

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Second Line

Anatomy of a Song

Louis Armstrong informed us, "The second line is a bunch of guys who follow the parade. They're not the members of the lodge or the club. Anybody can be a second liner. Whether they be raggedy or dressed up they seemed to have more fun than anybody."



Second Liners in New Orleans ... Oliver Morgan in Second Line mode

On the other hand, "Jelly Roll" Morton said that they actually marched out in front, which is also true. "But that's the way it had to be in New Orleans," he explained. In front of, following or marching along side of a funeral cortege, Mardi Gras parade or other New Orleans musical procession, with decorated umbrellas bobbing and handkerchiefs waving in rhythm ... that's the Second Line.

There is also a fantastic song bearing that name, actually a two-sided hit entitled *Second Line Part I and II*. It was composed and recorded by Willie Norman "Bill" Sinegal (May 13, 1928 - April 14, 2014), who grew up in Uptown New Orleans before later moving to Gentilly.

With time between recording sessions at Cosimo Matassa's studio, Sinegal put down a lively number he originally called the *B-flat Blues*. Six months later, he received a call from "Cos" who was convinced they could "make a go of it". Released in 1964 by Bill Sinigal [sic] and the Skyliners on the White Cliffs label, the song's intro Sinegal said he borrowed from Dave Bartholomew's *Good Jax Boogie*, which often roused the musicians back to the bandstand after their break. But the essential riff existed long before even Dave Bartholomew came along.

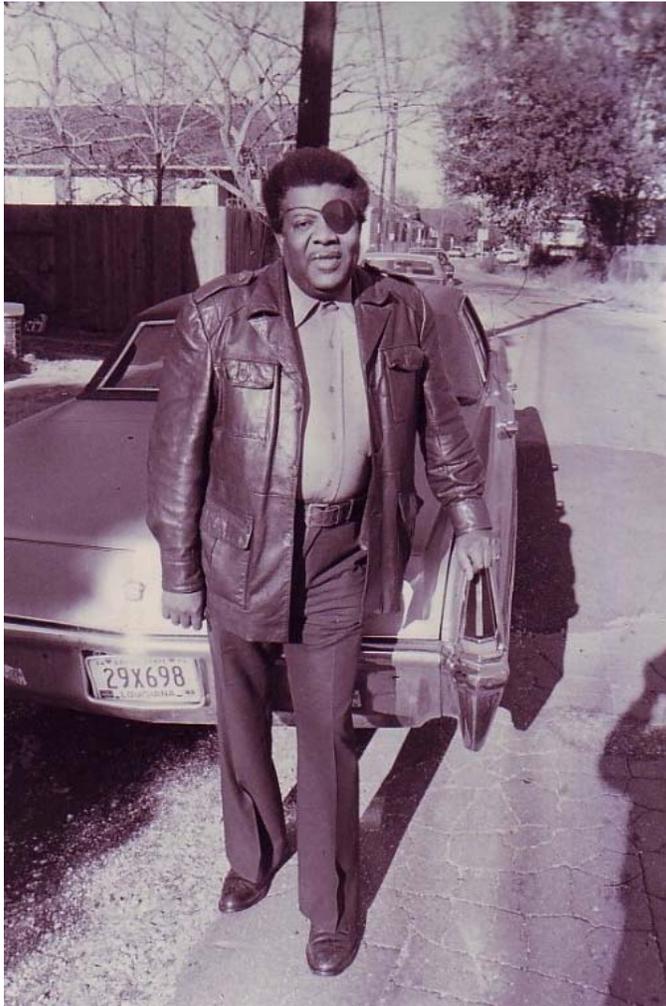
The body of the song was *Joe Avery's Blues*, a traditional Jazz number. James Rivers played sax and the trumpet player, Milton Batiste, mixed Dixieland, R & B and Mardi Gras into a classic recording (even though Sinegal insisted it wasn't intended as a Carnival classic). Sinegal said that it came out of a music school assignment of taking four bars out of several songs to create a new composition.



