



Bossmen: Bill Monroe & Muddy Waters

James Rooney

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Every field has its "bossman"--the one who sets the style and makes the rules. In bluegrass and early country music the man was Bill Monroe. In the world of urban blues, the man was Muddy Waters. Using their own words and dozens of remarkable photographs by David Gahr, Carl Fleischhauer and John Byrne Cooke, James Rooney compares and contrasts the careers of these two bossmen. Both grew up in remote rural areas. Muddy Waters heard field hollers, church music, jubilees, shouts, string band music, and the raw sound of the delta blues; for Bill Monroe it was square dance music, hymns, old country ballads and the fiddling of his Uncle Pen Vandiver. Both brought their music to the big cities: Bill to Nashville, Muddy to Chicago. Musicians who passed through their bands went on to form bands of their own, giving rise to the worlds of Bluegrass and Chicago Blues. But this is more than a book about music; it is a book about black and white America. In microcosm, it is almost a history of this country; and it sets up striking comparisons that cut deep into our heritage and ways. In the words of Pete Seeger: "Anyone in the world wanting to understand American music could well start right here."

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