“A Precipice Between Deadly Perils”: American Folk Music and the Mass Media, 1933-1959

Kirstin Ek
New York, New York

M.A. Music Education, New York University, 2006
B.A. Music, Cornell University, 2004

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Music

University of Virginia
December, 2014

Table of Contents

List of Examples

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the faculty of the McIntire Department of Music at the University of Virginia, who created an incredibly diverse department where any student is fully supported to pursue just about any musical interest. Without the following faculty members, this project would not be possible: my committee chair, Scott DeVeaux, my committee members, Richard Will, Karl Hagstrom Miller, and Jack Hamilton, and I'd like to extend a special thanks to Michelle Kisliuk. Thank you, as well, to Sarah Culpeper, Vilde Aaslid, Matthew Jones, and Geoffrey Philabaum, my colleagues at the University of Virginia whose support and friendship have truly made this journey fun.

I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Ellen and James S. Marcus Institute for Vocal Arts at the Juilliard School. Thank you to Monica Thakkar for her support, understanding, and humor, and to Katie Baltrush for her unbridled enthusiasm for musical scholarship and practice. I would especially like to thank Jacqueline Schmidt, whose encouragement and mentorship throughout allowed for me to complete this project. I feel very lucky to work with such a caring and creative group of people every day.

To Lori Sexton, who is not only one of my oldest and dearest friends, but is also someone who I greatly admire. Lori, I marvel at your intelligence and work ethic, and am so proud of how you have harnessed your gifts. Thank you for being my friend and a

patient sounding board as we undertook (and now completed) this journey together on separate coasts.

Without my family, this project would not have been possible. To my parents, Bill and Vicki, my sisters, Courtney and Amanda, and my late grandfather, Frank: you have always believed in me, no matter what, and your never ending supply of silliness and good food have always kept me close to home. Thank you for everything!

To my husband, Seth Sarelson, who has taken this journey with me. Seth, your intellectual curiosity and love of music are contagious. Your work ethic has inspired and motivated me just as your unwavering love, support, and humor have fueled me through this process. This dissertation is for you.

Introduction

American folk music from 1930-1959 can be divided into two forceful, yet contradictory currents. One was the folk revival, governed by what we might think of as "traditional folk ideals" distinct from modern life – isolation, antimodernism,[1] and the pastoral – and defined by its separation from popular culture and economic gain. Examples of the folk revival include the ideologically driven music of the Popular Front during the 1930s and early 1940s, and the institutionally supported published collections of John Lomax, and his son, Alan's, efforts with the Library of Congress and the Office of War Information. Folk revival giants of the era like Pete Seeger and his Almanac Singers supported folk music because it could mobilize the masses, everyone and anyone could participate, and it promoted a contemporary sense of American identity centered around the "common man," as exemplified by the dusty Okie, Woody Guthrie, and the southern, black convict Lead Belly. In other words, folk revivalists promoted the movement as *free of charge*, powerful in that it was available to all during a time of economic hardship. Nevertheless, this folk revival was not a product of "the folk" (however much it celebrated and promoted "the folk"), but was actually driven by an in-group of intellectuals (like Lomax and Seeger), propelled by academic, artistic and political ideals.

---

[1] T.J. Jackson Lears describes "antimodernism" as a response to citizens looking for a sense of "weight" in their cultural heritage as industrialization, intellectualism, and urbanization pulled them from what they felt were "earthy," "natural," roots. In defining the folk arts of the past, citizens would discover what was important to their present and find a more rooted sense of individual and national identity. T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

A very different sense of "the folk" participated in mass culture and was created through the intervention of amplification and recording technology. Mass media like popular magazines, radio, recording, and later television and film disseminated folk music and numerous interpretations of American folk identity. In this sense, folk music affected mainstream commercial entertainment as folk tunes topped the pop charts and as folk artists headlined radio programs, television variety shows, and starred in big-time Hollywood films. This kind of folk music was affected by, but not driven by the traditional ideals of the folk revival, and it openly participated in mainstream economic and cultural markets. The folk revival aimed toward intellectual ideas and ideals (including politics); the more popular folk music was open to as much of the mainstream as possible.

Mass media popularization split the folk music field into what Pierre Bourdieu would categorize as an autonomous field in which success was measured by artistic prestige and understandings of authenticity (the folk revival), and a heteronomous field in which success was measured by economic prosperity and mainstream fame (popular folk music).[2] Folk music's infiltration into the dominant, money-driven, music-production power structures and processes challenged the revivalists' folk ideals. Not only was this new folk music being produced in ways antithetical to the hand-made, spontaneous, and "natural" methods so cherished by revered folk collectors and

[2] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randall Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29-73.

scholars like Francis Child, Cecil Sharp, and Johann Gottfried von Herder, it also opened the music up to new audiences who would evaluate it using different standards of prestige. Rather than the more abstract criteria of authenticity, sincerity, and antimodernity, the new heteronomous field measured prestige using criteria like record sales, income, media exposure, and the *Billboard* charts.

Although the folk revival has monopolized scholarly attention thus far, mass-mediated folk music was a huge force between 1930 and 1959. Pete Seeger and the Weavers achieved unprecedented commercial success through their collaboration with Decca bandleader, Gordon Jenkins on their recording of "Goodnight, Irene," a tune attributed to folk music monolith, Huddie Ledbetter (better known as Lead Belly). Pop musicians like the New York-born Harry Belafonte increasingly used folk sounds and styles in his recordings, received critical accolades in trade publications like *Billboard, Variety,* and *Time*, and charted highly among some of the most successful artists of all time like Frank Sinatra, Nat "King" Cole, and Elvis Presley. Folk music, folk heroes, and folk identities became the focus of countless network television specials, and even the short, animated big-screen musicals produced by Walt Disney and based upon the frontier-themed tall tales of Johnny Appleseed and Paul Bunyan. Even two of the most revered participants in the 1930s and 1940s folk revival contributed to the mass-mediated folk music phenomenon. Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie also recorded commercially, resided in urban hubs like New York City and Los Angeles, and participated in and produced scripted radio shows for major media outlets like CBS. In

spite of the mass mediation present in all of these cases, the traditional folk ideals never entirely disappeared as many predicted they would. Instead, a "diluted" or less literal interpretation of these ideals continued to hold the greater genre together despite its changing sights and sounds.

