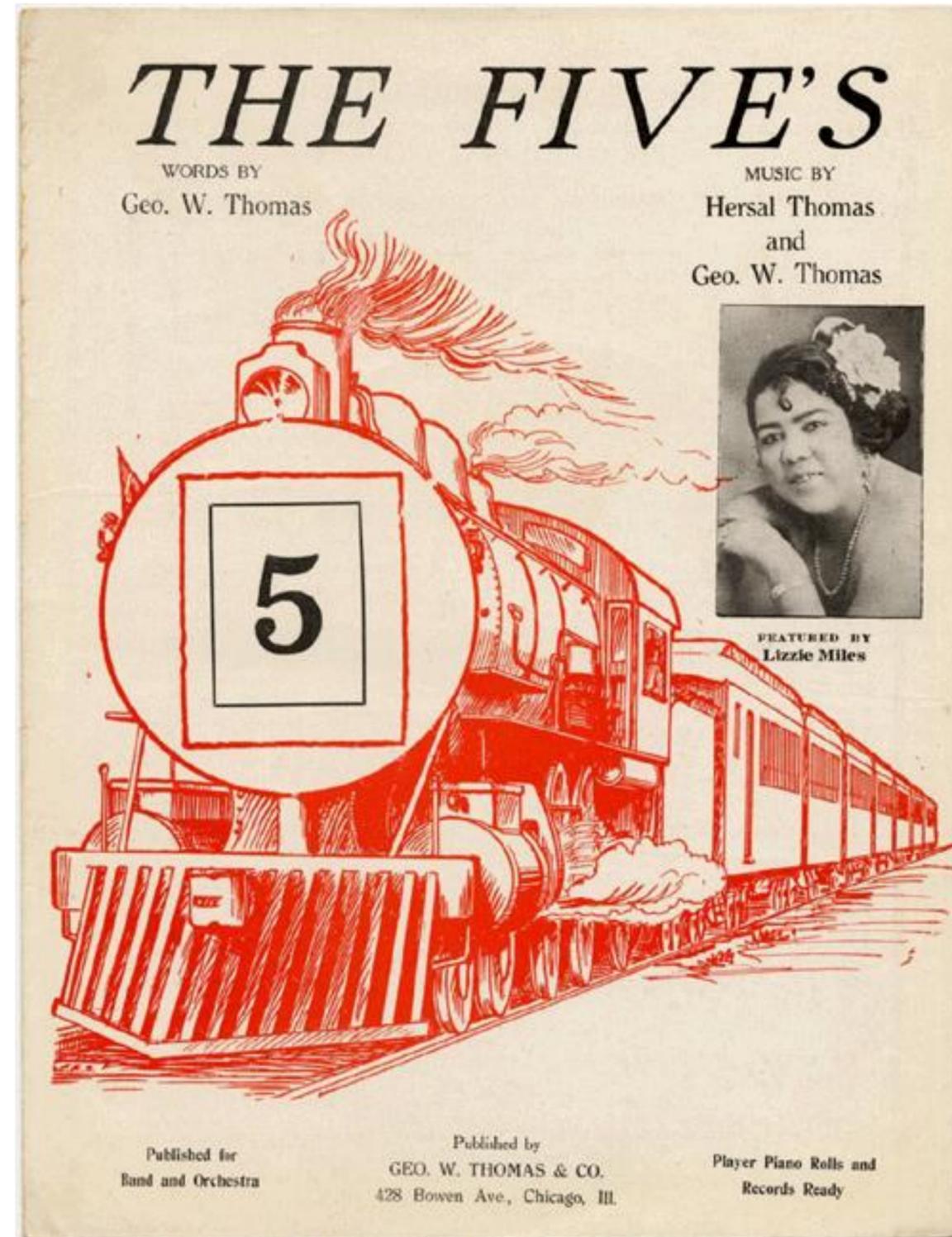
- In his 1940 "Boogie Woogie and Blues Folio," Clarence Williams states: **"The 'Boogie Woogie' originated in Texas many years ago. It wasn't called the 'Boogie Woogie' then. George Thomas was the fellow who used this style and first wrote it down."**



(George Thomas)

The Five's

by George and Hersal Thomas



Paul Oliver, 1986:

- In the 1986 television broadcast of Britain's "South Bank Show" about Boogie Woogie, music historian, Paul Oliver, noted:
- **"Now the conductors were used to the logging camp pianists clamoring aboard, telling them a few stories, jumping off the train, getting into another logging camp, and playing again for eight hours, barrelhouse. In this way the music got around -- all through Texas -- and eventually, of course, out of Texas. Now when this new form of piano music came from Texas, it moved out towards Louisiana. It was brought by people like George Thomas, an early pianist who was already living in New Orleans by about 1910 and writing "New Orleans Hop Scop Blues," which really has some of the characteristics of the music that we came to know as Boogie."**

Mack McCormick: Music Historian & Folklorist



Mack McCormick, 1963:

- With regard to the Boogie Woogie elements present in Pine Top Smith's "Boogie Woogie," in 1963, musical historian, Mack McCormick wrote:
- **"The term 'Fast Western' is unknown among Texas pianists. Moreover, they identify boogie woogie with the 1929 Pine Top Smith record. They are, however, quick to point out that the elements Smith used had been common for decades."**

Frederick Ramsey, Jr., 1939:

- **“The Boogie Woogie piano players had already developed a mature style in the early twenties, yet it waited until 1938 to find ready acceptance in the hot music field, and by such dispensers of musical taste as the arrangers.”** – Frederick Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, 1939, page xiv in the "Introduction" to the book, **“Jazzmen: The Story of Hot Jazz Told in the Lives of the Men Who Created It.”**

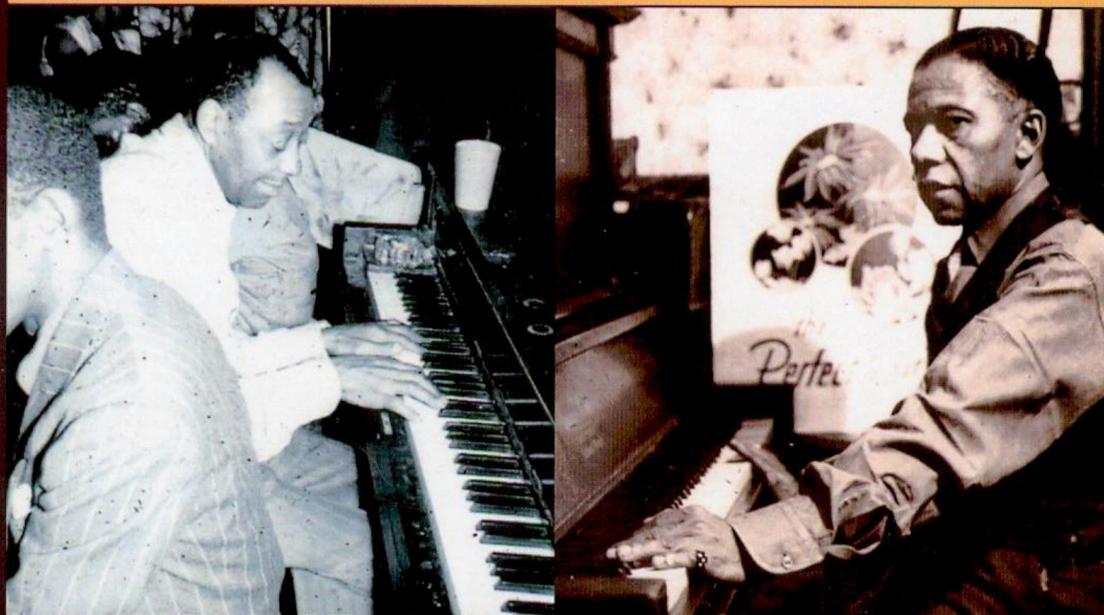
Boogie Woogie for as Long as They Could Remember

