Jefferson, Blind Lemon,

byname of LEMON JEFFERSON (b. July 1897, Couchman, Texas, U.S.–d. c. December 1929, Chicago), American country blues singer, guitarist, and songwriter, one of the earliest black folk-blues singers to achieve popular success.

Blind from birth and the youngest of seven children, Jefferson became an itinerant entertainer in his teens, learning a repertoire of prison songs, blues, moans, spirituals, and dance numbers. He worked in the streets and in brothels, saloons, and parties in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Virginia. In the 1920s he went to Chicago.

Jefferson's high voice, shouting style, and advanced guitar technique, which used melodic lead lines, bent notes, and imitative effects, as well as his lyrics and themes, became staples of the blues through such disciples as Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter), who worked with Jefferson for a time, and through his recordings for the Paramount label (1926-29). Jefferson also recorded spiritual songs, using the pseudonym Deacon LJ Bates. He reportedly suffered a heart attack on the street and died of exposure; a grave marker was placed over his plot in the Wortham (Texas) Negro Cemetery by blues devotees on Oct. 15, 1967.