Mass media popularization shifted the folk genre into a broader cultural field. This shift marks the historical boundary at which folk historians stop discussing, brush over, or deem unworthy folk artists with greater mainstream appeal and economic success. Scholarly discussions of Woody Guthrie and Lead Belly since the 1930s tend not to push past their political music or field recordings, while discussions of the incredibly commercially popular Harry Belafonte barely exist except as a transition to the second wave of the revival in the 1960s.[3] This dissertation addresses folk music in this era past that which strictly adheres to the traditional folk criteria as conceived through the frame of the folk revival, and instead reaches out to examine those folk expressions that permeate the mainstream, at times simultaneously contradicting *and* exploiting traditional folk ideals.

In order to demonstrate this split and illuminate the inherent contradictions of performing and constructing folk culture through technological and mainstream avenues, I examine how radio, television, film, commercial recording, and print media

[3] In their 1996 article, "From the 30s to the 60s: The Folk Music Revival in the United States," Ron Eyerman and Scott Barretta separate the American folk revival into two distinct waves: the first beginning in the 1930s, and the second beginning in the late 1950s – early 1960s. My research focuses on the areas in between these two intellectually and ideologically driven movements, viewing it not as transition, but as a full-fledged phenomenon. Ron Eyerman and Scott Barretta, "From the 30s to the 60s: The folk music revival in the United States," in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Aug. 1996).

were used by American popular folk musicians, as well as larger commercial media companies such as Walt Disney between the 1930s and 1950s. My objectives are threefold. First, in order to demonstrate the need for a broader understanding of folk music and continue the scholarly evolution away from the establishment and reinforcement of folk music "canons," I direct my attention towards understanding folk music less as a concrete musical style, and more as what Pierre Bourdieu would call a "field of cultural production" with a wide array of capital-value systems, processes, and products that are specific to the unique subject being created or beheld. Second, I attempt to constantly question and re-evaluate the term "authenticity" as it pertains to music, musicians, and practices discussed in the chapters that follow. Third, I attempt to expand the scholarly discourse of folk music to include more popular, mass-mediated, commercial folk music expressions by entities such as Harry Belafonte, the Weavers, and Walt Disney Studios.

Chapter Subjects

In Chapter 1, I consider the shifting frameworks for understanding American folk music through the 1950s. First, I describe previous models, specifically the canon-based approaches demonstrated by Francis Child, Cecil Sharp, and John Lomax and the politically-oriented Leftist folk movement of the 1930s and 1940s. Examining these models illustrates the roots of the autonomous criteria many critics used to assess the mass-mediated folk music of the 1940s and 1950s, as well as the dangers of using such

criteria on commercial art. Then, I put forth a new framework for understanding folk music based upon Pierre Bourdieu's field of cultural production. Last, to demonstrate how the cultural field model is a more appropriate framework for understanding folk music than pre-existing models, I describe how two of the most revered performers by the standards of these older folk music frameworks – Woody Guthrie and Lead Belly – were not the pure, traditionalist performers they were portrayed to be. Rather, they participated in the heteronomous field of cultural production through media such as broadcast radio and commercial recordings.

In Chapter 2, I examine the Weavers' "Goodnight, Irene" which was recorded for Decca in 1950 with Gordon Jenkins' Orchestra. This recording set off a commercial phenomenon, selling in vast numbers, topping various *Billboard* charts, and inspiring a spate of popular and country & western artists to record their own versions of the song. The "Goodnight, Irene" phenomenon represents a "seam" in American folk music history when the autonomous values touted by previous generations of collectors and political folk musicians intersected with the heteronomous values of the commercial recording industry. I examine how the Weavers' navigated their journey along this seam, drawing connections to the folk ideals (especially through their professed connections to Lead Belly) and adopting elements of the popular sound of the day (due in large part to the arrangements of bandleader, Gordon Jenkins). The Weavers' treatment of both the popular and folk set the stage for the mass-mediated folk music phenomena that followed.

Popular folk singer Harry Belafonte and his label, RCA-Victor, capitalized on his simultaneously folksy and urban origin story, good looks, charisma, and popular sound in order to construct what I will describe in Chapter 3 as a "modern everyman persona," someone who could both sell records (which appealed to the record label), and bring about social change (as with Belafonte's participation in the American Civil Rights Movement). In addition to analyzing selections of Belafonte's music, I examine the mixed critical responses to his sounds, performances, and persona. These critical reviews reflect the fluidity of the term "folk music" and how a critic's position within the field of cultural production – whether he assessed art from the autonomous or heteronomous perspective – determines the criteria by which the critic assesses that which they criticize.

The Walt Disney Company located their construction of American folk culture in a much more specific historical moment, namely the imagery and values associated with an ideal of nineteenth century Western frontier as exemplified by the Davy Crockett phenomenon of the mid-1950s. Disney harnessed the power of multi-mass-media like no one before, using film, television, merchandizing, and his groundbreaking theme park to create an echo chamber of his construction of folk values so thunderously loud that it cloaked the utter commercialism of the undertaking. In Chapter 4, I analyze Disney's construction of American folk culture as demonstrated by the Davy Crockett phenomenon and the animated musical shorts, "Johnny Appleseed" and "Paul Bunyan." These products capitalized on ultramodern media like television, animation, and 1950s

popular music while hearkening back to a past-time understanding of America and Disney's construction of the American folk music sound as exemplified by "The Ballad of Davy Crockett."

Chapter 1. From Canons to Fields: Shifting Frameworks for Understanding American Folk Music Through 1959

Scholarship of American folk music leading up to 1959 tends to focus on two approaches to characterizing and interacting with folk music. First were the "collectors" who hit their stride during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and who would – through various methods and media – gather, document, and canonize examples of folk music as they understood it. Second was the politically motivated music of the 1930s and early-1940s American Left as exemplified by the topical and pro-union music of groups like the Almanac Singers. These two waves of folk music and their correlating bodies of scholarship demonstrate the malleability of the term "folk music" and the shift from a folk located in an idea of the past to a living, breathing folk located in the present. In this dissertation, I examine the next "shift" which exploded in the 1940s and 1950s and was very much of the present: mass-mediated folk music.

Understanding preexisting models of folk music and folk music scholarship is vital to understanding why so many critics, scholars, and musicians were resistant to regarding mass-mediated folk music as worthwhile from a folk perspective. Examining such models – specifically those dedicated to constructing folk music "canons" – also exposes their shortcomings, thus bringing to light the value of regarding folk music as a field of cultural production. While canons are *exclusive* by their very nature – in labeling certain repertoires, styles, musicians, or musician types as worthy of preservation and commemoration, they inevitably exclude others – the cultural field model is *inclusive*.