- Sharon Pease (in Down Beat Magazine) (circa 1940) discovered that even the oldest living African Americans that he surveyed had heard Boogie Woogie being performed for as long as they could remember. Thus, it would be possible to derive a range of time by counting backwards from the ages of all known living African Americans who were alive circa 1940. Such a calculation suggests that Boogie Woogie elements might have been present prior to the Civil War. If so, these primitive Boogie Woogie performances would have probably had the most pure relationship to West African ostinato drumming as compared to Boogie Woogies that came later.
- Given that Lead Belly witnessed Boogie Woogie in 1899; and given the North to South migration of the Thomas family; and given the Texas & Pacific headquarter in Marshal; and given the huge slave population in Harrison County; and given the fact that the best-documented and largest-scale turpentine camps in Texas did not occur until after 1900 in Southeast Texas, it is probable that Boogie Woogie spread from Northeast to Southeast Texas, rather than developing diffusely with an even density over all of the piney woods of East Texas.



The Story of Boogie-Woogie

A Left Hand Like God



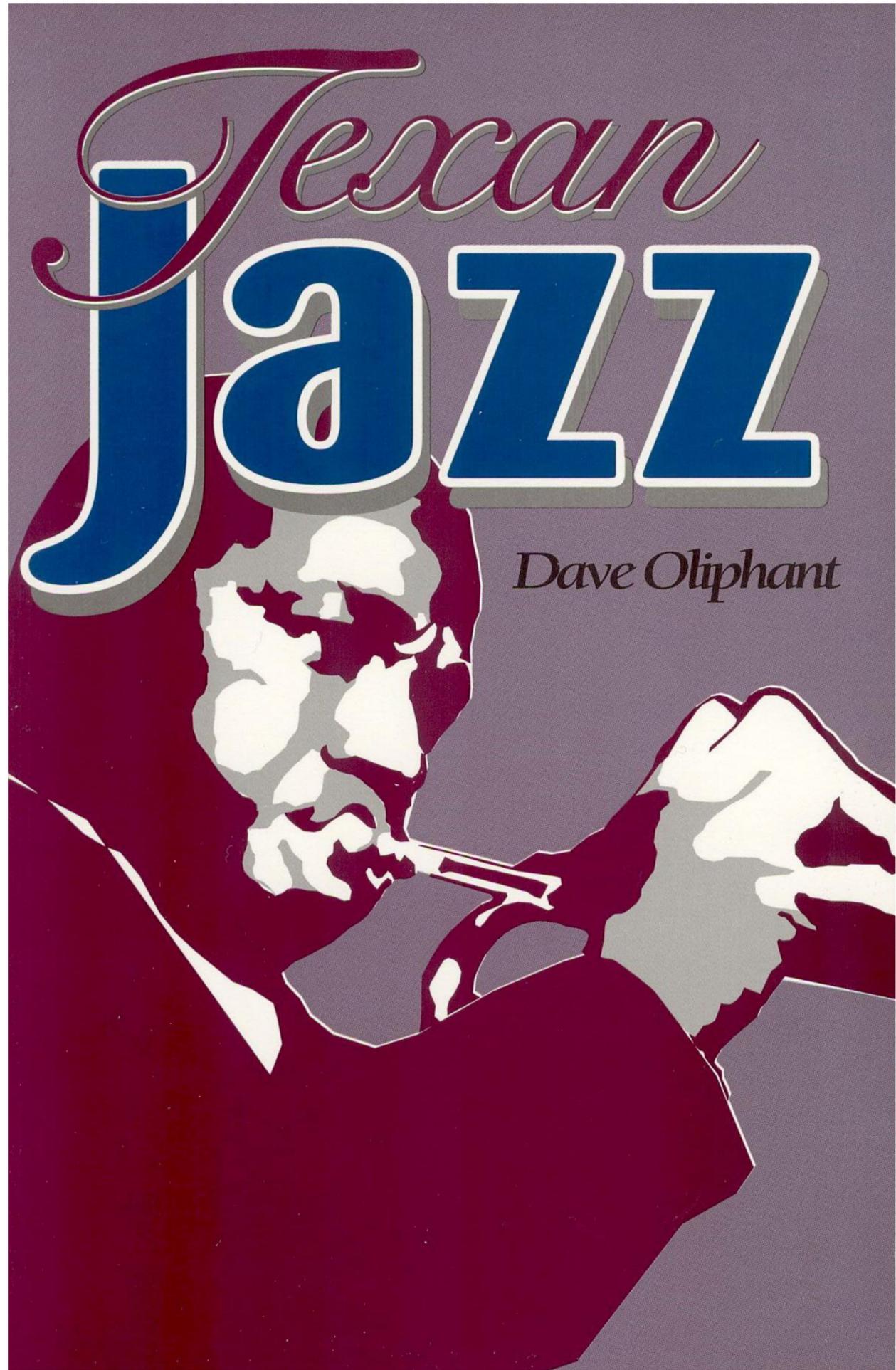
PETER J. SILVESTER

Peter J. Silvester, 1988:

- According to "The Story of Boogie Woogie: A Left Hand Like God," by Peter J. Silvester:
- **"....between 1872 and 1876, the Texas & Pacific Railroad had been laying track to the west of Shreveport at Marshall and to the north of Shreveport at Texarkana. In this general area, or in Caddo County, or in Shreveport itself, is where the blues singer and guitarist, Huddie 'Leadbelly' Ledbetter, first heard barrelhouse pianists playing boogie-woogie walking basses in 1899 (or 1901, depending on source)."**

Tescan
Jazz

Dave Oliphant



Dave Oliphant, 1996:

- **"Although the neighboring states of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Missouri would also produce boogie-woogie players and their boogie-woogie tunes, and despite the fact that Chicago would become known as the center for this music through such pianists as Jimmy Yancey, Albert Ammons, and Meade 'Lux' Lewis, Texas was home to an environment that fostered creation of boogie-style: the lumber, cattle, turpentine, and oil industries, all served by an expanding railway system from the northern corner of East Texas to the Gulf Coast and from the Louisiana border to Dallas and West Texas." (page 75)**
- **Here, Oliphant is describing a radially-expanding railroad system with Marshall, TX, at its crossroads.**

Rosetta Reitz, 1983:

- **"Texas as the state of origin became reinforced by Jelly Roll Morton who said he heard the boogie piano style there early in the century; so did Leadbelly and so did Bunk Johnson."**

William Barlow, 1989:

- Although there is an obvious typographical error in his comments, in "Looking Up at Down: The Emergence of Blues Culture," William Barlow writes in Chapter 7 of his book:

"Piano players were the first blues musicians associated with the Deep Ellum tenderloin. In Dallas, Houston, and other cities of Eastern Texas, the prevailing piano style of uptempo blues numbers was called "Fast Western" or "Fast Texas." An offshoot of boogie woogie, it probably came from the "Piney Woods" lumber and turpentine camps based in northwest [sic*]Texas, northern Louisiana, and southern Arkansas. However, the style became a fixture in "Deep Ellum" after the turn of the century."**

- ***** note the typographical error here – obviously, he is referring to northeast Texas, not northwest Texas.**

Shelly Berg, Dean, Frost School of Music, University of Miami, 2009:

