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The primary instrument of African-American pre-blues music in the rural south was the African-derived banjo. But the banjo did not have the volume, tone, bass strings², or sustain of the guitar³, and it was the guitar that eventually gave the blues of Charley Patton, Skip James and Robert Johnson its characteristic sound. However, the evolution of the blues had to await the mass production of inexpensive guitars, as the first blues musicians bore the burden of racial discrimination and Jim Crow. Therefore, it was the creativity of blues artists, ca. 1900, together with the innovations of the entrepreneurs who developed affordable guitars, that allowed the blues to develop when it did.

The Industrial Revolution⁴, first and foremost, was a revolution in productivity. Say's Law of Markets states that production creates demand: that is, with the move from muscle power to steam power, entrepreneurs and their employees became more productive. Increased productivity permitted people to demand, or purchase, more goods. Also, when factories produce more of something, they can both manufacture and market the products at lower prices. Richard Warren Sears and Alvah Curtis Roebuck, who together built the successful Sears, Roebuck and Company, could produce inexpensive goods, including guitars, and still turn a profit by serving the rising tide of new purchasers. Last but not least, by mechanization, the Industrial Revolution reduced the significance of muscle power, helping to put an end to the horror of slavery.

With the market innovation of the mail-order catalogue, Sears, Roebuck and Company could reach rural customers who previously could not hope to own what were, not long ago, a luxury. Today, many see wealthy entrepreneurs such as Messrs. Sears and Roebuck as enriching only themselves. However, the history of business and economics is replete with stories of how successful entrepreneurs got rich by "voluntary exchange", what goes by the label "capitalism": they provided a product that many people wanted to buy at a price that many people were willing to pay. One of the products the company produced cheaply and made available to rural customers (including Black Americans who were underserved by rural markets during Jim Crow), was the inexpensive steel-string acoustic guitar. According to Chris Kjorness⁵, "Guitars first appeared in the catalog in 1894 for \$4.50 (around \$112 in

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² Guitars with the low E (6th) string became common in Europe in the 1790s. ref: Tyler, J. and Sparks, P. (2002) *The Guitar and Its Music - From the Renaissance to the Classical Era*. The Oxford Early Music Series. 348p.

³ Thomas, T. (2013) *Hidden in the Mix, The African American Presence in Country Music*. Diane Pecknold, Ed., Duke University Press, 392p.

⁴ "Such an industrial revolution was the cause in the world today of much of what is different from earlier times: poor people who are rich by historical standards, ordinary people in charge of their own politics, women with jobs outside the home, children educated into their 20s, retirees living into their 80s, universal literacy, and the flowering of the arts and sciences." McCloskey, Deirdre (2008). *The Industrial Revolution and Liberty*. <http://deirdremccloskey.org/articles/revolution.php>

⁵ Kjorness, C. (2012) *Delta Dawn, How Sears Roebuck and Co. Midwived the Birth of the Blues*. Reason Magazine, May issue: <https://reason.com/archives/2012/04/19/delta-dawn>

today's money). By 1908 Sears was offering a guitar, outfitted for steel strings⁶, for \$1.89 (\$45 today), making it the cheapest harmony-generating instrument available." The comparatively low prices of the guitars (along with a price drop of almost 60% in only a dozen years, as well as the addition of steel strings), helped fuel the development of the blues in the Mississippi Delta ca. 1900. Hence, the creative genius of the African-American musicians who launched the roots of the popular music of the 20th and 21st centuries was aided by the creative genius of both the innovators who gave us the Industrial Revolution and the entrepreneurs who were alert⁷ or "tuned" to novel profit opportunities.

⁶ The steel guitar string, when compared to gut strings made from farm animal intestines, had tonal qualities that enhanced the playing of the blues. Steel strings were introduced by the Martin Guitar Company ca. 1900.

⁷ According to the economist Israel Kirzner, entrepreneurship is the alertness to, and discovery of profit opportunities. Ref: Fu-Lai Yu, T. (2001) Entrepreneurial Alertness and Discovery. Rev. Aust. Econ. 14:1 p47-63. https://www.gmu.edu/depts/rae/archives/VOL14_1_2001/3_yu.pdf