Fields of cultural production have space for all types of cultural products, categorizing them more on their processes in relation to each other, perspectives of the creator and consumer, and the various ways they assign value to those processes and products.

Models of American Folk Music through the 1940s

The early crop of American folk music scholars exemplified by Francis Child, Cecil Sharp, and John Lomax placed great value on "collections," hence placing firm delimitations on what was "folk" (that which was included in the collection) and what was "not folk" (that which was not included in the collection). What these scholar-collectors chose to include in their respective collections spoke volumes about what each valued in folk music, as well as their philosophies on national, racial, and class identity.[1]

Example 1.1 illustrates the differences in repertoire, methodologies, and definitions of "the folk" between the respective collections of Francis Child, Cecil Sharp, and John Lomax. Child and Sharp locate the folk in an idealized past: timeless in that it was "before the present," pastoral in the idyllic, natural landscape of the not-yet-civilized terrain, and isolated in that it was separate from and untainted by urban

[1] Although only a few collectors are highlighted in this section, other American folk music collectors contributed to this movement in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. For example, another notable body of folk music collections focuses on African American spirituals, folk song, and slave song (see the respective collections of American Negro Spirituals by James Weldon Johnson; Afro-American Folksongs by Henry E. Krehbiel; and Slave Songs by William F. Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison). For an overview of various collectors and collections during this era, see Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 9-46.

Example 1.1 Table comparing Francis Child's, Cecil Sharp's, and John Lomax's respective folk music collections.

Scholar	Type of Folk Music Collected	Method of Collection	Location of "the Folk"	Resulting Collection(s)
Francis Child	English and Scottish ballads	Manuscripts and text-based authentication	The folk objects were the ancient text, located firmly in the past.	*The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1898) Included the texts to "definitive" versions of the ballads.
Cecil Sharp	English folk song	Field work in the American Appalachians	The folk objects were the songs. They were located in the past, but could be collected in the present from a naïve, lower class of rural, isolated people who were mere "vessels" for the music.	*English Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachians* (1932) Included the text and various musical elements of the songs, as well as the names of people he collected them from.
John Lomax	Various types of folk music found in America (ballads, cowboy songs, music of American prisoners, etc.)	Field work and field recordings across America's prisons and rural regions	The folk was located more in a type of person or place – possibly in the present – isolated from contemporary, urban society most likely in rural parts of the nation.	*Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1915) *Negro Folk Songs as Sung By Lead Belly* (1936) Printed collections including text, music, and stories. Recorded collections stored in the Library of Congress.

society. Both scholars collected British folk song, with the purpose of linking contemporary national and racial identities to those very old songs with natural themes.

Child's text-based collection was the result of manuscript study, while Sharp's text- *and* music-based collections were gathered from the living, breathing inhabitants of the American Appalachian Mountains.[2] To a certain extent, both scholars distrusted living sources: while Child dismissed them altogether, Sharp viewed his informants as polite and hospitable Others – racially and economically – who seemed to be the naïve carriers of a cultural tradition that only educated elite (like Sharp, himself) could harness in the most proper way. According to Benjamin Filene, "Sharp did not believe that the commoners were up to the task of creating the national music. Rather, they were to be commended for having preserved the raw materials out of which trained composers [like Ralph Vaughan Williams, Percy Grainger, and Béla Bartók] would create new music."[3]

John Lomax approached folk song collection from a much different perspective. Greater than the repertoire Child and Sharp canonized, Lomax defined a ballad as "a song that tells a story, is of community or group authorship, has no date, is handed down by word of mouth, and is impersonal in tone."[4] These parameters take ballad scholarship away from the written record towards physical practice, just as they drive towards a sense of communal authorship. Instead of scientifically searching for and

---

[2] Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York: Folklore Press, 1956); Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachians* (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1932). Many scholars describe Child's and Sharp's respective collections and methods. Some examples include D.K. Wilgus, *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1959); B.H. Bronson, *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* (Princeton, NJ, 1959-1976); B.H. Bronson, *The Ballad as Song* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Press, 1969); and Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 12-27.

[3] Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 22.

[4] Wilgus, *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship*, 81.

authenticating the original versions, Lomax searched for "encounters" and "linkages," "repeatedly discover[ing] the real thing in the process."[5]

Most drastically, Lomax's definition of the ballads removes the ideal of the authentic folk from the European past and places it into the American present. He is no longer concerned with capturing a long lost, pastoral way of life, and is instead more concerned with searching for the authentic American folk character of the *now*. Part of this shift to the present day is due to the fact that the United States was a relatively young nation, and did not have an ancient history to explore. The American spirit was, in a way, dependent on nature, but mostly in the idea of the American frontier (a specific flavor of nineteenth century American folk identity that carries through to the Walt Disney animated shorts discussed in Chapter 4). Lomax viewed the possibility of expansion, the idea of Western wide open spaces, and the simple un-urban lifestyle to be defining traits of what he perceived to be the authentic American folk essence.

The American folk music collections of John Lomax and his son, Alan, also represent a practical shift in folk collection methodology, namely the shift from manuscript documentation to audio recording and live performance. In using his then cutting-edge recording technology, John Lomax had what he touted as an enduring record of an actual event, uncontaminated by the mediations of written transcriptions, packaging, or even the voice of the field worker. He viewed these recordings as witnesses to performances, able to reproduce an event with the utmost accuracy and

[5] Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 147.

the most vivid memory.[6] (However, as I will discuss later in this chapter and in Chapter 2, Lomax's field recordings were not the unmediated documentations he portrayed them to be.) John Lomax would later bring the very performers he had "collected" on the road – figures like Huddie Ledbetter – parading them in front of erudite audiences like the Modern Language Association (MLA). Although he did publish his findings in written collections,[7] Lomax also preserved the audio recordings for posterity in the archives of the Library of Congress. Lomax's methods and resulting collections were much more inclusive of contextual information than Child's and Sharp's. Yet, he targeted his field work towards performers who embodied a very specific set of criteria, thus excluding others. His collections were less canons of "songs," and more canons of "types."