- [Riverwalk Jazz Radio Program](#) on NPR - Chicago's Jazz Age Melting Pot: Hot Jazz, Boogie Woogie & the Blues - Broadcast November 19, 2009. At this performance in October, 2009, in San Antonio, Texas, pianist and Dean of the [Frost School of Music](#) at the University of Miami, [Shelly Berg](#), cited **East Texas as the origin of Boogie Woogie.**

Boogie Woogie: The Father of Rock and Roll

- The Boogie Woogie Beat: Rompin' Stompin' Rhythm, Broadcast the week of 1/17/02, Based on Riverwalk, script ©2001 by Margaret Moos Pick, stated:
 - **" Pine Top's Boogie Woogie launched a fad that swept the world in the 1930s and 40s. The boogie woogie craze was the most spectacular revolution in popular music to come along until Elvis Presley's Blue Suede Shoes. In many ways, Boogie Woogie is the father of rock and roll."**
- Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Ray Charles, and Jimmy Yancey were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame at their first induction dinner in 1986. Although Jimmy Yancey was already known to the public as a Boogie Woogie player, the other four inductees into the [Rock and Roll Hall of Fame](#) have stated the following about Boogie Woogie:
 - Little Richard said:
 - **"Everything I play is boogie woogie...rock and roll is just up-tempo boogie woogie!"**
 - In a 1990 interview, Little Richard also offered this explanation for the birth of rock:
 - **"I would say that boogie-woogie and rhythm & blues mixed is rock and roll."**
 - On page 142 of his 1987 autobiography, "Chuck Berry: The Autobiography,"²⁹ Berry wrote:
 - **"The nature and backbone of my beat is boogie and muscle of my music is melodies that are simple. Call it what you may: jive, jazz, jump, swing, soul, rhythm, rock, or even punk, it's still boogie so far as I'm connected with it. When I can't connect to it, I have no right to dispute its title. When its boogie, but with an alien title, the connection is still boogie and my kind of music."**²⁹
 - The **"alien title,"** of **"Rock and Roll"** to which Berry refers indicates that he was aware that his music had been arbitrarily re-labeled by promoters and marketers. Moreover, Berry partly borrowed his guitar style from the Boogie Woogie as played by the pianist in Berry's band, Johnnie Johnson. For this reason, some historians regard Johnnie Johnson as a more legitimate "Father" of Rock and Roll than Berry.
 - During a November 3, 1999 interview by Nick Spitzer on the [American Routes Radio Show](#), Spitzer asked Jerry Lee Lewis about the music that came to be called Rock and Roll. Lewis responded:
 - **"They called it blues. They called it Boogie Woogie. Then they changed the name of it to Rock and Roll."**
 - By referring to **"they,"** Lewis suggests that it was not he who changed the name of the type of music he was playing, but rather those who promoted and marketed the music he was playing.

Boogie Woogie: The Father of Rock and Roll

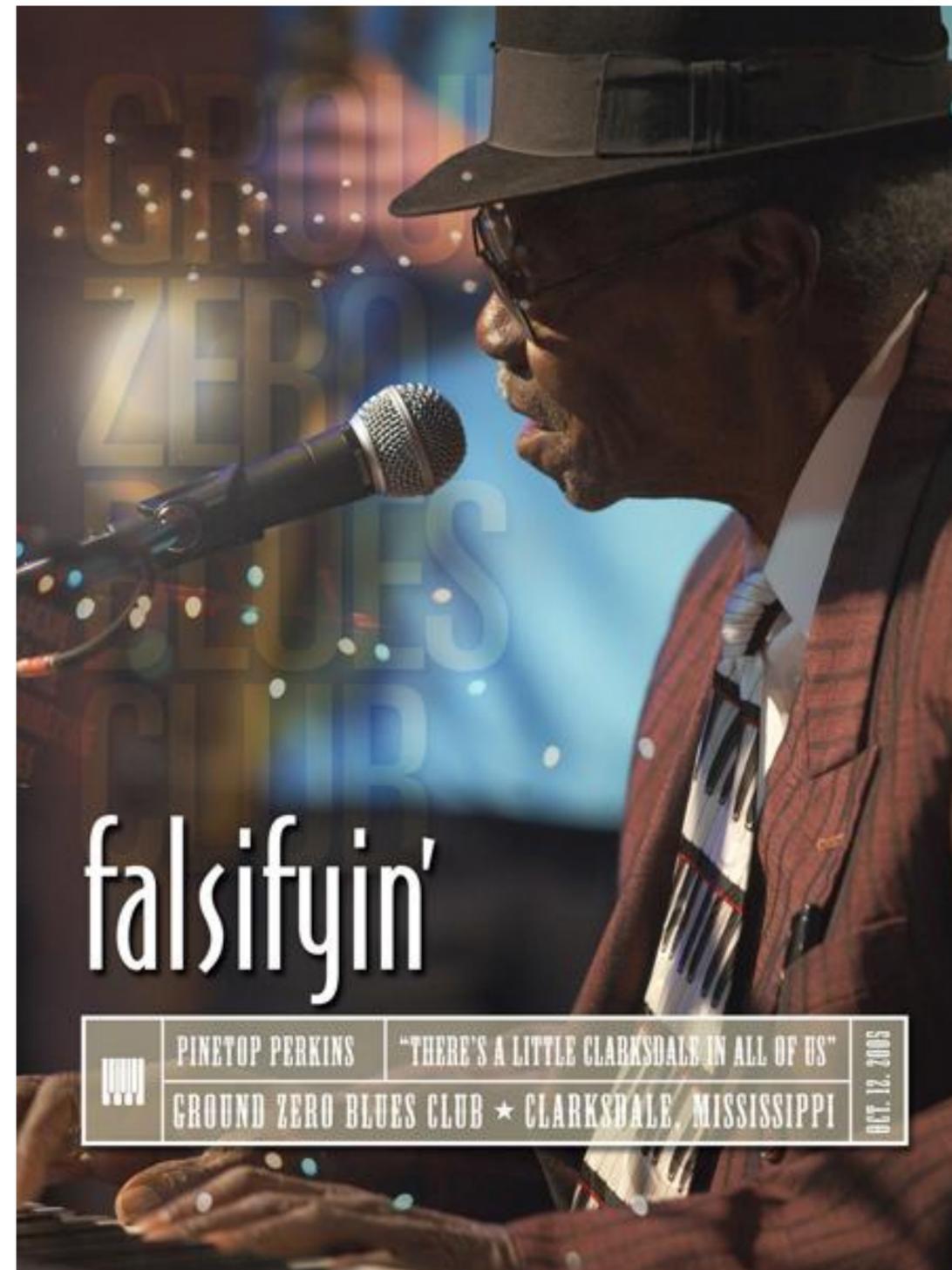
- Ray Charles gives ample evidence of the influence that Boogie Woogie had on him, indicating that Boogie Woogie was the first style to which he was exposed, and that Boogie Woogie records were the first records to which he listened. In his autobiography, "Brother Ray: Ray Charles' Own Story," Ray Charles states the following (page 8):
- **"Sometimes I'm asked about my biggest musical influence as a kid. I always give one name: Mr. Wylie Pitman. I called him Mr. Pit."**
- and (page 8)
- **"Mr. Pit could play some sure-enough boogie-woogie piano."**
- and (page 8)
- **"Oh, that piano! It was an old, beat-up upright and the most wonderful contraption I had ever laid eyes on. Boogie-woogie was hot then, and it was the first style I was exposed to. Mr. Pit played with the best of them."**
- and (page 9)
- **"I tried to figure out how he could make all those notes come together. I was a baby, but I was trying to invent some boogie-woogie licks of my own."**
- and (page 9)
- **"Some days I'd be out in the yard back of the house. If I heard Mr. Pit knocking out some of that boogie-woogie, I'd drop what I was doing and run over to his place. The man *always* let me play."⁵⁶**
- and (pages 9-10)
- **"I heard the radio round town, though there were only white stations on it. No way they'd be playing real blues -- I mean hollering-through-the-hollow-log blues. But records were also around, and the first ones I listened to were on Mr. Pit's jukebox."**
- and (page 10)
- **"Boogie-woogie, baby! The jukebox was jumping with the stuff. There was Pete Johnson, Meade Lux Lewis, and Albert Ammons. And you better believe that there was also some filthy blues, some *country* blues, coming out of that same box -- Tampa Red, Blind Boy Phillips, and Washboard Sam."**

