



Handout 4 - Boyd Rivers and Ruth May Rivers “Fire In My Bones”

Boyd Rivers was born in 1934, fifty years after Reconstruction. His elders witnessed both the landmark election of two African American Senators as well as the terror campaigns of white Mississippians in response to African American progress.

Rivers’ version of “Fire In My Bones,” is part of the “sacred” Blues tradition, which has been passed down orally/aurally since the era of slavery, and borrows lyrically from the Bible. Specifically, “Fire In My Bones” draws from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, who had taken a vow of silence that he finds himself unable to keep:

“If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak anymore in his name,’ then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”

Jeremiah 20:9 NRSV

In *Blues People* (1963), writer Amiri Baraka’s asserts that “if slavery dictated certain aspects of blues form and content, so did the so-called Emancipation and its subsequent problems dictate the path blues would take. Also, the entrance of Negroes into the more complicated social situation of self-reliance proposed multitudes of social and cultural problems that they had never had to deal with as slaves. The music of the Negro began to reflect these social and cultural complexities and change.

In Baraka’s retelling of history, music serves as a primary source. “Blues People” established the idea that the trajectory of black life in America was most reliably recorded in the music that the experience had produced.



“Fire in My Bones”
as sung by Boyd Rivers and Ruth May Rivers
(Response in parenthesis)

I got fire and its shut in my bones

One of these mornings (Mmmm Mmm)
I'll be done with this world (Well)
I'll be done (Lord)
Oh, oh with this world (Yeah)
This same old fire shut in my bones

I said fire
The Holy Ghost (Fire)
He's in my feet (Fire)
The Holy Ghost (Fire)
He set me free (Fire)
The Holy Ghost (Fire)
He's in my legs (Fire)
The Holy Ghost (Fire)
He raised my head (Fire)
Oh so glad (Fire)
Oh so glad (Fire)
Oh that fire shut in my bones (Fire)

Someday Monday (Fire)
The fire was burning (Fire)
Tuesday (Fire)
The fire was burning (Fire)
Oh Wednesday (Fire)
The Holy Ghost (Fire)
On a Thursday (Fire)
The Holy Ghost (Fire)
On a Friday (Fire)

I went down (Fire)
On my knees (Fire)
Crying Lord have (Fire)
Mercy please (Fire)
Oh, fire (Fire)
Oh, fire (Fire)
In my bones (Fire)
In my bones (Fire)
In my bones (Fire)

If you don't believe ((Fire)
I've been redeemed (Fire)
Follow me down to (Fire)
Jordan stream (Fire)
Oh, fire (Fire)
Oh, fire (Fire)
On a Sunday (Fire)
Holy Ghost (Fire)
Holy Ghost (Fire)

Someday Monday (Fire)
Fire was burning (Fire)
Someday Tuesday (Fire)
Someday Wednesday (Fire)
Someday Thursday (Fire)
Someday Friday (Fire)
Someday Saturday (Fire)
Nothing but fire (Fire)
On a Sunday (Fire)
On a Sunday (Fire)

If you don't believe (Fire)
I've been redeemed (Fire)
Follow me down to (Fire)
Jordan stream (Fire)
Oh, fire (Fire)
Oh, fire (Fire)
Nothing but fire (Fire)
In my bones (Fire)
In my bones (Fire)
In my bones (Fire)
Make you love (Fire)
Everybody (Fire)
When you have fire (Fire)
Nothing but fire (Fire)
Nothing but fire (Fire)
Oh Lord (Fire)
So glad (Fire)
Nothing but (Fire)
Ohhhhhh that fire

Unison: shut in my bones
Spoken: Nothing but fire