In the years that followed these scholarly collections, American folk music as a genre came to be defined more by the ways it was practiced – instrumentation, an artist's motivation, projected persona, community, etc. – than by its connections to an ancient repertoire or antimodern, pastoral way of life. The American folk grew more into a thriving mass of like-minded individuals, represented by their participation in a tradition that had *associations* with traditional folk ideals, not individuals who were actually in the past or located in isolated, pastoral settings.

---

[6] John Avery Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947).

[7] Two of Lomax's most notable printed collections *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (New York: Sturgis & Walton:1915); and *Negro Folk Songs as Sung By Lead Belly* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936) which was co-authored by his son, Alan.

Representing a drastic contrast to the collections described above was the politically-motivated music of the Popular Front in the 1930s and early 1940s as epitomized by the Almanac Singers. As these Leftists sought to mobilize, unionize, and lift up the underpaid, overworked industrial workers and the starving, badly treated farmers, the American, blue-collar "everyman" worker replaced the idyllic folk ideal of the early ballad collectors. They were less concerned with singing "authenticated" folk songs that could be traced back to some pure, idyllic source; rather, their songs were often original, topical lyrics laid on top of a pre-existing song (see the discussion of the Almanacs' "Union Maid" in Chapter 2). To the Leftists, "the group" and "the masses" were paramount, as was an understanding of folk song as *something people do* as opposed to *something that was made long ago*.[8]

Although the folk and their music were even more tangible to the Leftists, the People were not exactly divorced from the folk ideals put forth by the ballad collectors of previous decades. The "everyman" was set forth as the new paradigm, but this too was a construct, just like "the folk." Certainly as a cohesive mass, the People were held together by common goals like unionization and better work opportunities, as well as shared circumstances like mistreatment by the government and the ruling classes.

---

[8] A vast body of scholarship is dedicated to folk music of the 1930s and 1940s American Left. See Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Ronald D. Cohen and Dave Samuelson, booklet accompanying *Songs for Political Action: Folk Music, Topical Songs and the American Left* [CD Box Set] (Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 1996); R. Serge Denisoff, *Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1971); and Richard A. Reuss, *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000).

However, the everyman image never quite let go of the past as the People found their contemporary folk heroes in individuals like Woody Guthrie or Lead Belly who had links to what was perceived as a "purer," less industrialized frontier on the margins of contemporary society.

Methods of collection, preservation, and performance across Child's, Sharp's, and the Lomaxes' collections through the more practice-based, Leftist performers in the 1930s and 1940s reflect a shift in the temporal and geographical locations of American folk roots, and hence, in constructions of authentic American folk identity. The Lomaxes – especially Alan – served as a sort of "pivot point" between the older school of print-based, British folk music collectors and a newer school of American folk music scholars, performers and activists who treated folk music less as a body of texts that carried a society's very essence, and more as a practice, a state of mind for its participants and authentic in its mode of transmission. Rather than being depicted as authentic because of its racial heredity or national history, this music was portrayed as authentic because it was created by and for the folk to sing.

Common Themes across Pre-1950s Models of American Folk Music

What the early collectors and the more politically-oriented performers of the 1930s and 1940s have in common in spite of their different temporal and practical constructions of authentic American folk music, is that they defined their respective folk by a reference or relationship to an "Other" in regards to people, place, and time. In

comparison to the collectors' and Leftists' "present," the authentic folk or folk music were constructed as "past" or "primitive": either literally in that the folk lived long ago, or figuratively in that the folk were perceived to live a less "civilized" existence by contemporary standards (i.e. less advanced technology, "simpler" lifestyles, etc.). Geographically, the folk were located "somewhere else," whether that place be another continent, another region, or another type of landscape (such as the American South, the prisons, rural regions, "the frontier," etc.).

While the Leftists did not perpetuate *written* canons to the extent that the collectors did in earlier decades, they did promote idolizations of certain folk artists or artist "types," resulting in less formal, but perhaps more powerful canons of great men. First and foremost, those canonized as folk music's great men were portrayed as having relationships to the isolated, pastoral and antimodern. They were isolated from an idea of contemporary, urban existence, either by a perceived geographical distance, or a literal barrier like the prison that isolated Lead Belly from the outside population. They exhibit a relationship to the pastoral, either by hearkening from rural regions or agrarian lifestyles, or embracing ideals of the American frontier. Related to the isolated and pastoral, these canonized folk types convey a sense of antimodernism. According to T.J. Jackson Lears, early twentieth century American folk movements emerged because of a growing anxiety over the "overcivilization" that accompanied the increasingly industrialized modern existence. Americans responded to this anxiety by looking to an

idyllic past to get in touch with identities more grounded in nature.[9] Antimodernism, therefore, is subjective as Regina Bendix claims: it is a reaction to an understanding of the present and is linked to a nostalgia for an idealized version of the past.[10]

In demonstrating these traditional folk ideals, great men also tended to be idealized as "traditionalists" as defined by Ellen Stekert in relation to conceptions of authenticity.[11] Traditionalist performers were seen as sincere because their music was taken as an organic consequence of their upbringings. Furthermore, they were deemed sincere because audiences identified the performers' person, persona and character as one and the same.

Performance studies scholar Philip Auslander suggests that there are three facets to a performer's identity: the "person," the actual, real-life individual; the "persona," the collective, public, and constructed face of the performer; and the "character," the role the performer plays in individual songs or albums.[12] According to this model, a performer who presented identical person, persona and character would have no need for theatricality or artifice in their performances, press, or day-to-day appearances and interactions: the audience would simply witness the performer "being

---

[9] T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[10] Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 17.
[11] Ellen J. Stekert, "Cents and Nonsense in the Urban Folksong Movement: 1930-1966," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana, IL: The University of Illinois Press, 1993), 96.
[12] Philip Auslander describes these three facets (person, persona and character) in regards to artists like David Bowie and T. Rex's Mark Bolan, but the same principles may apply to any performer. Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music,* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 4-6.

himself." The traditionalist folk archetype would fit into this category, hence seeming more honest and sincere.