Boogie Woogie: The Father of Rock and Roll

- In 1987, Smithsonian music historian, Martin Williams wrote:
- **"Early rock music borrowed boogie woogie devices and effects wholesale."**
- Another source of corroboration of Boogie Woogie's role in the creation of Rock and Roll comes from Morgan Wright of Hoy Hoy Records. Wright has done extensive listening of pre-1950s Rock and Roll (see [Hoy Hoy Records website](#) for audio examples, artist names, and historical commentary on the history of Rock and Roll.) As a result of Wright's inquiry into the history of the music we came to call "Rock and Roll," he came to define "Rock and Roll" as:
- **"Boogie Woogie with a back beat."**

Falsifyin' – 2007 Documentary on Boogie Woogie

- "Some music scholars have said what you're hearing shouldn't work... Because the right hand plays against the left instead of with it. They actually called it falsifyin'."



Morgan Freeman States the Following in the Introductory Narration to *Falsifyin'*:

- "There is an unspoken faith in the power of music to heal, some say heal even the deepest of our cultural wounds. This faith is manifested when a diverse group of musicians take the stage, making beautiful music, rendering race, religion, age, and economic status irrelevant. Their differences are then expressed simply as various instruments, each adding its distinctive sound to the music. This mysterious harmony that makes diversity work so well as one song, or as one genre of music, becomes a powerful metaphor for how the human race could work together, if we would only listen, if we would only see. Unfolding before us is the perfect example....night after night, millions of times a day on stages, concert halls, clubs, and juke joints all over the world wherever musicians sit down to play together. There is a deeper, more profound reason why we love music. When we hear these penetrating and resonant chords struck, when we see black, white, old, young, rich, and poor playing together in harmony, there is opened a door that reveals at least one path to our salvation."

**In the Closing to Falsifyin', the
Following Text Appears on the Screen:**

- "The father of Rock 'n Roll is not the Blues...Oh, no. The Blues is the grandfather. Boogie Woogie is the father."

Influence of Boogie Woogie As Compared to Blues

- The influence of Boogie Woogie on Rock-and-Roll and popular music worldwide is greater than that of Blues in general.
- Boogie Woogie is the kind of Blues that has had the most influence on popular music throughout the world.
- The less upbeat styles of Blues have not had this magnitude of influence.

Marshall, Texas

- Marshall, TX, was the First “Hub” of Boogie Woogie, i.e. the geographical center of gravity, around which the earliest Boogie Woogie was played.
- This same line of logic has resulted in New Orleans being regarded as the birthplace of jazz. That is, there is no hard evidence that the first “jazz” was played within the city limits of New Orleans, yet the claim of New Orleans, as the “birthplace of jazz,” is considered an acceptable claim because New Orleans was unquestionably a geographical center of gravity for such music.

Marshall, Texas: The First Hub of Boogie Woogie



John Penney of the AMRF:

- In 2009 the American Music Research Foundation received the Gold Remi Award for its documentary titled, "International Boogie Woogie," based on footage from AMRF's 7th Annual Motor City Blues and Boogie Woogie Festival in Detroit, Michigan in 2005. At time of receiving the award above, AMRF Director John Penney commented, "It's particularly appropriate that we received this award in Texas, the birthplace of Boogie Woogie."**

The Case for Marshall, TX as the “Birthplace of Boogie Woogie”

- There is a virtual consensus among experts that East Texas was the birthplace of Boogie Woogie.
- The only lack of specificity has traditionally been in pinning a specific geographical focal point or “center of gravity” in East Texas where the first Boogie Woogie was played.

The Case for Marshall, TX as the “Birthplace of Boogie Woogie”

- Railroad and logging camps have been acknowledged as the first sites where Boogie Woogie was played by African Americans as early as the 1870s.
- Given Marshall’s being the headquarters of the Texas & Pacific Railroad, Marshall was the nearest municipal hub for locomotive sounds, railroad construction, and the associated logging industry that co-occurred with railroad construction.

**The Thomas Family Migration
(Included Fanny Thomas,
George W. Thomas, Sr., &
George W. Thomas, Jr.,
born 1883 in Little Rock)**

**This map detail is from the
October 1897 Texas & Pacific
map in Nonjohn's archives.**



1. Starting Point: Little Rock, Arkansas (northeast of visible map)
 2. Southwest to Texarkana, AR-TX
 3. South to Marshall, Texas
 4. West to Longview, Texas
 5. Southwest to Palestine, Texas
 6. South to Houston, Texas
- George W. Thomas, Jr.'s younger sister, Beulah Thomas (married name of Sippie Wallace) was born Nov. 1, 1898 in Houston. The Texas & Pacific line from Texarkana to Shreveport was not yet present in 1898. Had the Thomases migrated when this line was present, they might have bypassed the crucial town of Marshall, Texas, on the way to Houston, Texas.**

Hudie Leadbetter (AKA Leadbelly)



The Case for Marshall, TX as the “Birthplace of Boogie Woogie”

- Leadbelly says he heard pianists playing Boogie Woogie bass lines as early as 1899 somewhere along the Marshall-Shreveport Corridor.
- Leadbelly is associated with the Texas & Pacific Railroad in two ways:
 - 1. Leadbelly and musician Blind Lemon Jefferson specifically used the T&P in their travels to play music at various East Texas locales.
 - 2. Leadbelly reports having witnessed Boogie Woogie piano in the brothels on Fannin Street in Shreveport. The Texas & Pacific Railroad ran in extremely close proximity to these structures, closer by far than any other railroad.

Leadbelly, 1899:

- The migratory pathway of Leadbelly (from birthplace Mooringsport, Louisiana to Dallas, Texas) takes him through Marshall, Texas no later than the time that the Thomas family probably came through Marshall. Also, Leadbelly was known to have spent some time in the Texarkana area, a town through which the Thomas family almost certainly passed on their migration to Houston, TX. These correspondences of Leadbelly's overall east-to-west migration with the Thomas family north-to-south migration, coupled with Thomas's having said that he based his "Hop Scop Blues" on music being played in East Texas point strongly to Northeast Texas/Northwest Louisiana as the area where we have what appears to be the earliest eyewitness report of Boogie Woogie being played in 1899.
- Specifically, Ernest Borneman notes on page 14 in his chapter on Boogie Woogie (Chapter 2) in the 1957 book, "Just Jazz":
- **"Leadbelly says he heard it first in 1899 in Caddo County on the Texas Border."**
- In reality, there was no "Caddo County" in Texas, and most of the African-American communities along Caddo Lake were actually a part of Harrison County, of which Marshall is the county seat. But it seems reasonable to infer that Leadbelly was referencing the "Caddo Area" along Caddo Lake, which even now is a sparsely-populated wilderness of cypress swamps and unique, primordial beauty. Caddo Lake is the only naturally-formed lake in Texas, and the largest in the American South. It covers about 30,000 acres, and is almost evenly divided between Texas and Louisiana. On the Louisiana side, there is a Caddo Parish, the Louisiana equivalent of a "county." But, according to the 1910 data, there was a much higher population density of African-Americans on the Texas side (62.5 – 75%) than on the Louisiana side (25 – 37.5%), which would indicate a higher probability of African musical sensibilities on the Texas side. In either case, the region was culturally unified and the state boundary was defined only by a line of longitude, not by a barrier such as a River. Thus, locations of Railroads, Roads, and known music venues would be more reliable clues as to which side of the border Leadbelly first heard Boogie Woogie. His comment would seem to place it in Texas. Regardless, by 1899, it was almost certainly being played in the area he christened "Caddo County", and on both sides of the Texas-Louisiana state border.

