

Music and power, May 6, 2013

Robert Johnson (1911-37), *Cross Roads Blues*, take 1 (recorded 1936)

I went to the crossroads, fell down on my knees.
I went to the crossroads, fell down on my knees.
Asked the Lord above, "Have mercy, now save poor Bob if you please."

Yeoo, standin' at the crossroads, tried to flag a ride.
Ooo eee, I tried to flag a ride.
Didn't nobody seem to know me, babe, everybody passed me by.

Standin' at the crossroads, baby, risin' sun goin' down,
Standin' at the crossroads, baby, eee, ee, risin' sun goin' down,
I believe to my soul, now, poor Bob is sinkin' down.

You can run, you can run, tell my friend Willie Brown
You can run, you can run, tell my friend Willie Brown
That I got the crossroads blues this mornin', Lord, babe, I'm sinkin' down.

And I went to the crossroads, mama, I looked east and west
I went to the crossroads, baby, I looked east and west,
Lord, I didn't have no sweet woman, ooh well, babe, in my distress.

Billie Holiday (1915-59), *Strange Fruit* (recorded 1939)

Text: Abel Meeropol (1903-86)

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.
Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
And the sudden smell of burning flesh.
Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.