The traditionalist performer as epitomized by Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie is a persistent image in American folk music which will crop up time and time again throughout this study. The traditionalist type has been canonized to such an extent that many performers continually wield their relationships to these performers and their repertoire like badges of authenticity (for example, see the Weavers' deliberately drawn connections to Lead Belly as discussed in Chapter 2, and Harry Belafonte's televised performance of Ledbetter's "Sylvie" as discussed in Chapter 3). Even the folk heroes celebrated in Chapter 4's Walt Disney animated musical shorts bear reference to the "spirit" of the Guthrie ideal: these heroes roamed the landscape with a *Wanderlust* of an American cowboy or train-hopping hobo, and in the case of Bunyan, he even moved westward like the Okies travelled to California's "pastures of plenty." Although the Bunyan and Appleseed stories were set earlier than Guthrie's lifetime, these heroes were celebrated because of those "authentically American" qualities their stories represented, just like Woody.

Like the text-based canons created by the ballad collectors, the canonization of certain great men can prove equally as exclusionary, and perhaps even more harmful to a balanced understanding of folk music. Not only do these types of canons exclude so many other constructions of what it means to be a folk performer, style, sound, etc. and relegate the purest folk identities to an idealized version of the past. They also suggest

what types of performers, styles, sounds, etc., should be created, valued, and commemorated in the future.

The work of the collectors and the Leftists do much to perpetuate very specific understandings of folk music that are useful to their creators' respective scholarly or political projects. Collectors like Francis Child and Cecil Sharp place specific boundaries on what folk music is, namely British ballads that can be traced back to an idea of the past that exemplifies the purity they associate with the antimodern, isolation, and the pastoral. Their respective projects were motivated by nationalism and the desire to link that national identity with a specific, European racial identity. Shifting from the European to the American, the Lomaxes' collections also reflect a reverence for the traditional folk ideals, but were interpreted in more modern contexts. John and Alan claimed to have found pure American folk song in the pastoral American frontier and the isolation of the American prison systems, both antimodern in comparison to early-twentieth century urban centers where so many scholars were headquartered. The 1930s and 1940s American Left perpetuated the image of the American everyman while drawing linkages from themselves to those they portrayed as traditionalist performers like Woody Guthrie and Lead Belly. Groups like the Almanac Singers brought the American folk into the present, using song and their projected relationships to "traditionalist performers" to mobilize the masses for political change.

All of the above definitions of folk music, although varied, present problems in their approaches to defining, performing, and studying folk music. First, they are all

held up on romanticized notions of the folk, based less in reality and more in Otherness, nostalgia, and, at times, primitivism. Second, they all – to varying degrees – take authenticity for granted. Rather than treating authenticity as a construct, they each treat it as something concrete that someone or something either has or does not. Third, they all stake their claims to folk identity and folk authenticity on the shoulders of a few idealized individuals (i.e. Guthrie or Ledbetter) or an established set of texts (i.e. the English and Scottish ballads, cowboy songs, and the repertoire of one or two paradigmatic performers like Guthrie or Ledbetter). Fourth, the above models (especially the earlier collections), generally do not address the processes and structures that give birth to and define folk music as such. Last, they do not account for large portions of folk music as understood by the mainstream.

Locating folk music only in the past, locating folk music in a present that is portrayed as isolated from the trappings of modernity, or portraying folk music as only free of charge and made by the collective, dismisses a large swath of music that is understood by the mainstream as "folk." Mass-mediated, contemporary, and often non-political American folk music emerged as a true commercial and cultural force for mainstream American audiences in the late 1940s through 1950s. This music had a great impact on average American audiences, but has been largely neglected by folk music scholars and critics because it does not fit the molds put supported by the above understandings of folk music.

In the following section, I put forth a framework for understanding folk music as a whole which allows for the inclusion and evaluation of a greater breadth of folk music, ranging from the ballads, to cowboy songs, to Leftist rallying cries, to the popular recordings of Harry Belafonte and beyond. Examining folk music as part of a field of cultural production rather than a series of texts or performer types opens the scholarship to a greater variety of music and products which evaluate success in different ways.

American Folk Music from 1930-1959 as a Field of Cultural Production

My research is influenced by contemporary scholars inside and outside of folk music like Elijah Wald and Richard Peterson who define musical genres through their dynamic processes, socio-historical contexts, and a much broader range of products than those traditionally represented in written and performer-based folk music canons. Great works and performers were not created in a vacuum, isolated from the influence of outside forces like popular taste, history, politics, etc. Music-makers, listeners, and industry professionals inevitably interacted with the sights and sounds of their world, regardless of whether or not these sights and sounds were later canonized.[13]

[13] Rather than defining American popular music only through canons carefully stocked with "great" works and artists, pop music scholar Elijah Wald casts as wide a net a possible, also considering what was "popular," or even just what was merely "present" at the time. Wald's approach calls upon scholars to understand the rule, rather than just the exception; after all, once has to understand the rule to grasp what makes the exception so very exceptional. Likewise, country music scholar Richard Peterson investigates the supportive apparatuses – like nationalism, the burgeoning commercial recording industry, geographical expansion of audience, etc. – which cultivated the country music genre during its early years.

This dissertation is structured as a series of "snapshots," each zooming in on a particular moment or phenomenon in mid-century, mass-mediated folk music. I follow Wald and Peterson in that as I focus on each individual subject, I also examine the social, cultural, and economic structures that supported their creation, as well as the structures that supported people's understanding of each. After all, one cannot begin to comprehend why the Weavers' particular construction of American folk identity appealed to mainstream American audiences at that particular historical moment without examining the historical moment itself both from the perspectives of their anti-commercial, folk roots and the commercial, popular music industry that so embraced their particular construction of folk identity. Similarly, one cannot begin to unpack why Harry Belafonte's popularly-accepted, theatrical interpretations of folk songs were so scorned by some critics while being heralded by so many others without considering the values systems of each perspective.

Whether they use this term or not in relation to the contextual processes that impact the music they study, both Wald and Peterson call for an understanding of a particular genre, artist, practice, etc., as part of what Pierre Bourdieu calls a "field of cultural production." Bourdieu's model presents art as more than artistic works or hermeneutic meanings. Rather, different types of art exist in contextually specific fields consisting of the dynamic rules, power structures, behaviors and conflicts that allow for

---

See Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

artists' works to be produced and consumed.[14] According to Bourdieu, framing art through fields of cultural production allows us to

> make a radical break with the substantialist mode of thought…which tends to foreground the individual, or the visible interactions between individuals, at the expense of the *structural relations* – invisible, or visible only through their effects – between social positions that are both occupied and manipulated by social agents which may be isolated individuals, groups or institutions.[15]

Wald and Peterson both write with these "structural relations" in mind, choosing to examine why these genres are held together and why the music is created and received, not who or what fits most easily into categories created without consideration of the tastes and realities of the socio-historical moment in which the music was created.