Milton Batiste (1934 – 2001) said it combined *Picou's Blues* and *Whuppin' Blues*. Some may even discern a funky street parade version of *Rock Around the Clock* ... or perhaps the writers for Bill Haley's hit (over 25 million copies sold) borrowed it from *Joe Avery's Blues*. Who knows? Some believe *Rock Around the Clock* was lifted from *Move It On Over* by Hank Williams ... or possibly *Syncopated Clock* by Leroy Anderson. What a range of possibilities!

Sinegal, a saxophonist, studied music at the Grunewald School of Music in New Orleans. He could be heard in bands all over the Crescent City backing up many local favorites, such as James "Sugar Boy" Crawford, Tommy Ridgley and Guitar Slim. Sadly all of these musical greats are gone from us now.

In 1974, Bill Sinegal asked for \$100 but settled for \$65 from local bandleader and music producer Senator Jones for the rights to *Second Line*, which was re-recorded by a group called Stop, Inc. That version became quite a popular hit. Aside from a small royalty payment when he first recorded the song, that's all Sinegal pocketed for possibly the most quintessential Mardi Gras song of New Orleans. But then again, with such a complicated paternity, "that's the way it had to be in New Orleans."



Willie Norman
Sinegal

Senator Jones, not on the ballot in November

There are two other Sinegals the reader should be acquainted with. One is Paul "Lil' Buck" Sinegal, best known as a zydeco guitarist, who played on Paul Simon's *Graceland* and also as a swamp blues session guitarist on many recordings. He recorded an album of his own for Allen Toussaint's NYNO label with Toussaint himself on keyboards. At the 2013 New Orleans Jazz Fest "Lil' Buck" performed the great Peppermint Harris number, *I Got Loaded*, with his daughter on washboard.

The other Sinegal of note headed up a company that did something

quite exciting on Carrollton Avenue, but it wasn't until after he retired. James D. Sinegal, (born January 1, 1936, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), started out as a bagger for a discount department store chain, only to become the co-founder and CEO of the international retail chain Costco. Known for his integrity and his abiding love of \$1.50 hot dogs, Sinegal refused to put the squeeze on customers or employees just to please Wall Street. For New Orleanians, Costco in 2013 was a most welcome addition, filling the huge void left by the demolition of the Carrollton Shopping Center (built in 1961).

As for the Sinegal surname, its origin is thought to be the country in West Africa known today as the *République du Sénégal*. And as many readers are aware, the first human cargo taken off the docks in New Orleans were slaves from French *Sénégal*. They arrived in the 1720s. Most believe the country was named for the *Sénégal* River, but the river's etymology is confusing, contested - but extremely interesting.



West African slave trade along the Sénégal River

The river runs along the country's northern border before entering the Atlantic Ocean. Once known as the "River of Gold", the *Sénégal* has numerous potential origin stories.

One is that the name comes from that of a local Wolof tribal chieftain. Writing in 1573, the Spanish geographer Luis del Marmol Carvajal stated that the Portuguese called the river *Zenega*, and most recently historians suggest the name *Sénégal* is probably a derivation of *Azenegue*, the Portuguese term for the Saharan Berber people, the *Zenega*, that lived north of the river.



A 1413 chart of the Sénégal River, or "River of Gold"

A more popular origin story, first proposed by Father David Boilat (1853), was that *Sénégal* is derived from the Wolof phrase, *sunu gaal*, meaning "our canoe" (or more precisely, "our pirogue"). Pirogues, of course, abound in Louisiana. A visiting Englishman once described riding in a Louisiana pirogue as "floating in the water on a match".

L'abbé Boilat speculated that the name, like so many things in life, was the result of a misunderstanding between a Portuguese captain and some Wolof fishermen. The captain, Boilat surmised, asked them what the name of the river was and they (believing he was asking who their fishing boat belonged to) replied simply "it is our pirogue" (*sunu gaal*).

The charming and humorous "our pirogue" theory has been embraced in modern *Sénégal* for its appeal to national solidarity, as in "We're all in this boat together."

In the great gumbo that is Louisiana, we too are all in this together: whether marching on the front lines or Second Lining alongside.

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