

The Thrill is Gone: RIP, Riley B. King, a/k/a BB King—Michael's Rock and Roll Posse, May 15, 2015

<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/b-b-kings-inimitable-sound> (New Yorker)

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/16/arts/music/b-b-king-blues-singer-dies-at-89.html?emc=edit_th_20150515&nl=todaysheadlines&nid=18983381&r=0 (NY Times)

<http://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2015/05/15/bb-king-dies/26867377/> (Mississippi Clarion Ledger)

<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/b-b-king-blues-legend-dead-at-89-20150515>

BB King has gone to his reward.

As I wrote this morning: *I have commencement and grading deadlines, but as soon as I get through these, I will post a proper recognition, as if there could be one. Thanks to the 4 people who forwarded me the news, including one at 3:30 this morning. My research department never sleeps...*

Even though the posting was a placeholder until I could finish reading a dozen papers (my self-imposed allocation for the day), I received over a dozen responses from all of you.

In thinking about this, as I have for the last week, when I heard he had gone into hospice, I wondered how I could do justice to B.B. King, who died at 89, and who struggled with diabetes for almost three decades. I first wrote about him when I was invited by Dean Jim Rosenblatt to speak at the Mississippi College School of Law, in Jackson. I told Dean Rosenblatt (a loyal and regular correspondent in the Posse) that my mother had been born in Yazoo City, and that I would come if he could find a way that Tina and I could go to see Crossroads (Clarksdale, Mississippi), where Robert Johnson was reputed to have struck a bargain with the Devil to exchange his soul for the ability to play the blues. The Dean said, I will take you myself, and we'll go to the Rock and Blues Museum and BB King's Museum. Well, I was there, first chance I had.

We went to the area where my mother had grown up, and then went to Indianola, where the new-ish BB King Museum was located: <http://www.bbkingmuseum.org/>. The Museum was a converted cotton gin, in Indianola, where he had worked as a young man, driving a truck. These places are usually completely hagiographic, extolling the virtues of the namesakes—I have visited about a dozen connected with music—but this was decidedly different. Noting that he had been married twice but had no children with either wife, the guide blithely said that when the venue had opened in 2008, they had invited his family, and over a dozen children showed up in a bus, including five named Riley B. King, Jr. ???!! She said he “took proper care of all of them,” but it struck me that they did not gild the lily. And, of course, it seemed as if Poppa had been a rolling stone.

The Museum had hours of the most interesting film footage of r and b music I have ever seen, showing grainy pictures of the Chitlin' Circuit he played for so many years, until he was featured in a Fillmore West concert—where he seemed genuinely blown away by the white audience's reverential reaction—his 1970s appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show, and other more current footage, including his playing with his many white acolytes: Eric Clapton, Keith Richards, Billy Gibbons, Bono, John Mayer, and many others.

While the late James Brown was said to be the “hardest working man” in music, I think that nickname more properly describes his sweaty, athletic singing style, whereas BB King sat there like Buddha and played his legendary guitar, Lucille. But there can be no doubt that he was really the hardest working man in the business, and for almost 65 years. His first hit was "3 O' Clock Blues," released in 1951, the year I was born. “A 1998 Rolling Stone feature by Gerri Hirshey estimated that King had played more than 15,000 concerts. He spent more than 65 years on the road, playing more than 300 shows a year until cutting back to around a 100 during the last decade.” That is an extraordinary record, one that will never be topped.

His passing leaves Fats Domino, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and (arguably) Jerry Lee Lewis as the remaining living streams that lead into the river of Rock and Roll. The takeaway: Riley B. King, Jr. is gone, but The Thrill will never be gone, as long as we have his music. Join with me:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqr4yq3E5ow> (on the Ed Sullivan Show, 1970)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALGnqyyhC20> (BB King and Eric Clapton)

Michael

PS: More on the upcoming *Elonis* case and issues: MAO on Houston Matters, KUHF/Houston Public Media, May 13, 2015 (Rap Lyrics and Criminal Law)

<http://www.houstonmatters.org/show/2015/05/13/air-quality-and-rap-lyrics-in-court-wednesdays-show-may-13-2015> (entire show--MAO at 29:47 until 41:00)

<https://soundcloud.com/houstonmatters/are-rap-lyrics-protected-by-free-speech> (MAO) This one has a loving comment by a nephew—whom I am promoting to Nephew # 1