Along these lines, American folk music from 1930 through 1959 was not a concrete musical style, but a field of cultural production.[16] Viewing folk music as a cultural field shows how the folk revival and mass-mediated folk music are not diametrically opposed as their ideals suggest, but are rather two inherently linked parts of a greater system. The cultural field model's criteria of capital, power and recognition allow for an examination of mass-mediated folk music on its own terms – rather than solely by the standards of the folk revival or of the popular music sphere. At the same

---

[14] See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29-73; and Jen Webb, Tony Schirato, and Geoff Danaher, *Understanding Bourdieu* (London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 2010).

[15] Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production," 29, emphasis mine.

[16] See Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production," 29-73. In their discussion of the first and second waves of the American folk revival, Ron Eyerman and Scott Barretta have put forth a very similar model called "Production of Culture," based upon dynamic processes between and within contextually specific cultural field. See Eyerman and Barretta, "From the 30s to the 60s." For simplicity and consistency of terms, I will adhere to the vocabulary of Bourdieu's model.

time, these more contextually appropriate criteria allow a presentation of mass-mediated folk music as a powerful force alongside the folk revival, rather than dismissing it as “bad” or “inauthentic.”

American folk music of this era consisted of two principle sub-fields: “the folk revival” and “mass-mediated folk.” Although scholars have traditionally treated these sub-fields as wholly opposed – embracing the former while dismissing the latter – in reality they functioned interdependently as dynamic parts of an ever-changing whole, with many rich areas of overlap. Deciphering the areas of tension and overlap between these two sub-fields is essential to understanding why mass-mediated folk music has been neglected in folk scholarship as well as to demonstrating the importance of its inclusion.

The tension between the sub-fields is best explained through Bourdieu’s two opposing styles of defining and distributing “capital”: heteronomous and autonomous. Corresponding to mass-mediated folk music, heteronomous systems use money as their capital, and distribute it to those performing effectively in the economic marketplace. Successful mass-mediated folk artists, then, earn money by participating in mainstream institutions of the popular music market such as the recording industry, radio, print, television, promoting a persona, etc., all the while referring to the traditional folk ideals.

Relating to the folk revival, autonomous systems operate against the mainstream, heteronomous economy. They define capital as “prestige” rather than money, and are often driven by idealism rather than an economically-motivated desire

to draw the masses. The folk revival portrays itself as autonomous because successful artists earn prestige by participating in "niche" institutions – academia, politics, government initiatives, small live performances – which garner little mainstream attention, and earn even less money. They create music through "natural" means, ideally rejecting studio recording sessions for live, acoustic performances or field recordings. The folk revival further demonstrates its autonomy from the mainstream by defining itself as "the anti-pop," the negative of the mainstream music-making machine.

In spite of their conflicting means and values, folk music actually thrived in the gray areas between the autonomous and heteronomous between 1930 and 1959. The folk revival self-identified as the opposite of heteronomous capital systems and structures, yet they increasingly utilized mass-media to achieve their socio-political goals. For example, while word of mouth and oral tradition were powerful for much of the folk revival, the Leftists' political message could span greater distances with greater speed through commercial recordings like the Almanac Singers' *Songs for John Doe*, print publications like *The Daily Worker* and *People's Songs*, and management companies like People's Artists, Inc.[17] Even the once-academic act of folk song collecting was brought to a greater audience through mass publication. Influenced by the 1927 publication of Carl Sandburg's *The American Songbag*,[18] new songbooks aimed

[17] For examinations of American Folk Music and the Left during the first half of the twentieth century, see Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, Cohen and Samuelson, *Songs for Political Action,* Denisoff, *Great Day Coming,* Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk,* and Reuss, *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics*.
[18] Carl Sandburg, *The American Songbag* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927). According to Benjamin Filene, *The American Songbag* "clearly aims at a popular audience. In presenting its 280 songs, it completely ignores academic standards. It does not list the folk sources from whom Sandburg collected

at the public fostered participatory and democratic performances of American identity, not the solitary, *silent* study of musical texts fostered by Child and Sharp's respective text-based canons.

Likewise, mass-mediated folk reached into the revival, exploiting the traditional folk ideals' associations with authenticity and American national identity. For instance, record executives, journalists, and the record-buying public valued artists like Harry Belafonte whose folk music sounded and looked very much like pop (his crooning vocal style, lavish orchestral arrangements, the sex-appeal of a matinee idol), and who still bore *reference* to the traditional folk ideals (by being African American, using Caribbean rhythms, recording Child ballads and songs popularized by Lead Belly). The same was true for Disney's animated interpretations of American folk culture, which employed heavily produced scores with full orchestras and choirs, but had lead voice actors who skillfully adopted "untrained," folksy singing styles. Folklorists Ron Eyerman and Scott Barretta aptly describe the phenomenon: "Such music evoked folk qualities, but was standardized for a mass audience."[19]

Hence, folk music on both fronts during this period was like the proverbial snake eating its own tail: the perception of autonomy (or "folk authenticity") led to its commercial appeal, just as the commercial appeal contributed to a heightened

---

the songs nor does it specify which songs came from other collectors." Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 40.

[19] In the context of their article, Eyerman and Barretta use the cited quote to describe what they call the "second wave" of the American folk revival in the 1960s because of its enmeshment in the popular music industry. The same applies to the mass-mediated folk of the 1940s and 1950s. Eyerman and Barretta, "From the 30s to the 60s," 530.

awareness, perhaps even a caricature of folk authenticity and autonomy. A new contradiction emerged between the sense of American identity supported by purist interpretations of the traditional folk ideals, and the new American identity based upon commercial consumption. During the late 1940s and 1950s, buying folk music – as opposed to the "free of charge" attitude of the 1930s folk revival – was an expression of this new American identity. After the lean times during the Great Depression and World War II, the new nationalism made buying records – buying *anything* – a patriotic act, an expression of a communal American experience during a time of new economic prosperity.[20]

In building upon Wald, Peterson, and Bourdieu, I depart from two of the most prevalent bodies of folk music literature. First, I write against historical folk music scholarship that supports the building of folk music canons, defines folk music as a collection of "texts," or evaluates folk music purely through the lens of traditional folk ideals as described above. This approach removes people, sound, process and context from folk music, and in discarding the "new," it unavoidably relegates folk music to the past. Second, I write "around" the well-represented body of work that focuses only on the Leftist folk revivalists from the 1930s and 1940s, like Pete Seeger, Alan Lomax, the Almanac Singers, etc. The Leftist folk revival represents an important part of the folk music field of cultural production between 1930 and 1959. However, my research will

