

FINDING FOGERTY

*Interdisciplinary Readings of John Fogerty
and Creedence Clearwater Revival*

EDITED BY **THOMAS M. KITTS**

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To the happy and peaceful residents
and guests of Casa Kittsberg



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Introduction

As I was working on this collection, I had a conversation about Creedence Clearwater Revival with Chris Byrne, formerly of Black 47 and now leading Seanchai and the Unity Squad. “One of my all-time favorite bands,” Chris said. “But you know they were never considered ‘cool’ or ‘hip.’ They were thought of as an AM band, a singles group.”

Byrne is right. Few knew the band was one of the headliners at Woodstock. Leader John Fogerty was dissatisfied with their performance and so withheld the necessary permissions from the filmmakers and record producers—certainly a missed opportunity for some counterculture credibility. Even though CCR produced counterculture anthems like “Fortunate Son” and “Who’ll Stop the Rain,” there was something less than radical about the band. Their lifestyle and work ethic somehow seemed a bit too middle class. They worked all the time, releasing hit after hit. . . . too many for their counterculture good. From 1968 through 1972, CCR produced 10 top-ten singles and seven gold albums of new material—no live albums or greatest hits collections. Over the same period, Woodstock stars Sly and the Family Stone produced four top-ten singles and five albums (one a greatest hits collection) and The Who released no top-ten singles and five albums (but two compilations and one live record).

For many in the counterculture, CCR were too prolific, too successful, too middle class, and too clean. Fogerty, in fact, has been called “the notorious Puritan of rock.”¹ In 1976, he explained to Cameron Crowe: “I suppose I should be ashamed [of never taking acid] or something. But I didn’t want to

be 30 and driving down the freeway when suddenly a little part of it hits me again. No drinkin' and no dopin'—that's always been my policy."²

Perhaps predictably, CCR began life in the suburban community of El Cerrito, California, located five miles from Berkeley, another five miles from Oakland, and another five from San Francisco. In 1958, three junior high school students, three-quarters of what would eventually evolve into Creedence Clearwater Revival, formed a combo. John Fogerty played guitar; Stu Cook played piano, and Doug Clifford drums. None was brave enough to sing. Throughout high school and still without a regular vocalist, the Blue Velvets, as they called themselves, got every sock hop and youth gig in town. "It's funny, we were the only band in junior high, we were the only band in high school," said Cook. "We were the only kids we knew who were playing."³ El Cerrito has never been a hotbed of music. Carole King and Gerry Goffin could have been writing and the Monkees could have been singing about El Cerrito in "Pleasant Valley Sunday," with "charcoal burning everywhere," weekend squires mowing lawns, and roses blooming, but only the Blue Velvets were "trying hard to learn their song." Remember, this is pre-Beatles.

Missing from the Blue Velvets was later Creedence member Tom Fogerty, John's older brother by 3½ years. Tom had developed his own musical path through high school, and by his 1959 graduation, he was fronting Spider Webb & the Insects, a band that flirted with success. By the fall of 1961 after the Insects disbanded, Tom took note of his kid brother's band. They weren't bad and they needed a vocalist. Tom joined for occasional gigs and used the Blue Velvets as his backing band for recording sessions at Orchestra Records. One of the failed singles, "Have You Ever Been Lonely" (1962), marked John's debut as a songwriter. Before long Tom joined the band as a permanent member and assumed leadership.

The band struggled on for several years trying different musical and fashion styles and names (the Visions, the Golliwogs) and occasionally releasing singles that sold poorly. However, as time passed, John's ambition began to take hold, especially after he took work as a shipping clerk at Fantasy Records. He began to assert himself more and more within the band, and by 1965, he was the lead vocalist and the leader of the band—a point solidified with the Golliwogs' fourth single, a derivative bluesy rocker called "Brown-Eyed Girl" (not Van Morrison's). "This was really the first record by John," states Paul Rose, an unofficial A&R man for Fantasy. "The whole sound was different. Now we really got into more involved sessions, where we overdubbed John on everything. We'd use Doug and Stu on the basic tracks but didn't record Tom's instrument at all, he would just sing. John also played

organ and occasionally bass on some of those sessions too. So Doug was sometimes the only other musician.”⁴