Ernest Borneman, 1957:

- On page 17 in his chapter on Boogie Woogie in “Just Jazz”, Ernest Borneman notes:
- "About 1900, Leadbelly heard an old-time Louisiana pianist named 'Pine Top' (*not* Clarence 'Pine Top' Smith) playing Boogie on Fanning Street." (Borneman misspelled "Fannin" as "Fanning.") Leadbelly was so inspired by this piano playing that he imitated Pine Top's rhythmic piano style on his guitar.
- Borneman quotes Leadbelly's comments about Fannin Street's Pine Top on page 17 of “Just Jazz:”
- **"He played that Boogie Woogie. That's what I wanted to play on guitar -- that piano bass. I always wanted to play piano tunes. I got it out of the barrelhouses on Fannin Street."**
- **Note:** The "Pine Top" to which Leadbelly refers was not Clarence "Pine Top" Smith from Alabama who first used the word, "Boogie Woogie" in the title of his Boogie Woogie sound recording. Clarence "Pine Top" Smith was not born until June 11, 1904.

Alan Govenar, 1991:

- Leadbelly met fellow blues player, Blind Lemon Jefferson, in the Deep Ellum area of Dallas. For an uncertain period of time, they played together in Dallas. Deep Ellum developed as a Mecca for original music in Dallas as a direct consequence of being at the crossroads of the Texas & Pacific Railroad and the Houston & Texas Central Railroad. This crossroads was important to the development of blues music in Texas. Leadbelly relied on the Texas & Pacific Railroad to transport him to Dallas. Moreover, he has stated that he and Blind Lemon used the T&P to travel to locations where they would perform together. Specifically, on page 22 of the chapter, "Blind Lemon Jefferson: That Black Snake Moan: The Music and Mystery of Blind Lemon Jefferson," in the book, "Bluesland: Portraits of Twelve Major American Blues Masters," Alan Govenar wrote of Leadbelly's recollections about Leadbelly's and Blind Lemon's travels on the Texas & Pacific Railroad:
- **"Leadbelly remarked that they were often able to get free rides on the Texas & Pacific Railroad in exchange for their playing."**
- Leadbelly could be responsible for having taught Blind Lemon Jefferson to play a walking bass line on Jefferson's guitar. According to Sammy Price, Jefferson called his walking bass line his "booga-rooga."

The Case for Marshall, TX as the “Birthplace of Boogie Woogie”

- Not until 12 years later (in 1911), was there a claim by Clarence Williams of hearing Boogie Woogie performed in Houston.
- The relative isolation of the Marshall railroad hub allowed for a stylistic elements distinct from Ragtime and Jazz to develop.

The Case for Marshall, TX as the “Birthplace of Boogie Woogie”

- The nomenclature of Lee Ree Sullivan suggests a maturation of Boogie Woogie that began with relatively simple musical forms in the Marshall area and became increasingly complex in locations where the Texas & Pacific railroad routes were being constructed radially away from Marshall to the east, west, and north.
- The association between Boogie Woogie and developing routes of the T&P Railroad has also been recognized by other researchers as well, such as Margaret Moos Pick (see slides below).

Lee Ree Sullivan's Nomenclature for Boogie Woogie Basslines

- 1. Marshall
- 2. Waskom
- 3. Greenwood
- 4. Shreveport
- 5. Jefferson
- 6. Hoxie
- 7. Texas & Pacific
- 8. Texarkana & Northern
- 9. Swamp Poodle
- 10. Black Diamond
- 11. Big Sandy
- 12. Tyler Tap



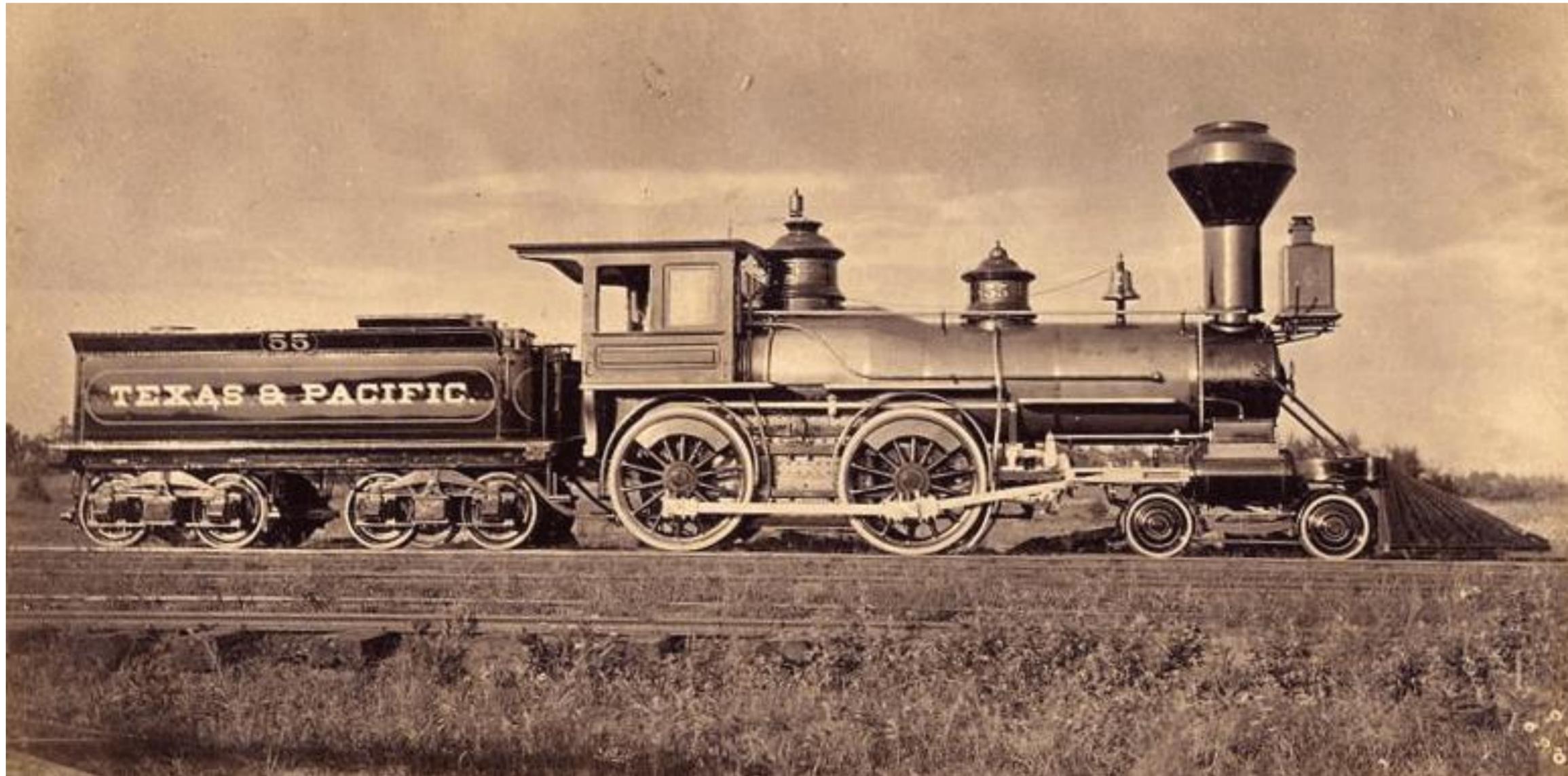
Margaret Moos Pick, 2001:

- Another attribution of the geographical origin of Boogie Woogie to Texas was in the radio script, "The Boogie Woogie Beat: Rompin' Stompin' Rhythm," (broadcast the week of 1/17/02, Riverwalk script ©2001 by Margaret Moos Pick). Moos wrote [when referring to the developers of the Boogie Woogie]:
 - **"They had a captive audience: loggers from the lumber camps deep in the piney woods, and workers laying track for the Texas and Pacific railroad, carving a line of steel through the wilderness. The sounds of barrelhouse Boogie Woogie spread out in all directions following the path of the newly emerging railroad lines."**

Expanding Rails in East Texas



Texas & Pacific Engine 55



The Texas and Pacific: The Boogie Woogie Railroad



The Case for Marshall, TX as the “Birthplace of Boogie Woogie”

- Boogie Woogie in Donaldsonville, Louisiana in 1904, adjacent to the Texas & Pacific line:
- On page 22 of the **July 1939 issue of Down Beat**, Onah L. Spencer wrote that songwriter Richard M. Jones witnessed Stavin Chain playing Boogie Woogie in 1904 at Bully Reynolds' T P Saloon in Donaldsonville, Louisiana adjacent to Texas & Pacific Railroad camps. Moreover, Richard M. Jones indicated that Stavin Chain had traveled from Arkansas. Since Stavin Chain was heard in Donaldsonville performing for Texas & Pacific railroad workers, he likely had traveled from Shreveport on the Texas & Pacific line.
- Since the Texas & Pacific Railroad had built eastward from Marshall, TX to Shreveport, LA, and then to Donaldsonville, and then to New Orleans, it is probable that the T&P Railroad was responsible for bringing Boogie Woogie out of Texas to from Marshall to Shreveport, then to Donaldsonville, and then to New Orleans. (Since 1871, the New Orleans, Mobile, and Chattanooga Railroad had an operational line between Donaldsonville and New Orleans. Thus, upon T & P's reaching Donaldsonville, Boogie Woogie could have spread quickly to New Orleans. Thus, if we were able to go back in time, following T&P's railroad route from Donaldsonville towards Texas points back to Shreveport, and from there, back to Marshall.
- In contrast, the first documented claim of witnessing in Houston did not occur until 1911 by Clarence Williams.



The Case for Marshall, TX as the “Birthplace of Boogie Woogie”