[20] Eyerman and Barretta attribute this new American nationalism to the economic upturn, and the overwhelming new number of college-educated, young adult consumers with their new purchase power and intellectual craving for something more "meaningful" than the "formulaic" sounds of rock 'n' roll and Hit Parade tunes. Ibid., 503.

view the revival as context, part of the structural relations that both fostered the creation of mass-mediated folk music (i.e. Alan Lomax's CBS radio shows) *and* contributed to mass-mediated folk music's absence from the canon because of its strong attachment to the traditional folk ideals and the everyman image that conflict with many elements of commercial music-making. Contrary to both historical folk music scholarship and the excellent body of literature on the Leftist revival, I expand the label "folk" to include heteronomous, commercial folk music products and processes, subjects that have not been afforded serious, if any, scholarly attention.

The Transitional Traditionalists: Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie

Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie were paradigms of American folk identity from the autonomous perspective of the mid-century folk revivalists. To these revivalists, Ledbetter and Guthrie performed with a sincerity afforded by their origin stories, and by the perceived poverty and anti-commercialism of their music-making careers. In addition to being prolific songwriters and performers, both men were seen as traditionalists whose person, persona and characters were one and the same (and hence, sincere), and whose unified identity embodied the traditional folk ideals. Yet, upon closer inspection, even these paradigms of the autonomous folk performer participated in the early throes of the all-but-dismissed mass-mediated folk music phenomenon that peaked in the 1950s.

Two "Traditionalists": Lead Belly, the "King of the Twelve-String Guitar Players of the World," and Woody Guthrie, the Okie Everyman

In 1936, John and Alan Lomax published *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly: "King of the Twelve-String Guitar Players of the World," Long-Time Convict in the Penitentiaries of Texas and Louisiana*. A collection of forty-eight tunes with corresponding vignettes of how Lead Belly conceived of or performed them, *Negro Folk Songs* was the product of field recording sessions captured between 1933 and 1935, mostly in the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola and later at the Lomaxes' Wilton, Connecticut home. Songs like "Bring Me Li'l' Water, Silvy," "C.C. Rider," "Ella Speed," "De Midnight Special," and the most recognizable and enduring of Lead Belly's repertoire, "Irene," are scattered throughout the collection and corralled into categories like "Work Songs," "Hollers," and "Ballads."

More than a pardoned murdered and an afflicted bluesman, Huddie Ledbetter was an eclectic songster who had an extensive range of performance-ready genres and styles at his disposal. Lead Belly – as Ledbetter was more commonly known – was a folk collector's dream: he had a vast repertoire of songs, played the twelve-string guitar with the utmost virtuosity, and could be promoted to Northern audiences as a black murderer from the South. In other words, he could be portrayed as the isolated primitive, bearing the purest of American music. His persona had strong ties to the isolated, the pastoral, and the antimodern, which the Lomaxes saw as a huge boon.

The Lomaxes celebrated that they had discovered Ledbetter in a prison, literally isolated from the general public. In *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly*, the Lomaxes leverage his confinement to validate what they deemed as the authenticity of his songs. They pronounced that Southern penitentiaries were the most fruitful sites of their fieldwork, "for among Negro convicts we found such [folk] songs in greatest number, variety and purity."[21]

Of these convicts, Ledbetter was, by far, the most prolific in spite of and because of his isolation. The Lomaxes note that:

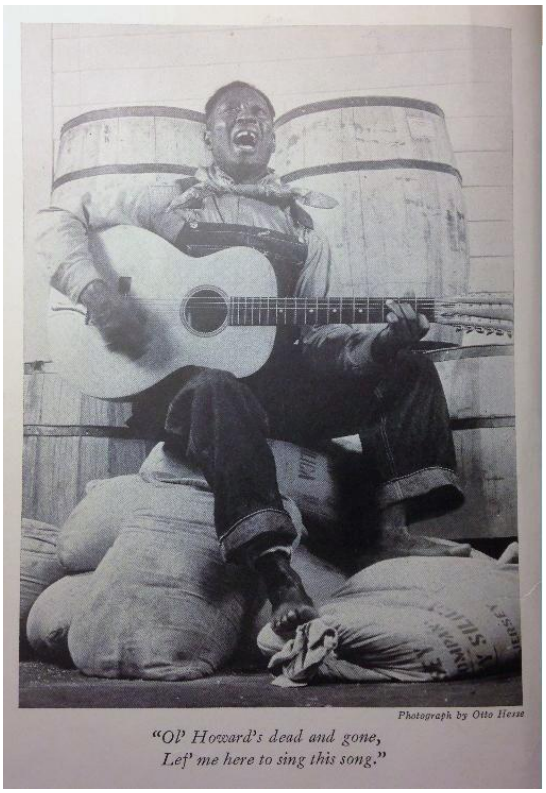
> From Lead Belly we secured about one hundred songs that seemed 'folky,' a far greater number than from any other person. In addition, he knew many more of the popular sort, current now or in other years. His eleven years of confinement had cut him off both from the phonograph and from the radio. According to his own claim he knew five hundred songs learned by 'word of mouth.' He carried in his head all these words and tunes. We saw no printed page of music either in his prison cell or in his home.[22]

Here, the Lomaxes celebrate Lead Belly's isolation *alongside* a sense of antimodernism, simplicity, and sincerity in his music learning and making process. Oral transmission has been and continues to be a powerful marker of a folk tradition. Learning music by word of mouth implies firsthand knowledge of a song or musical practice, and suggests that performer learned the song "naturally" and sang it "sincerely" and with a sense of "immediacy." Furthermore, Lead Belly learning these tunes by word of mouth

[21] Lomax and Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs*, ix.
[22] Ibid., xiii.

suggested a lack of technological mediation – by sheet music, radio, records, etc. – and implied a more ancient, "primitive" way of learning.

Example 1.2 Frontispiece to *Negro Folk Songs As Sung By Lead Belly*. John Avery Lomax and Alan Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs as Sung By Lead Belly*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936).