“Brown-Eyed Girl” became a local hit, selling over 10,000 copies and putting the band on the California highways. They may have toured the state but they were still largely a cover band. “I don’t recall playing our early singles live,” comments Clifford, “though we would play our ‘hit.’ We did the popular songs like ‘Gloria’ and ‘Satisfaction’ that were on the jukebox, to keep our audience.”⁵ The next single in February 1966, “Fight Fire,” may have failed but featured John’s fuzz-tone guitar and indicated another crucial ingredient in the Creedence sound—an interest in sonic experimentation which would make John’s simple hypnotic riffs dynamic and flexible in songs like the soon-to-come “Suzie Q” or “Born on the Bayou” and, near the end of CCR, “Heard It Through the Grapevine.”

In 1966, John and Doug entered the Army Reserves. Soon after their discharge the following year, the band rededicated themselves and changed their name to Creedence Clearwater Revival—*Creedence* from a coworker of Tom’s friend, Credence Nuball, with an added *e* to suggest creed and commitment; *Clearwater* from an advertisement for Olympia Beer and indicative of the band’s environmental concerns; and *Revival* reflective of the band’s renewed energy. In the first days of January 1968, the band re-signed with Fantasy, which had been purchased by a group led by Saul Zaentz, who was very encouraging at the time. The CCR sound took a leap forward with the 8:36 remake of Dale Hawkins’s “Susie Q,” which locks into a dark grove and flirts with San Francisco psychedelia, reverberations, snake-like guitar runs (not dissimilar from the later “Run Through the Jungle” or “The Old Man down the Road”), John’s voice from a megaphone, fuzz tone, and feedback. Released as a single, with the song split on the A and B side, it reached #11 on the national charts and introduced CCR to the world. They were off and running with John Fogerty in charge.

In 1971, Tom, feeling underappreciated, quit CCR, and by 1972, the band collapsed. In short, Tom, Stu, and Doug found John increasingly domineering and overbearing. They wanted more input into the music and they wanted to record their own songs under CCR. John—who on previous albums had been credited as composer, producer, and arranger—yielded on the band’s final album, the disastrous *Mardi Gras*, which Jon Landau in *Rolling Stone* called “the worst album that I have ever heard from a major rock band.”⁶

After the break-up, all continued careers in music. Tom had only minor success with his solo albums and as part of the band Ruby. Doug “Cosmo” Clifford, who also released a solo album, continued to play with Stu Cook

in the Sir Douglas Quintet and then the Don Harrison Band. Cook joined Southern Pacific, a country rock band that enjoyed success on the country charts in the 1980s. In 1995, Clifford and Cook found commercial success with Creedence Clearwater *Revisited*, a project that riled Fogerty into filing an injunction to prohibit the use of the name. (The injunction was overturned.) The band drew large crowds and, in 1998, released a live album, *Recollection*, which featured old CCR hits. After almost ten years of constant sales, the album was certified platinum.

Since the demise of CCR, John Fogerty has had an uneven solo career, one requiring two major comebacks after decade-long absences from the music scene. Fogerty has released ten solo albums from *Blue Ridge Rangers* in 1973 to *Wrote a Song for Everyone*, scheduled for release in the fall of 2012, on which he and guest stars perform CCR classics. Fogerty's solo work, while inconsistent in commercial and artistic success, has been, nonetheless, consistently adventurous and ambitious. He has continued to provide insights into his two favorite topics: America and himself. He celebrates both while revealing his country's inequities and hypocrisies and exposing his own frustrations and self-torment. Only late in his career does he reveal some consistent self-contentment. He has risen from a kid in a local suburban band to become a forceful American artist.