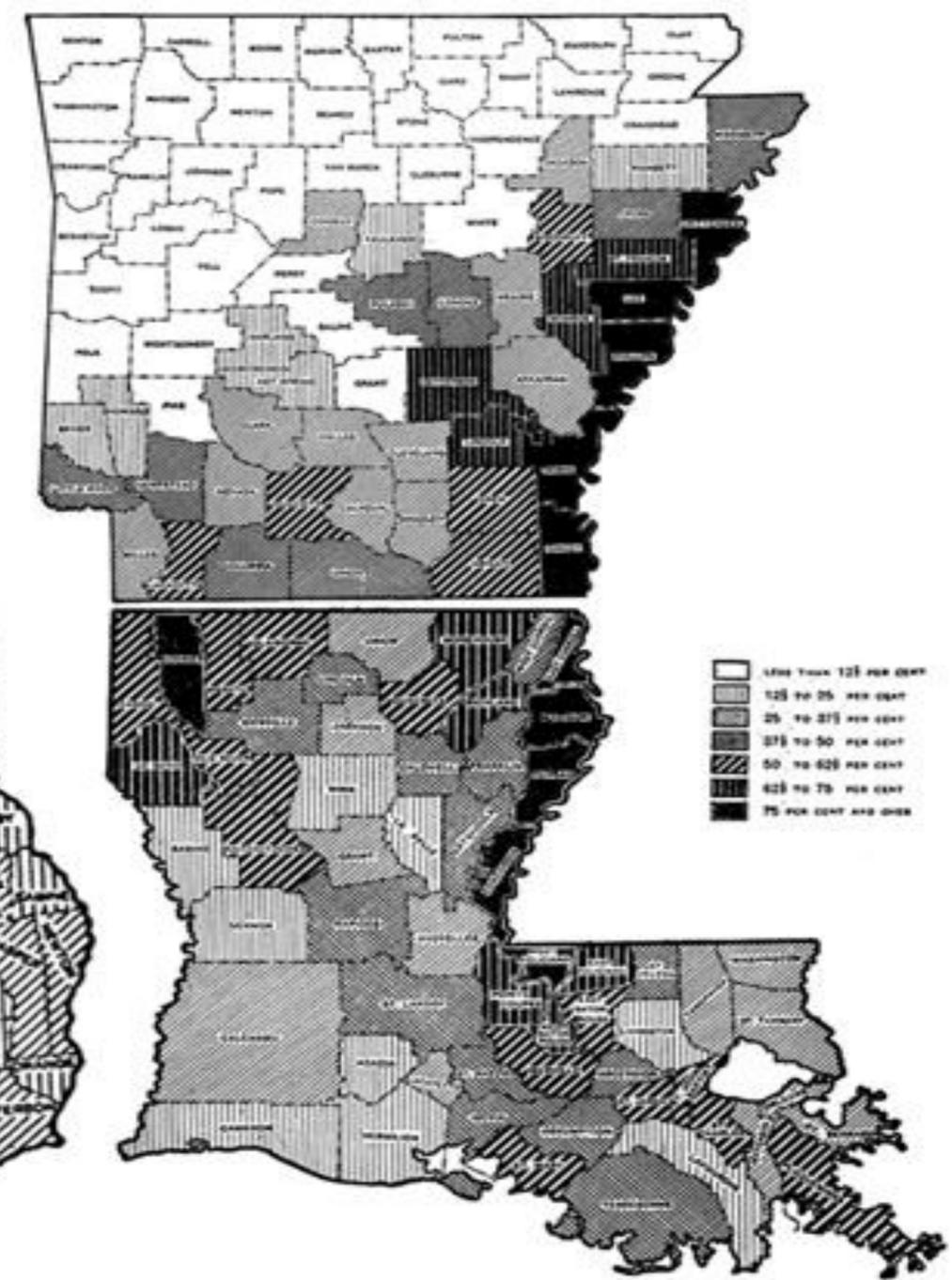
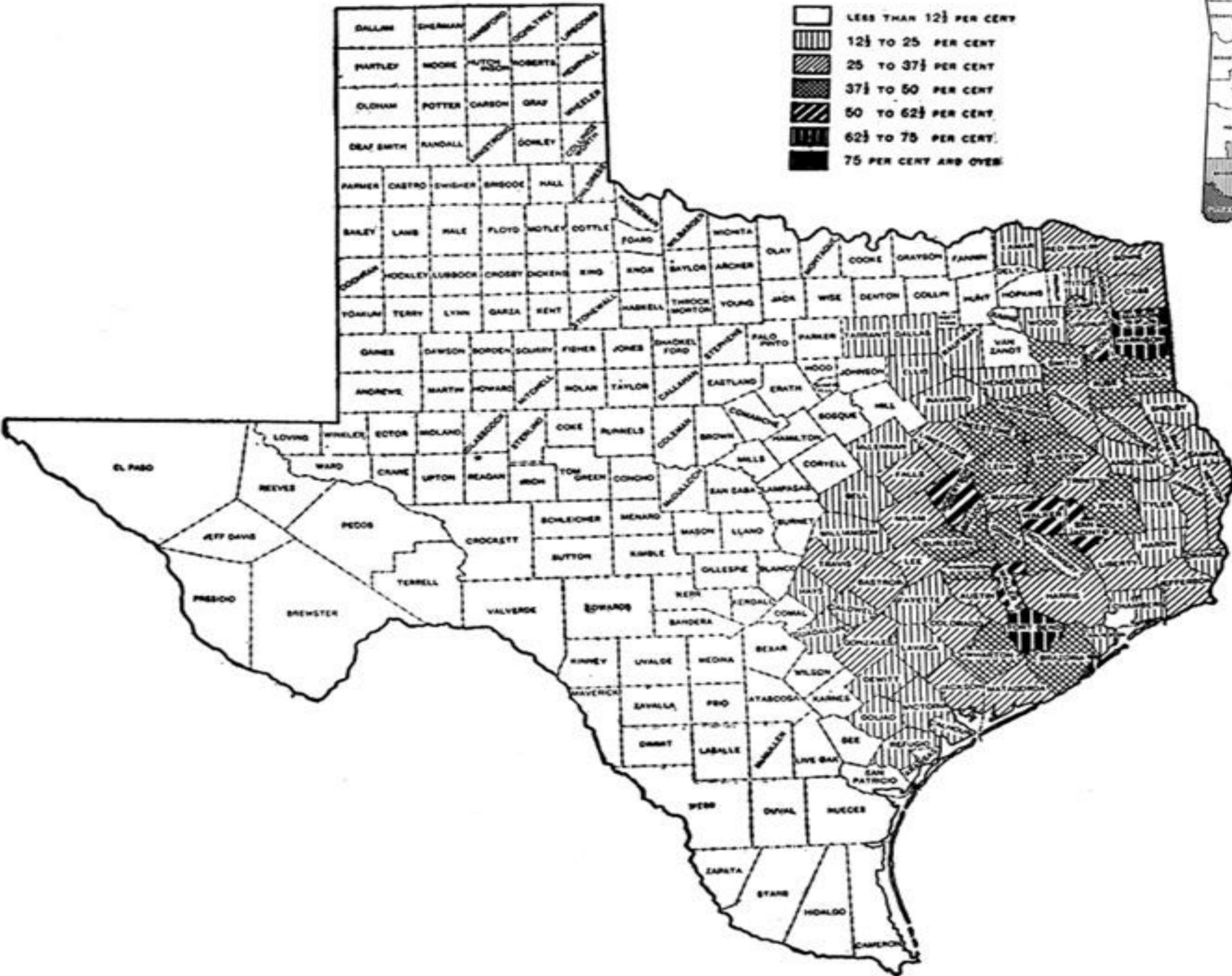
- Another documented term for Boogie Woogie is “Fast Western.” (1938)
- Music historian, Mack McCormick determined that Boogie Woogie players in the Houston area (such as Robert Shaw and Buster Pickens) were unfamiliar with “Fast Western” as synonym for “Boogie Woogie. Yet Boogie Woogie players Lee Ree Sullivan and Artis Brewster of Texarkana were both familiar with “Fast Western” as a synonym for Boogie Woogie piano, and attributed the term “Fast Western” to the fact that the precursor of the Texas & Pacific Railroad was the Texas Western Railroad, a name that had stuck with the slave laborers who were involved in the very first construction efforts of the Marshall-area railroad hub that began at Swanson’s Landing on Caddo Lake from materials that had been shipped in by Steamboat up the Red River, and then along the Cypress Bayou to Swanson’s Landing on Caddo Lake.
- Despite Robert Shaw (born 1904) being from Stafford (the original western terminus of the first operational railroad line in Texas in 1853), Shaw was completely unfamiliar with “Fast Western,” as a common synonym for Boogie Woogie piano. Yet, “Fast Western” was familiar to Boogie Woogie players in the Arkalates area, and attributed by them to the fact that the Texas & Pacific had derived from the “Texas Western Railroad” (chartered in 1852). These facts suggest that Boogie Woogie (AKA “Fast Western”) did **not** originate in proximity to the operations of a Houston-area railroad company.

Mack McCormick: Music Historian & Folklorist



The Case for Marshall, TX as the “Birthplace of Boogie Woogie”

- The African American population of Harrison County and Marion County was significantly greater than that of Harris County prior to 1900 and even afterwards.
- Thus, the probability of African musical sensibilities being expressed was also greater.



Alan Lomax, 1993:

- **"Anonymous black musicians, longing to grab a train and ride away from their troubles, incorporated the rhythms of the steam locomotive and the moan of their whistles into the new dance music they were playing in juke joints and dance halls. Boogie-woogie forever changed piano playing, as ham-handed black piano players transformed the instrument into a polyrhythmic railroad train."**

Steam Locomotives Sound Like Boogie Woogie



Texas Type Super-Power Steam Locomotive: A Metaphor for "Fast Texas" (Boogie Woogie) Piano

June 5, 1926

RAILWAY AGE

69

THE TEXAS TYPE

Designed in Collaboration with A. P. Prendergast,
Mechanical Superintendent, The Texas and Pacific Ry.



One of the Texas Type Super-Power Locomotives hauling a tonnage train over Iona Hill, 12 miles west of Fort Worth, Texas, on the Texas and Pacific Ry.—Grade 1.26%.

Increased Operating Efficiency

"The average weight of freight trains and the average speed with which they are moved considered together constitute one of the best measures of operating efficiency."

