

Goin' where de Norfolk Western² curves jes' lak de river bends,
Where de Norfolk Western swing around de river bends, 5
Goin' where de people stacks up mo' lak friends.

Leave 'is dirty city, take my foot up in my hand,
Dis do-dirty city, take my foot up in my hand,
Git down to de livin' what a man kin understand.

Gang of dicties³ here, an' de rest wants to git dat way, 10
Dudes an' dicties, others strive to git dat way,
Put pennies on de numbers from now unto de judgement day.

I'm got de tin roof blues, got dese sidewalks on my mind,
De tin roof blues, dese lonesome sidewalks on my mind, 15
I'm goin' where de shingles covers people mo' my kind.

1931

Ma Rainey¹

I

When Ma Rainey
Comes to town,
Folks from anyplace
Miles aroun', 5
From Cape Girardeau,
Poplar Bluff,²
Flocks in to hear
Ma do her stuff;
Comes flivverin'³ in,
Or ridin' mules, 10
Or packed in trains,
Picknickin' fools. . . .
That's what it's like,
Fo' miles on down,
To New Orleans delta 15
An' Mobile⁴ town,
When Ma hits
Anywheres aroun'.

II

Dey comes to hear Ma Rainey from de little river settlements,
From blackbottom⁵ cornrows and from lumber camps; 20

2. Another railroad line.

3. Middle- and upper-class blacks.

1. Celebrated blues singer (1886-1939).

2. The seat of Butler County, in southeastern Missouri. Cape Girardeau is a city (and county) in

southeastern Missouri.

3. Riding in a flivver, or a small, cheap automobile.

4. A seaport in Alabama.

5. Fertile land.

Dey stumble in de hall, jes a-laughin' an' a-cacklin',
Cheerin' lak roarin' water, lak wind in river swamps.

An' some jokers keeps deir laughs a-goin' in de crowded aisles,
An' some folks sits dere waitin' wid deir aches an' miseries, 25
Till Ma comes out before dem, a-smilin' gold-toofed smiles
An' Long Boy ripples minors on de black an' yellow keys.⁶

III

O Ma Rainey,
Sing yo' song;
Now you's back
Whah you belong, 30
Git way inside us,
Keep us strong. . . .
O Ma Rainey,
Li'l an' low;
Sing us 'bout de hard luck 35
Roun' our do';
Sing us 'bout de lonesome road
We mus' go. . . .

IV

I talked to a fellow, an' the fellow say,
"She jes' catch hold of us, somekindaway. 40
She sang Backwater Blues one day:

*'It rained fo' days an' de skies was dark as night,
Trouble taken place in de lowlands at night.*

*'Thundered an' lightened an' the storm begin to roll
Thousan's of people ain't got no place to go.* 45

*'Den I went an' stood upon some high ol' lonesome hill,
An' looked down on the place where I used to live.'*

An' den de folks, dey natchally bowed dey heads an' cried,
Bowed dey heavy heads, shet dey moufs up tight an' cried,
An' Ma lef' de stage, an' followed some de folks outside." 50

Dere wasn't much more de fellow say:
She jes' gits hold of us dataway.

1932

6. Plays songs on the piano in minor key signatures.