



The Original Guitar Hero and the Power of Music: The Legendary Lonnie Johnson, Music, and Civil Rights (North Texas Lives of Musician Series)

Dean Alger

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Lonnie Johnson (1894–1970) was a virtuoso guitarist who influenced generations of musicians from Django Reinhardt to Eric Clapton to Bill Wyman and especially B. B. King. Born in New Orleans, he began playing violin and guitar in his father's band at an early age. When most of his family was wiped out by the 1918 flu epidemic, he and his surviving brother moved to St. Louis, where he won a blues contest that included a recording contract. His career was launched.

Johnson can be heard on many Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong records, including the latter's famous "Savoy Blues" with the Hot Five. He is perhaps best known for his 12-string guitar solos and his groundbreaking recordings with the white guitarist Eddie Lang in the late 1920s. After World War II he began playing rhythm and blues and continued to record and tour until his death.

This is the first full-length work on Johnson. Dean Alger answers many biographical mysteries, including how many members of Johnson's large family were left after the epidemic. He also places Johnson and his musical contemporaries in the context of American race relations and argues for the importance of music in the fight for civil rights. Finally, Alger analyzes Johnson's major recordings in terms of technique and style. A new Lonnie Johnson music CD will be released by the author to coordinate with the publication of this book.

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