Hound Dog Taylor and the Houserockers. With Brewer Phillips and Ted Harvey.
12 selections, vocal and instrumental, stereo.
Alligator 4701. Alligator Records, Box 11714, Chicago, Illinois 60611, 1973.
$6.00.

Big Walter Horton and Carey Bell. With Carey Bell, Eddie Taylor, Joe Harper, and Frank Swan.
11 selections, vocal and instrumental, stereo.
Alligator 4702. Alligator Records, Box 11714, Chicago, Illinois 60611, 1973.
$6.00.

The Son Seals Blues Band. With Johnny "Big Moose" Walker, John Riley, and Charles Caldwell.
10 selections, vocal and instrumental, stereo.
Alligator 4703. Alligator Records, Box 11714, Chicago, Illinois 60611, 1973.
$6.00.

Reviewed by Philip Nusbaum.

Alligator Records is a new company operating out of Chicago, which, according to the notes accompanying the Son Seals disc, is dedicated to "recording Real, black blues." The first three issues by the new concern are all representative of what is loosely called "Chicago blues." Hound Dog Taylor, Big Walter Horton and Son Seals are the front men for their blues bands on Alligator 4701, 4702 and 4703, respectively.

Considering that this is a commercial concern, Alligator has done a better than average job of documenting the performers and performances. The liner notes give a broad impression of the blues club atmosphere, the life history of the artist, or some of his musical contacts. However, there is nothing in the way of scholarly documentation. While personnel is listed, and some of the performers' musical contacts are given, there is no attempt at complete discography, or a complete, systematic description of, say, performer-audience interaction. We are given snatches of information, for example, Hound Dog Taylor's second guitarist Brewer Phillip's wandering into the audience, singing and dancing as he plays guitar. Even as the Alligator packages scarcely resemble scholarly work, the recording efforts and liner note insights of those connected with the company could provide the impetus for future study of the total blues context so important to the understanding of the blues.

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Singer-guitarist Hound Dog Taylor heads up a three piece band including Brewer Phillips on guitar and drummer Ted Harvey. (The latter two are part time musicians, each holding a day job.) The trio offers fairly standard blues fare centering around the talents of Mr. Taylor. That is, the band is geared toward providing a stable backdrop for the vocalist or soloist. In this respect I feel that the recording could have been improved upon in a number of tracks by increasing the volume on Taylor's guitar so that it could be heard over the rhythm section. At any rate, Taylor plays in the bottleneck style derived from the early twentieth

century Mississippi players and pioneered on electric guitar by Hound Dog's chief influence, Elmore James, among others. On "Wild About You Baby," Mr. Taylor opens up with a guitar pattern strongly reminiscent of James's widely imitated "Dust My Broom." We get a glimpse of the Muddy Waters influence in the guitar introduction of "It Hurts Me Too," after which he mixes in his more usual Elmore James derived style. It is unfortunate that on this stylistically significant track, the rhythm section overpowers the lead guitar work. "She's Gone" is an unusual piece for a Chicago band, as it uses the archaic Mississippi device of elimination of all chord changes--the piece is played all on one chord. Composer credit is, unfortunately, not provided for the non-original songs.

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Big Walter Horton has long been known as one of Chicago's most talented, if erratic bluesmen. However, this set is a fine one and may be the best recording of Horton to date. The blues harp duets between Horton and Carey Bell are featured, and they are a joy to hear. Alligator is to be commended for noting that Walter plays through the left channel and Carey through the right. It is interesting to hear how the two handle the harp duet situation, as the blues has usually been a solo-improvisatory idiom. It appears that the soloists have worked-out arrangements which allow the soloist to expound his ideas--the call and response and solo-backing formats predominate over worked out duets. Particularly intriguing are the disc's four instrumentals--"Lovin' My Baby," "Under the Sun," "Have Mercy" and "Temptation Blues."

The arrangements are designed to allow the soloist to move freely, but the band generates excitement of its own. Drummer Frank Swan, while maintaining the strong beat characteristic of Chicago style drumming, manages to break the strong beats into shifting rhythmic patterns. Bell and Joe Harper share bass guitar, veteran guitar man Eddie Taylor is present in the rhythm section, and together they provide consistent sympathetic backing. Alligator has managed to get the recording levels right this time, and the record comes off as a well put together expostulation of Big Walter Horton's music.

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The Son Seals Band represents a third aspect of the Chicago blues scene. The playing of this band, the whole being in distinctly blues style, leans somewhat on certain soul or rock devices. Bruce Iglaur, who owns Alligator Records, regards Seals's music as "future blues" in his rhythmic and lyrical efforts. As with the other discs, the supporting musicians (Johnny "Big Moose" Walker-organ, John Riley-bass and Charles Caldwell-drums) are relied on to provide a solid foundation for the soloist. However, perhaps owing to the relative youth of Son Seals, the band sometimes plays to a modified "soul" beat. That is, the third, rather than the second and fourth beat in each measure is accented. The "soul" influence can be heard to good advantage on "Your Love is Like a Cancer" and "How Could She Leave Me." In addition, the organist's playing is characterized by the holding of tones, rather than the more usual riffing in the background. The effect of the organ is of a filler for the group's sound. This is much the same way the organ was used

by some of the rock bands of the 1960's and can be heard throughout the disc.