Surprisingly, Fogerty's work with and apart from CCR has not received significant scholarly attention. *Finding Fogerty: Interdisciplinary Readings of John Fogerty and Creedence Clearwater Revival* begins to correct this neglect. This book stands as a tribute to one of America's great rock bands and one of the rock era's great songwriters and vocalists and one of its underrated guitarists and producers. *Finding Fogerty* pulls together scholars from various disciplines and approaches to argue for the musical and cultural contributions of Fogerty and CCR—an argument easily won.

Section One opens with “‘Born on the Bayou’: CCR and the Evocation of Place” by Jeff Sellars who focuses on CCR's signature song, examining its “swamp gumbo,” its origins, its distinctive sound and groove, its images, its sense of history and myth, and its evocations of place, time, and memory, all of which combine to transport the listener to Fogerty's secret world. Stephen Paul Miller's “Reviving the Pre-Sixties: Creedence on a Sixties/Seventies Cusp” argues that CCR was the first major late sixties rock group to found its success upon an anxiety of influence toward sixties rock and the sixties itself. Miller states that the bayou, the central site of CCR, represents the Vietnam war, a valid cultural escape from it, and the cusp between them, a cusp that runs parallel with that between the loosely codified realities of the sixties and the increasingly codifying realities of the seventies. In “John Fogerty: Middle-

Class Poet,” Jake Sudderth interprets Fogerty as a product and chronicler of middle-class America and, in “Down to the River: Narrative, Blues, and the Common Man in John Fogerty’s Imagined Southern Gothic,” Bob McParland investigates Fogerty and CCR’s appeal to southern iconography and the southern musical tradition of rockabilly and the blues, while also examining Fogerty’s evocation of an America both haunted and harmonious.

With “Devil’s on the Loose’: Creedence Clearwater Revival and the Religious Imagination,” Ted Trost begins Section Two with an investigation of the deep undercurrents of danger, moral questioning, and the awareness of injustice that characterize the band’s entire song catalogue. These persistent concerns, “religiously” considered, suggest how the band’s songs helped to articulate conflicts in American identity during a period of agonizing reappraisal. Timothy Gray, in “Flying the Flannel: An Americana Salute to Creedence Clearwater Revival,” considers CCR’s lasting influence on today’s alt-country types by devising a top ten, actually twelve, list of CCR songs that matter, not only because they showcase the multiple influences the band accepted, but also because they speak to a flannel-clad fan’s understanding of American independence. In “The 1969 Creedence Clearwater Revival Recording Contract and How It Shaped the Future of the Group and Its Members,” CCR biographer Hank Bordowitz analyzes one of rock’s most infamous record contracts, which led to lawsuits, internal band conflicts, and personal and professional distress for especially John Fogerty.

In “Centerfield,” Section Three, Larry Pitilli focuses on Fogerty’s love for Americana, his struggles with writer’s block, and his creation of the Blue Ridge Rangers in “America as Patron and Muse: The Creation of the Blue Ridge Rangers,” while Tom Kitts considers “The 1980s Comeback of John Fogerty” with close readings of *Centerfield* and *Eye of the Zombie*. The section closes with “Multimodal Fogerty: Scoring and Scaffolding the Music of CCR to a Vietnam War Literature Unit,” in which Chris Goering and Will Sewell suggest strategies for using CCR and Fogerty to teach about the Vietnam War and literary devices such as metaphor, imagery, and narrative voice.

In the final section, “Keep on Chooglin’,” Lee Cooper contextualizes the CCR leader within the rock tradition in “John Fogerty and America’s Three Rock Generations.” William Miller and Jeremy Walling study Fogerty’s complicated relationship with the political world and the impact of politics on his music from his days with CCR to the present in “The Political Legacy of Fogerty: Forty Years of Parallel Messages.” The collection ends with Nick Baxter-Moore’s assessment of Fogerty as a songwriter, guitarist, and vocalist in “‘Rockin’ All Over the World’: John Fogerty’s Place in American Popular Music,” a place which Fogerty himself has seemed to sabotage from time to time.

