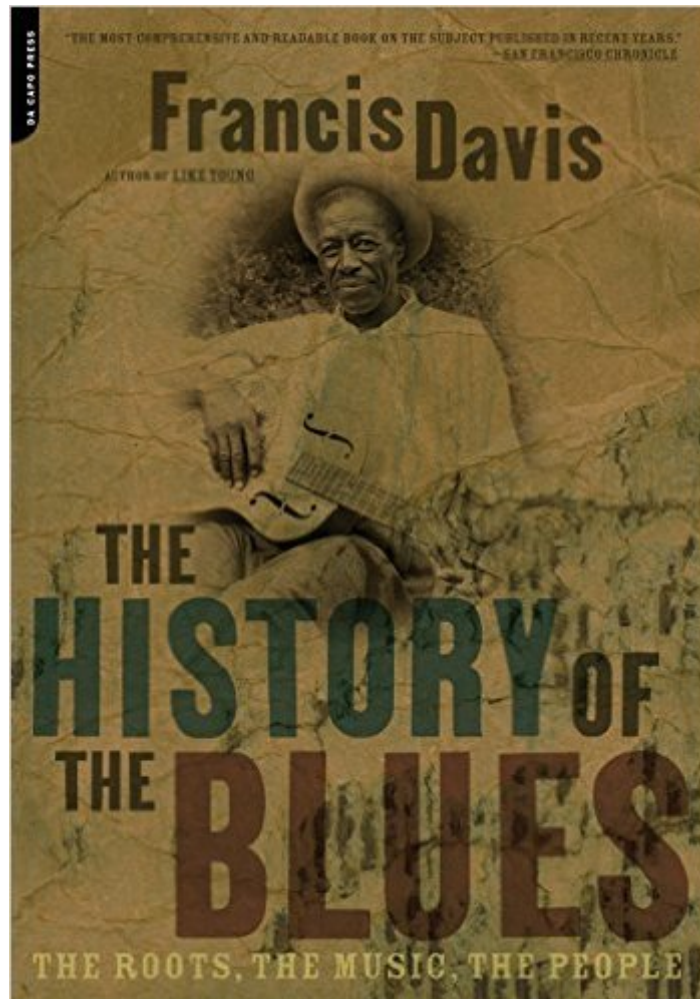


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The History Of The Blues: The Roots, The Music, The People



Synopsis

Francis Davis's *The History of the Blues* is a groundbreaking rethinking of the blues that fearlessly examines how race relations have altered perceptions of the music. Tracing its origins from the Mississippi Delta to its amplification in Chicago right after World War II, Davis argues for an examination of the blues in its own right, not just as a precursor to jazz and rock 'n' roll. The lives of major figures such as Robert Johnson, Charlie Patton, and Leadbelly, in addition to contemporary artists such as Stevie Ray Vaughan and Robert Cray, are examined and skillfully woven into a riveting, provocative narrative.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I wonder if this person even read the same book that I am reading. Some people won't like this book simply because it does not always take a traditionalist view of things. It is much broader and more open minded and tends to look at the blues from a broader region (IOW, there are blues outside of the Delta region) in order to gain a better understanding of it, it's performers, and theories as to it's origins. It challenges common accepted notions, and encourages the reader to challenge them as well. Sure the author injects his own opinions and experiences from time to time, but not only does he back them up, he does not try to pass them off as concrete fact, and you are fully aware that these are his thoughts on a particular matter. Now as far as some of the listed "inaccuracies" in the book... Tony states: "he stupidly tries to talk about Bluegrass existing in the 1920s or about the Carter family." Well, what Francis Davis ACTUALLY says is the following: "the repertoire of the

typical black country songster of the 1920's was more or less identical to that of the white rural performers of the same period. [snip a sentence abt Miss. John Hurt] The typical black songster was probably someone like Leslie Riddle, a singer and guitarist from North Carolina who didn't record until the blues revival of the 1960s, and who might be completely forgotten now if not for his early relationship with A.P. Carter, the patriarch of the Carter Family, the legendary white country harmony group...."The fact is that Leslie Riddle DID meet A.P. Carter in 1928. The two went on trips throughout the south "collecting songs" with A.P. Carter writing down the words to the songs they liked, and Riddle remembering the Music.

I've been reading books and "scholarship" on the blues since about 1970, a time when it was possible to actually own 90% of the books ever written on the subject -- my point is to indicate how relatively few there were at that time. And although I am no writer or critic, I have met and chatted with a number of famous researchers & writers in the areas of both black and country music: Bill Ferris, Steve LaVere, Robert Palmer, Paul Kingsbury, Bill Malone, etc. My point here is not to namedrop but to identify myself as someone who's been reading most books in these fields for over 40 years, and who has met as well as read the books of a number of important writers. That said, I found Davis' book to be a great read, but only because I've already read the books on the subject from Lomax and Charters onward. I already know the thumbnail (or book-length) biographies of the major and minor players in the various blues genres, as well as the major and minor authors who've written on the subject for 40 years. So I already know the arguments, disagreements, and pet peeves of most of the researchers who've written blues histories and biographies during this time. For someone with my background, Davis' discussion of various issues (I can't say his "narrative"; because it's not one) is neither jumpy nor confusing. If anything, it is the single best (or probably the only) one-stop collection of competing or evolving theories about the blues and black music in existence.

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