James, Elmore (1918-1963) Encyclopedia Article

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James, Elmore (1918-1963)

Undeniably the most influential electric slide guitarist of all time, Elmore James revolutionized the blues with his raw, sharp sound. Born in Canton, Mississippi, in 1918, James first learned to play on a homemade instrument fashioned from a broom handle and a lard can. James became an itinerant musician in his teens, frequently meeting up with other players including the legendary Robert Johnson and Howlin' Wolf. After serving in the Navy during World War II, James moved to Memphis and became a frequent "guest star" on local radio stations.

James' first solo recording, "Dust My Broom," became the largest rhythm and blues hit of 1951. Not long after the session, James moved to Chicago, assembling his all-star band the Broomdusters and recording for the Chess label. In the next ten years, he shuttled back and forth between Chicago and Mississippi before suffering a fatal heart attack in 1963. In 1980, Elmore James was elected to the Blues Foundation's Hall of Fame, and in 1992 he was inducted into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame.

Further Reading:

Oakley, Giles. *The Devil's Music: A History of the Blues.* New York, Da Capo Press, 1983.

Palmer, Robert. *Deep Blues.* New York, Viking, 1981.