The sweep of this collection reflects Fogerty's largeness and largess. He is both rock's puritan and rock's Walt Whitman. Fogerty hails not from El Cerrito, California, but from America: the North, South, East, and West and everywhere in-between. He translates America in all its beauty, force, and contradictions, its optimism and fear, its past times, like baseball and war, and its rural vacations and poverty—just look at the covers of successive albums *Green River* and *Willy and the Poor Boys*. In inducting CCR into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993, Bruce Springsteen referred to the “music’s power and its simplicity. ... Hits filled with beauty and poetry and a sense of the darkness of events and of history, of an American tradition shot through with pride, fear, and paranoia, and they rocked hard.”⁷ In short, Fogerty exudes America.

Notes

1. Hank Bordowitz, *Bad Moon Rising: The Unauthorized History of Creedence Clearwater Revival* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press/A Cappella Books, 2007), 210.
2. Cameron Crowe, “John’s Clearwater Credo: Proud Fogerty Post-Creedence,” *Rolling Stone*, May 6, 1976, 9.
3. Alec Palao, “Pre-Creedence: The First Decade,” *Creedence Clearwater Revival*, booklet accompanying box set, Fantasy Records, 2001, 23.
4. *Ibid.*, 27.
5. *Ibid.*, 28.
6. Jon Landau, Rev. of *Mardi Gras*, *Rolling Stone*, May 25, 1972, 63.
7. Bruce Springsteen, “On Creedence Clearwater Revival,” Speech from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony, January 1993, in *The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame: The First 25 Years*, ed. Holly George-Warren (New York: Collins, 2009), 79.

PART I

“BORN ON THE BAYOU”

CHAPTER ONE



“Born on the Bayou”: CCR and the Evocation of Place

Jeff Sellars

It is certainly no secret that Creedence Clearwater Revival is famous for its unique rock stylings—often called “swamp rock.” Possibly the quintessential song in their catalog to convey this style of music is “Born on the Bayou.” The song evokes a vivid sense of place and history, and the music and lyrics are deceptively simple—but both betray an expressive profoundness. In this essay, I want to examine the way in which “Born on the Bayou” creates a vivid sense of place in the mind of the listener through an examination of lyrical and musical content and economy. Through this examination, I will attempt to draw attention to the way in which John Fogerty and CCR transport the listener through simple and profound soundscapes and lyrical imagery. I want to examine the economy of the musicianship and the approach of a simple or minimalist aesthetic. I also want to examine some of the devices and economy of Fogerty’s poetics.

From the ominous drone that begins the song, to the first plucks of the richly toned, deeply echoing, twangy, slow vibrato E7 chord, we are transported from wherever we are to the back porch of CCR’s swampy home—smelling the smells, hearing the sounds, seeing the sights, and, also, somehow sensing the deep back history of the bayou. It is in this imaginative evocation (through the simple fingering of a few notes) that we find the music, people, and culture of the bayou—it’s the “cultural baggage [of] back-porch sounds of scrapping fiddles and percussive guitars, wheezy squeezeboxes and scratched rubboards; high nasal vocals arched over modified waltzes and simple but driving two-step dance rhythms.”¹ We find this history just outside New Orleans,

between Baton Rouge and the Louisiana-Texas border. ... [It's the] swampy, water-laced countryside familiar from films like *The Big Easy*. It's called the bayou, and from the mid-1700s on it became a refuge for the French-speaking inhabitants of the Canadian province Acadia. The British government began uprooting them after the French loss of Canada; though the Crown tried to resettle them elsewhere, many successfully fled to New France, where they reestablished their communities and culture and became known as Cajuns.²

