

James Cotton (born July 1, 1935) is an American blues harmonica player, singer and songwriter, who has performed and recorded with many of the great blues artists of his time as well as with his own band. Although he played drums early in his career, Cotton is famous for his work on the harmonica. Cotton began his professional career playing the blues harp in Howlin' Wolf's band in the early 1950s. He made his first recordings in Memphis for Sun Records under the direction of Sam Phillips. In 1955, he was recruited by Muddy Waters to come to Chicago and join Waters' band. Cotton became Muddy's band leader and stayed with Waters' group until 1965 and he would alternate with Little Walter on Muddy's recording sessions until the end of the decade. In 1965 he formed the Jimmy Cotton Blues Quartet, with Otis Spann on piano to record between gigs with Muddy Waters' band and eventually left Waters to form his own full-time touring group. His first full album, on the Verve label, was produced by guitarist Mike Bloomfield and vocalist/songwriter Nick Gravenites, both of whom were later members of the band Electric Flag. In the 1970s, Cotton played harmonica on Muddy Waters' Grammy Award winning 1977 album *Hard Again*, produced by Johnny Winter.

Cotton battled throat cancer in the mid-1990s, but he continued to tour, utilizing singers or his backing band members as vocalists

In 2006, Cotton was inducted into the Blues Hall Of Fame at a ceremony conducted by the Blues Foundation in Memphis. In addition, he has won or shared ten Blues Music Awards.

On March 10, 2008, Cotton and Ben Harper inducted Little Walter into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.