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What we have here, then, is a partial ethnography of the blues music of Chicago. All three examples display the blues' roots in tradition, albeit in technique and form of the music. There is an overwhelming use of the I-IV-V pattern in the harmonic structure and AAB form in the texts. Vocal and instrumental solos, important in much non-church affiliated Afro-American music is clearly in evidence by the organization of the bands. There is a clear dichotomy between the role of the soloist and backing musicians. Even in the case of the harp duets, Carey and Horton do not always solo together, rather, they usually trade off phrases or longer lines. In addition, there is a tendency for the leader to use material he has written. Nine of the twelve Hound Dog selections, eight of the ten by Walter Horton and seven out of the ten by Son Seals are originals. It is important to the individuality of the bluesman that he use his own material.

It is becoming obvious, as I have tried to point out by the admittedly random samples above, that although traditional blues texts and musical lines do exist, what is traditional about Chicago blues has more to do with the attitudes and techniques that the musician brings to the formal, traditional, overall pattern of this music style.

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To reiterate, Alligator is in the business of marketing recorded music developed in an Afro-American milieu. An attempt is made to present on record music closely resembling the blues played in the mostly black Chicago bars which serve as home base for many of the bands.

Similarity of music sound, however, ends the likeness between recorded and live performance. In the bars, the music can serve to facilitate dancing, listening, or as a backdrop for drinking, conversation, etc. The bar, then, offers up a constant range of possibilities of behavior which can be taken separately or in some combination. In this respect, the record is an enormous advance over the live performance, as the listener is in a position to define performance context and media and behavior combination--he can play the disc in his living room, at the beach, at a party, while watching television with the sound turned down, etc.

Here, then, we have a case of an item--blues music--in which changes in use occur from folk to popular culture. In the case of the bars, we have a contextually defined set of behavioral possibilities, while records give us a theoretically limitless range of combinational choices which may or may not be consciously or unconsciously derivative of the bar setting. In practice, though, there are probably culturally defined patterns of combinations of blues records with other elements. Thus, groups may form around certain ways of using records, underlined of course by certain fundamental, unself-conscious attitudes about the appropriate setting for various music styles. Unselfconsciousness is generally regarded as an attribute of folk behavior (in the traditional sense). In America, however, this may not be the case. The blues bar patron may conduct the better part of his life inside of what is regarded as the American norm, and visit the blues bar as a sort of

conscious cultural refurbishment. On the other hand, the mainstream individual uses mainstream artifacts (records) in the group situation in line with group taste in a more casual way. In this case, blues records is what happens to be popular in some circles at a certain time. It is likely that in America, what is called popular culture is where we find the unreflective behavior generally conceded to the folk. In addition, the use of blues records by the mainstream is probably dependent on popular notions for usage of records. The structure of the listening situation probably does not change greatly with the advent of a new style introduced to a group. Rather, given the influx of a new style, some surface elements may change in the more freewheeling use of contextual ingredients in popular culture, but maintaining the more consistent structural attributes. Here, tradition is analytically defined, as conscious maintenance of traditional items is usually not highly valued in the American mainstream.

Since mass media, of which records are a part, are addressed "To whom it may concern," isolated individuals as well as groups of people may form patterns of listening and combinations. These groupings, whether face to face or isolates, may form the kind of groups (or non-groups) folklorists are interested in. On the surface we are presented with a seemingly jumbled picture of components formerly regarded as dissonant: Single items are not tied to a regionally or ethnically defined group as in the classic notions about folk culture. However, each item has a distinct range of acceptable uses and combinations, and the overall structural picture--who uses what kind of recorded music in what context--may show a pattern or patterns of usage, combinations, beliefs and attitudes even among seemingly diverse individuals.

To sum up, then, in eclectic American society, as anywhere, men arrange cultural items in ways which are meaningful to them which may be totally removed from an original, sub-culturally defined meaning. However, if patterns of taste and usage do emerge from popular culture, perhaps we ought to consider folk and popular culture on opposite ends of a continuum. Modern folklore may necessitate an analytic conceptualization of tradition, and, perhaps, "popular culture" is the result of transformations from "folk culture" which may be related at some level.

Obviously, this is not an empirical study. My purpose, though, is to suggest some way of treating a popular artifact as a viable object of study of folklorists in addition to its existence as a carrier of ethnically or regionally defined behavior. The implication is that if we do a little digging, we may find forms of traditional behavior on all levels of society.