The bayou's other settlers, the French speaking black Creoles (who were descended from runaway and freed slaves), were part of this dynamic cultural mix. This mix of influences created a unique musical sound, and the Creole and Cajun culture developed along similar lines in many areas, like cuisine; in music, they crossfertilized to the point that their sounds were frequently interchangeable stylistically, with instrumentation, rhythms, and mournful vocals in idiosyncratic French staying fairly constant across the color bar. This was the case at least until the '20s and '30s, when other influences on the music's development entered the bayou via records and later radio. For Cajuns, the key new entrant was country music—the early raw hillbilly kind derived from the Anglo-Celtic folk traditions of jigs and reels and ballads, not Nashville's corporate product. For Creoles it was blues, which thrived along the Mississippi River in bustling ports and on backwoods plantations alike. Not surprisingly, these musical strains continued to cross talk, with Creoles picking up on country stylings and Cajuns adapting blues elements.³

All of this history and these influences are squeezed into “Born on the Bayou”—even just in the first guitar figure at the beginning of the song. John Fogerty plays his own version of the blue note, hinting at the history of that non-western scale, the sliding notes of African work songs and Irish and English folk music. The evocation is so deep that it is almost as if John Fogerty has distilled the essence of the swamp down to those few notes, even if Mr. Fogerty never lived there. The simple bluesy bending notes of that first guitar figure lays the foundation for what comes after. The band drops in and follows suit. Each member of the band is working in the tradition of the blues, a swampy blues, derived from the mud of the Deep South. This tradition found its way through the rock music that also influenced the band. Their music came from, as Doug Clifford has said, their

musical tastes growing up. We all had similar tastes. We all bought the same records. We listened to the same radio stations. Most of that was the roots of Rock 'n' Roll ... the music of Fats Domino, Little Richard, a lot of the great singing groups from that era. Bo Diddley. And then the Sun Records folks ... Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins. Elvis Presley was a big influence.⁴

This tradition can be found in each of the band members’ playing styles. For John Fogerty, this tradition is found in his singing as well as his playing. For instance, in Fogerty’s singing we hear the employment of the blues technique of rasp. We can hear clearly the tear and stress on his vocal cords—the proof is in the hearing, in this instance, and the emotional cry, or belt, and twang of his voice is nearly undeniable. The skill of twang is a common one, found in many gospel and blues singing: “*Twang* [is] heard frequently in gospel and blues singing. [It includes] in [its] physical set a tilted thyroid which stretches the vocal folds to thin them. ... *Twang* is evident in most of the blues and gospel singers’ vocal deliveries.”⁵ The twang in Fogerty’s voice is unmistakably evident in “Born on the Bayou,” not least when he sings the song’s title and stretches out the phrase (especially, the word “bai-u”). The heavy belt of John’s voice, imploring the listener to feel along with him, is present throughout “Born on the Bayou.” Belt is a special technique, seen as a development from “the ‘shouting’ style of ... field hollers. ... Equally, the influence of the preaching style of delivery within the gospel tradition has affected vocal performance. ... The vocal requirements of pre-amplification deliveries demand a large physical component and certain vocal qualities render the voice more audible. ... Here, elements of *belt* and *twang* may be deliberately employed to aid projection.”⁶ Fogerty picks up on belt quite readily in “Born on the Bayou.” But John’s belting style is not merely a musical technique to project (but it is that as well—for even the amplified singer needs the power of projection), but it is also a metaphorical technique for projection: the listener may now be more attentive to the voice and lyrics and the emotion that is conveyed; Fogerty’s not just singing, he’s preaching. With Fogerty’s guitar playing, we see the common use of the sliding and bending notes of the blues scale, as well as the finger picking style of many old blues players. The finger plucking of the intro chord to “Born on the Bayou” is evidence of this inheritance, and John’s use of the dominant 7th chord is also a clear reference to this blues tradition, run through the likes of Sun Records players like Sonny Burgess, Scotty Moore, and Carl Perkins. In fact, Scotty Moore’s finger picking technique (which combined the use of fingers and a pick) is evident when watching John play this song live.

