



Highway 61: Crossroads on the Blues Highway

Derek Bright

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Highway 61 - the legendary Blues Highway and route taken by modern-day Blues pilgrims on their journey south into the Mississippi Delta. Littered with iconic place names and immortalised in the songs of Bluesmen and women from the Deep South, the great river road was taken by countless African Americans in search of the promise of work in the cities north of the Mason-Dixie line and escape from the hardship of the rural South and the legacy of slavery manifested in the Jim Crow laws. Highway 61 draws on the work of the early musicologists looking for an authentic Delta folk music in the 1930s, to the record collectors from the northern cities in the fifties. It examines the campaigns of the Popular Front in the '40s as it looked for a musical form arising from the struggles of a newly emerging black American proletariat, through to the young white musicians who brought blues back to the States from England in the sixties. Derek Bright brings together a mass of evidence from numerous sources and suggests that we need to understand how historians have interpreted the music from the Deep South and the impact this has had on the narrative of the Blues if we are to fully appreciate the journey into the music's past that Highway 61 offers. For anyone embarking on the Blues pilgrimage this is essential reading that ensures the Blues pilgrim gets the most from the land where Blues began.

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