Railway Age Editorial, May 8, 1926

44%
Increased
Tonnage

33%
Increased
Train Speed

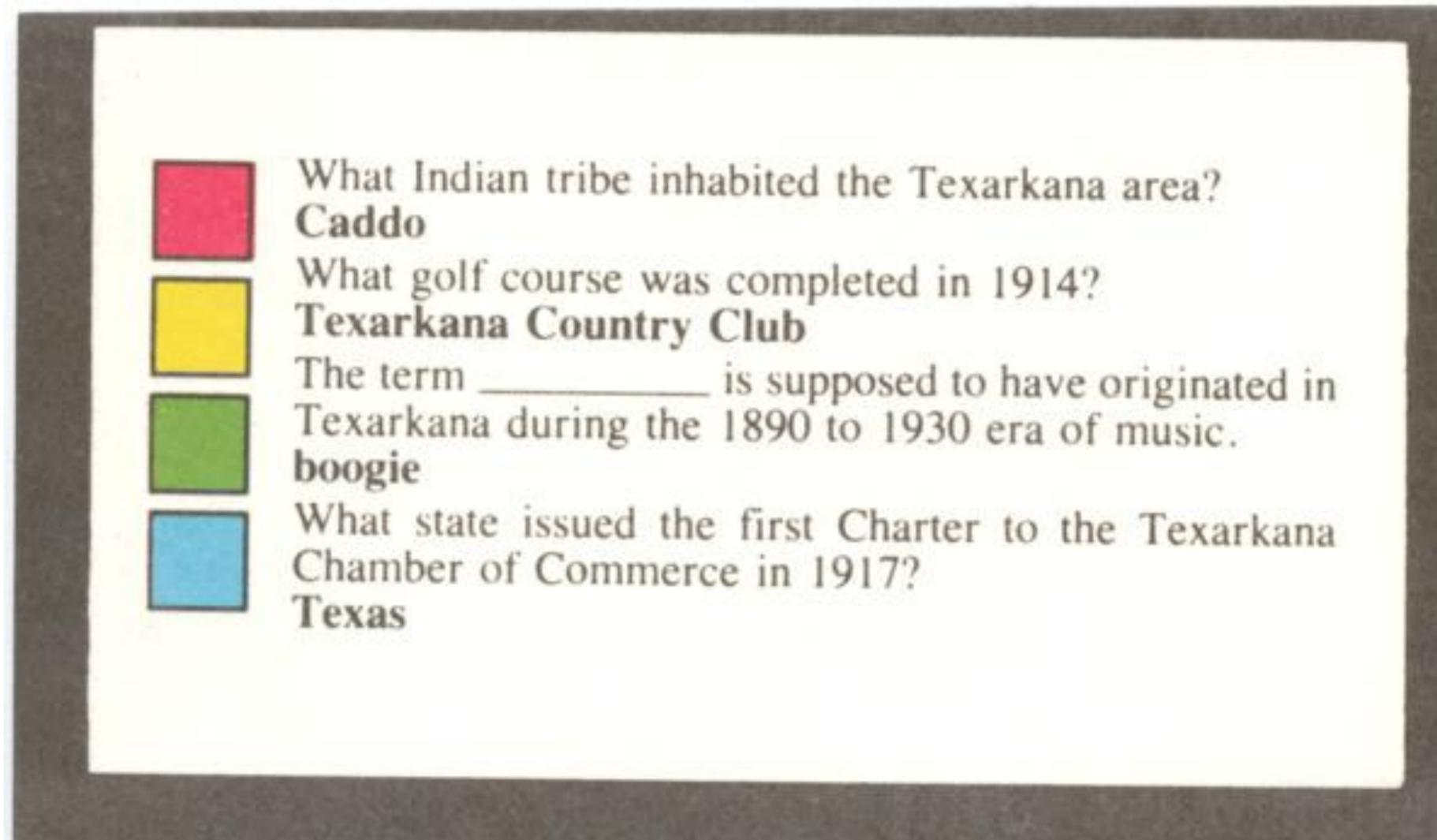
42%
Decreased Fuel
Per 1000 Gross Ton Miles

This is a three months comparison made in regular service with the Texas and Pacific 2-10-2 class having only 11% less weight on drivers than the Texas Type.



The Role of Texarkana after Boogie Woogie Spread Northward from Marshall, Texas

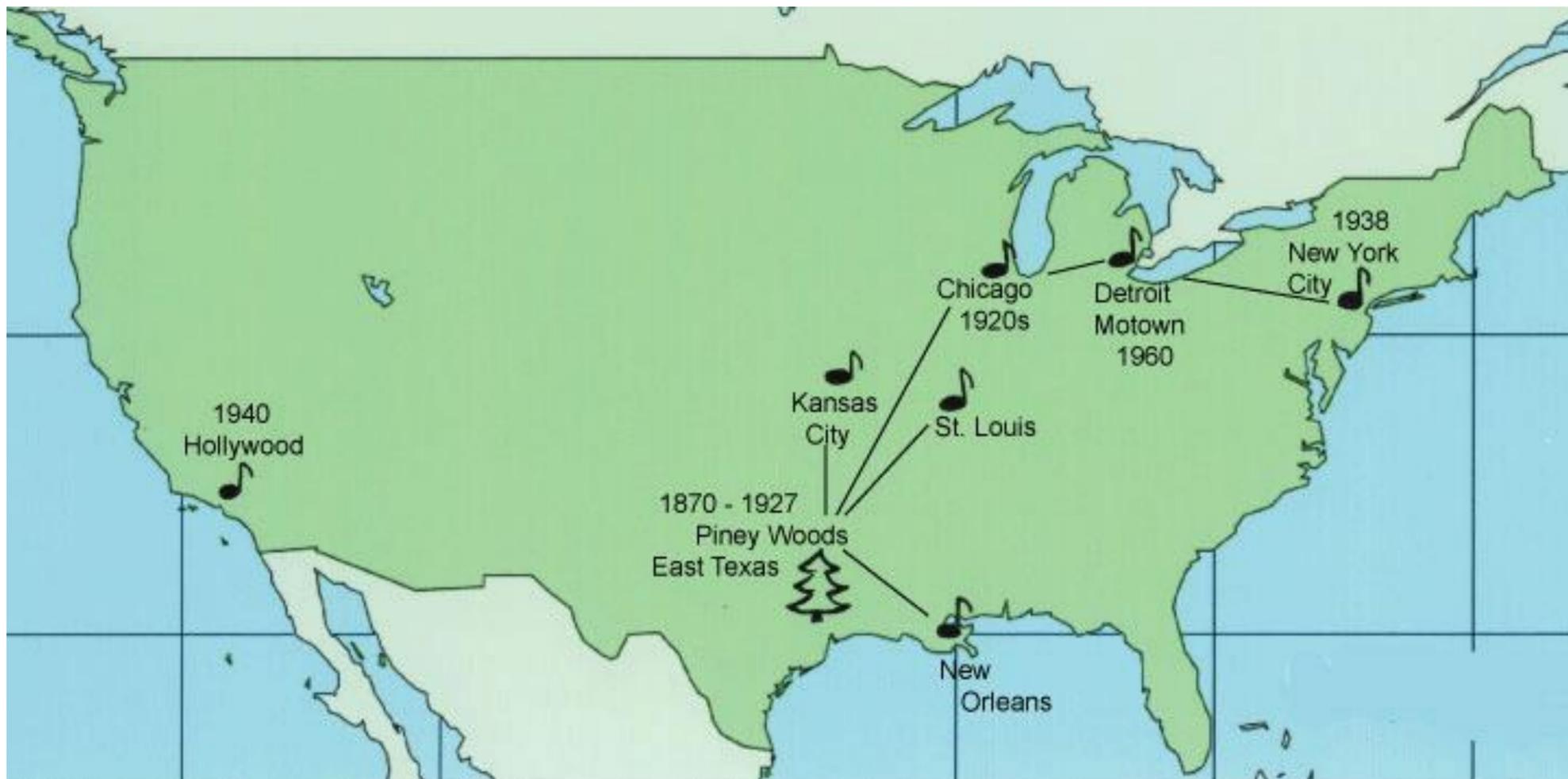
- Card from Texarkana Trivia Game based on the knowledge of Texarkana historian, Wilbur Smith:



Historical Movement of the Geographical Centers of Gravity for Performance of Boogie Woogie

- Circa 1870-1880: The Marshall Era
- Circa 1880-1900: The Texarkana Era
- 1900-1920: Extensive Diffusion was present, such that the geographical center of gravity of Boogie Woogie performance did not correspond to single municipalities, but had prominent representation in Shreveport, Dallas, Houston, New Orleans, St. Louis, and Kansas City.
- 1920-1930: The Chicago Era
- 1930-1950: Extensive Diffusion occurred again, involving prominent representation in Detroit, New York, and Los Angeles.
- 1950 to the present: Worldwide Diffusion, with strong presence in Northern Europe, including Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, The Netherlands, and England.

The National Spread of Boogie Woogie



The Current Geographic Extent of Boogie Woogie's Influence



**Marshall,
Texas:
The Birthplace of
Boogie Woogie**

By John Tennison, MD

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