In Doug Clifford’s drumming, we see the simple pulse of a 4/4 beat, handled with gusto and a good, solid, heavy hand. Clifford’s drumming here on “Born on the Bayou” reminds one of the classic hard driving blues drumming found on numerous blues recording artists—such as Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, or Elmore James—as translated through classic rock artists (for example, the drumming of D.J. Fontana or Jerry Allison). Coupled with the deep thunderous drumming is the bottom of Stu Cook’s bass. The two combine for

a dynamic backbeat that holds the song together and drives it onwards. Stu's bass is focused in on the root notes of the song, occasionally sliding around to hit accentuations and adding variation—even climbing up into the high scale of his instrument for effect. Added to this background is the steady rhythm of Tom Fogerty's guitar. Tom holds down the root chords—from E7 to D/D6 to A and back to E7—while John is powering through and augmenting the root playing of Tom.

The musicianship of the band is such that it always works for the song: there is no “showing off” which would distract the listener from the song itself; the skill and musicianship displayed are working towards a common musical goal. When the group is working together for a common purpose something greater than the sum of the parts arises—this is when the music transcends and grooves. This group effort provides a compelling approach to the valuation of a musical style: the transcendence that can occur when following such an approach can be emotionally affective and effective, as well as intellectually satisfying. It adds to the evocation of place: if they can provide that transcendence, it takes a person out of the norm, out of where he or she is currently, and it transports the person to a *somewhere*, a *somewhere* that the music dictates. If one wants a groove or feel, it is not the best thing to have players off on other tangents (playing for show or some other end). Even if one has the chops to play wildly technical flourishes, the discipline of restraint comes into play: the adding of gratuitous flourishes does not necessarily contribute anything to the song, the feel, the emotion, or the groove; in fact, it can be simply distracting and counter-productive to the ends of a song. In this aesthetic, the “chops” of the player should be used for the song and not the other way around. This does not mean, however, that flourishes and technique and the like are simply banished—that “going off” does not have its place. But it does mean that these things are subsumed under the aegis of “for the song.” They must be working for the bigger goal, striving to help create the soundscape, or they fall short: they become mere solipsistic shouts, mere rants of ego, that fail to yield nourishing fruits. As Fogerty says, “Even though I have often recorded alone, I still feel the best music is made by musicians playing off each other.”⁷ CCR creates their groove in just this aforementioned way. The drums and bass are working together in concert, holding down the backbeat. Stu Cook and Doug Clifford hold to a simple aesthetic and that aesthetic gives them their unique place in rock music:

When you talk about classic rhythm sections, you probably think about John Bonham and John Paul Jones or Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker. But Doug Clifford and Stu Cook, drummer and bass player, respectively, for Creedence

Clearwater Revival, were responsible for recording some of the most driving and potent rhythm tracks ever laid down on tape. Clifford was a very simple drummer, but had a feel that perfectly complemented the songs of John Fogerty.⁸

The no-frills attitude is reflected in Doug Clifford’s comments on his history with Stu Cook:

Well, he plays bass and I play drums. ... It’s ridin’ a bicycle and that’s what we’re doing; we’re out there enjoying riding that old tandem bike and keepin’ it chuggin’ the way it should be. ... We’ve been doing it for so long that, yeah, it’s pretty automatic. There’s something going on. Let’s put it this way, I’m not worried about Stuey, and we just get the thing done.⁹

Additionally, we could certainly make a distinction between the “simple” and the “basic” or “unsophisticated”—where the “simple” is the honing of one’s craft, the decidedly profound, thoughtful, and purposeful encapsulation of an artist’s work, and the “basic” or “unsophisticated” is an operation of “dumbing down.” We can here push against the common notions of the simple: Is simplicity necessarily to be equated with “dismissible,” “undemanding,” “effortless,” or “unintelligent”? It is the contention here that the aforementioned notions of the “transcendence of groove” and “working for the song” make just such a case for the simple—and, as just one example, it resides in the connection between economy of playing and evocation of place. It is the simplicity of playing, of working together to make a groove, that leads to transcendence, that helps to transport one to another place. We might then let the simple do its work and confound the wise. John Fogerty also notes this sense of the simple, and its importance, along with his philosophy of beauty: “But I think beautiful is simple and elegant, like a ballad with simple harmony.”¹⁰

And we see this economy of playing displayed beautifully in CCR’s musicianship in “Born on the Bayou.” Just in the first notes of the song, the twanging of the vibrato guitar makes a straightforward case for an economy of playing: again, it isn’t how many notes one plays but *which* notes one plays. The drums drop in simply, with Doug Clifford’s distinctive CCR sound: tubby, flat, crisp, tight—laying a steady beat, driving the song forward. The deepness and thickness of Stu Cook’s bass guitar holds a strong anchor to the backbeat, slipping up to higher notes periodically. The wash of the guitars, counter balancing each other, each distinguishable yet complementing each other with a seemingly effortless precision. And the guitar solo: understated, harmonious and evocative, played with a restrained energy. John Fogerty’s

beautiful voice rises above it all: muddy, gravelly, raspy, downright dirty and determined, authentic, soulful. The combination is exciting, rousing, and suggestive. The soul of the band is on display. There is no pretending at groove here—it is there in abundance. There is no, what record producer Jerry Wexler has called, “oversouling” it.¹¹

The way the songs of CCR were recorded also plays a big part of their ability to create a sense of place. There was a general consistency to their recording techniques. Engineer Russ Gary “set up his mics in a consistent manner, one that Fogerty took to immediately from the first ‘Green River’ session. ‘He came in, I got everything miked up and listened to them play a little bit, then John came into the booth and we went through it. My approach was not to add any EQ; just bring it up and go from there.’”¹² In this way, the natural sounds of the instruments were highlighted. This natural sound is also found with Doug Clifford’s drums:

Each piece of Clifford’s Camco drum kit was also miked with an SM56, though the snare required a second mic, a Sony C37 condenser. “Doug used a big Camco snare. It was a *big* wooden snare, and the rattles were so far down below that the mics could barely hear it.” ... At Fogerty’s request, the snare was recorded through one of Heider’s echo chamber returns—from Chamber 4, Gary’s favorite. “I printed the return right in with the snare,” he says. “If we wanted something and we knew it was right, we’d do it.” Another unique part of the CCR drum sound was Clifford’s large-diameter hi-hat. “That was an 18-inch hi-hat,” Gary says. “I’ve never recorded anyone who used cymbals that large. And if you hear Doug and Stu play with their band today, you can really tell that identifying sound between those guys.” Gary placed a Sony C37A on the crash and a U87 on the ride. Another U87 was placed about six feet behind the drum kit for ambience. “When you’re close-miking, everything sounds real up-front. Not only did the room mic capture ambience from the drums, it captured some of the other instruments, as well.”¹³

The methods of recording reflect a general sense of letting the instruments and players do the “talking.” All of this adds up to a very native sound, where the timbre and character of the music shines through and gives an unaffected air to the records. These techniques certainly added to the earthy, backwoods feel of the band’s music. There was very “little EQ on Creedence recordings—or any other trickery for that matter.” However, even when they did use some effects they worked towards the recall of the “old sounds” of their inherited musical tradition:

there was one signature effect that appeared on nearly every Creedence recording. “When we first worked together, John asked, ‘Can you give me some

slap-back?” I said, “Yeah, sure.” Gary had grown up on Elvis and Sun Records recordings, as had Fogerty. Gary achieved the CCR slap using a pair of Ampex 440 2-track machines and the studio’s echo chambers. “During most mixing sessions, both 2-track machines would be running and I would delay the signal going to the chamber to get it slapping and bouncing around, and then there would be one to mix on.”¹⁴

This simple, minimalist aesthetic is also continued, in its own way, in Fogerty’s lyrical play. Fogerty’s poetics are clean and effective in “Born on the Bayou”: the tales of childhood, politics, and the other-worldly all work together to transport the listener and evoke a striking sense of place. This is Fogerty’s swamp myth. Fogerty effectively places us somewhere through the narrational device of memory: he concocts a past that implicitly gives the listener a sense of history, of time and space. For example, Fogerty’s use of the term “the man” is itself a profound transporter and effective conveyer of history. The phrase “the man” conjures up a complex history. As Howard Zinn noted, the phrase gets its start in the Populist movement of the late 1800s:

When the Texas People’s party was founded in Dallas in the summer of 1891, it was interracial, and radical. There was blunt and vigorous debate among whites and blacks. ... When someone suggested there be separate white and black Populist clubs which would “confer together,” R.H. Humphrey, the white leader of the Colored Alliance, objected: “This will not do. The colored people are part of the people and they must be recognized as such.” ... Blacks and whites were in different situations. The blacks were mostly field hands, hired laborers; most white Alliance people were farm owners. ... Racism was strong, and the Democratic party played on this, winning many farmers from the Populist party. When white tenants, failing in the crop-lien system, were evicted from their land and replaced by blacks, race hatred intensified. ... It was a time that illustrated the complexities of class and race conflict. ... The Populist movement also made a remarkable attempt to create a new and independent culture for the country’s farmers. ... The Populists poured out books and pamphlets from their printing presses. ... Hundreds of poems and songs came out of the Populist movement, like “The Farmer Is the Man.”¹⁵

Of course, in common parlance this phrase has come to denote an oppressor, or someone who holds authority, or, more generally, the establishment. And its use here in this song, in the ’60s, paints a vivid picture, in two short words, of the general unrest of the times and of the history that led up to it. Implicit in this is a commentary on class, race, politics, government, and unease and disagreement with “the establishment” and older generations—and Fogerty’s phrase of not letting “the man” do what he did because he will “get

you” makes an implicit argument for the younger counterpart in the lyric to watch out for these larger powers, to keep them in check if possible, and to fight these larger powers when and where one can.

Additionally, Fogerty is tapping into a profound mystery when he utilizes the device of memory. To employ the theological evaluation of Augustine, the “power of memory is great, very great. . . . It is a vast and infinite profundity. Who has plumbed its bottom?”¹⁶ The images of various points of entry into the mind are available to us in our memories, and if these images “were not present in [our memories, we] would not know what [we were] talking about.”¹⁷ Fogerty’s use of simple phrases and simple rhymes (again, reflecting the aesthetic of the band as a whole, eschewing unnecessary flourishes and distractions) puts these images in the forefront of our minds—allowing us to transport ourselves with him to his created landscape. We see this reflected in Fogerty’s own words about his song:

“Born on the Bayou” was vaguely like “Porterville,” about a mythical childhood and a heat-filled time, the Fourth of July. I put it in the swamp where, of course, I had never lived. It was late as I was writing. I was trying to be a pure writer, no guitar in hand, visualizing and looking at the bare walls of my apartment. Tiny apartments have wonderful bare walls, especially when you can’t afford to put anything on them. “Chasing down a hoodoo.” Hoodoo is a magical, mystical, spiritual, non-defined apparition, like a ghost or a shadow, not necessarily evil, but certainly other-worldly. I was getting some of that imagery from Howlin’ Wolf and Muddy Waters.¹⁸

Fogerty’s visualizations and borrowed blues imagery create a short-hand for the audience, allowing the mood to develop within the listener. Fogerty creates a world within this song, and, much like a work of literary fiction, the song requires us to “‘open up’ . . . to an ‘outside’ that it projects before itself and offers to critical appropriation by a reader. . . . This opening consists in the pro-position of a world capable of being inhabited.”¹⁹ Fogerty lays a foundation of cultural history, of a memory that is accessible to the listener. This foundation allows us to project ourselves into his created world.

The mention of Howlin’ Wolf and Muddy Waters is telling. While John Fogerty does not point out which songs in particular “Born on the Bayou” was “borrowing from,” some songs come directly to mind—for example, and in particular, “I Ain’t Superstitious.” Written by Willie Dixon, the song, as performed by Howlin’ Wolf in 1961, shares some similarities with “Born on the Bayou.” There is a half-tempo feel to the song that is reminiscent of “Born on the Bayou”—though it is certainly not an exact matching tempo. The song also shares the lyrical content that John Fogerty mentions in pass-