The Lomaxes also depicted the songster as a product of a pastoral America. An example of the image the Lomaxes hoped to advertize is the often-reproduced photograph by Otto Hesse printed opposite of the title page of *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly* (Example 1.2, Frontispiece to *Negro Folk Songs*). Even before the reader can peruse the book's table of contents, they are struck by a full-page image of Lead Belly looking positively provincial in front of a backdrop of stacked, wooden

barrels. Guitar resting on his right knee, Lead Belly wears a kerchief tied around his neck, and a button-down shirt. The cuffed hems of his blue denim overalls reveal his bare ankles and feet. This is meant to be the costume of a laborer or slave, more specifically an "Other" separate from Northern, urban society. Moreover, the strange, work-related set pieces imply the photographer just "happened upon" this man in his natural habitat taking a break from a long day's work by playing some music.

Upon closer inspection, however, one can deduce that no work has actually been done in these clothes for they are brand new and pristine, with no soil visible and no evident wear and tear. Lead Belly biographers Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell note that the photograph was "made at the cost of $250" and "had been made a year before, when Lomax had been encouraging Huddie to wear such an outfit."[23] The same overalls and kerchief ensemble is also featured in *The March of Time* newsreel that hit movie theaters on March 8, 1935.[24] The newsreel is a three-minute dramatization of the oft-cited and romanticized legend of how John Lomax discovered Lead Belly in the Louisiana State Penitentiary before assuming what the newsreel portrays as a "benevolent" custodianship over the songster.

After his release from prison, the film stages Lead Belly seeking out and finding Lomax hard at his work at his typewriter on a field trip in what is supposed to be a Texas

---

[23] Charles K. Wolfe & Kip Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 195-196.

[24] *The March of TIME: Folk Legend Leadbelly* Newsreel. Originally released on March 8, 1935. Time Magazine Online: http://content.time.com/time/video/player/0,32068,30862122001_1918195,00.html (last accessed March 7, 2014).

hotel room. Ledbetter enters the room wearing his laborer costume and pledges his undying loyalty to the elder Lomax, pleading: "I'll drive you all over the United States and I'll sing all songs for you. You'll be my big boss and I'll be your man. Thank you, sir, thank you!"[25] The language he uses – "boss," "man," and "sir" – combined with the costume of a menial laborer serves to distance the viewer from the songster, and evoke more sinister power structures of the slave owner and slave. Such language and imagery also frames John Lomax as Lead Belly's keeper, someone who will "curate" the songster as a part of the American folk music canon, and someone who will control his behavior, thus taking the edge off of the fact that he was a black man convicted of violent crimes.

Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly and the origin story depicted in *The March of Time* newsreel both support the image of Lead Belly as a traditionalist American folk music performer to the 1930s and 1940s folk revivalists. These documents portray the songster as a Southern, black, ex-convict with rural roots who sang songs he could have conceivably learned "from oral tradition as he grew up." Lead Belly was the convict who sang the prison song, "Jail-House Blues" and the laborer who sang the field holler, "Go Down, Ol' Hannah". Furthermore, these "biographical" documents paint Lead Belly "the man," Lead Belly, "the performance persona," and the character of his songs as one and the same. After all, he plays himself in the movie of his life, singing songs "honestly" from what could be perceived as first-hand knowledge.

[25] Ibid.

Although quite different than Lead Belly, Okie folksinger Woody Guthrie also has and continues to be upheld as a paradigm of American traditionalist folk identity by scholars and fellow performers. Like Ledbetter, Woody Guthrie was perceived by others as sincere, singing from the firsthand experience of his upbringing. Born in 1912 in Okemah, Oklahoma, Guthrie emerged from what came to be known in the 1930s as the Dust Bowl: a region that was literally immersed in clouds of dust as drought ravaged the farmland of poor Americans, a region that also came to represent the rural face of the Great Depression.

Communist – or at least, communist-sympathizing – groups like the Almanac Singers latched onto the idealization of the Proletariat in their efforts to mobilize the working classes to unionize. In doing so, they touted the personal history of fellow Almanac, Woody Guthrie, as a badge of their authenticity and authority. Guthrie grew up in the Oklahoma dust bowl before voluntarily hitting the rails and the roads during the Great Depression.[26] Guthrie left his wife and children because of that *Wanderlust* John Lomax so valued in his cowboy songs, not necessarily because he needed to venture to California to find work. So, when the Almanacs latched onto Guthrie's Okie background and history of hobo-ing across the nation, they glossed over his upbringing as a relatively privileged son of a local politician and portrayed him as *the* starving, roaming Okie who blew right into New York City on a cloud of dust. Guthrie's Okie "authenticity" was unique even within the Okie experience, but compared to Almanacs

[26] For accounts of Woody Guthrie's life, see Joe Klein, *Woody Guthrie: A Life* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1980); and Ed Cray, *Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).

– most of whom were northeastern, upper-class, and Harvard-educated like Pete Seeger – he was the closest person they could find to their blue-collar everyman ideal. As a result, they adopted some of his ways, wearing plain work clothes, rolling up their shirt-sleeves, and speaking in a folksy everyman jargon. Therefore, the folk ideal was relocated to the People's everyman, but it still followed in the centuries-old tradition of constructing an image based in Otherness.

One of the people who knew him best was fellow Almanac Singer and future member of the Weavers, Pete Seeger. Seeger often marveled at Woody's "genius," and praised his "honesty" and "simplicity," terms that will come up again and again when critics or musicians attempt to evaluate folk music as such. Seeger proposes that Guthrie's "songs are honest; they say things that need to be said. But above all else, Woody's songs show the genius of simplicity. Any damn fool can get complicated, but it takes a genius to attain simplicity."[27]

Just as Lead Belly's on-stage persona and many of the characters of his songs matched audiences' perception of Lead Belly's real-life story, Woody Guthrie sang of the people he supposedly represented. With titles like "The Great Dust Disaster," "Talking Dust Bowl Blues," and "Dust Bowl Refugee," so many of Guthrie's songs came from a place of personal experience or personal identification. And like Lead Belly wore the costume of the southern black convict and laborer, Guthrie wore the costume of the dusty Okie or train-hopping hobo. He wore blue collar clothing like button-down shirts

[27] Pete Seeger, "'Woody Guthrie, Songwriter,' 1963," in *Pete Seeger: In His Own Words*, eds. Rob Rosenthal and Sam Rosenthal (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 48-49.

with his sleeves rolled up, and was famously lacking in his personal hygiene: wild, unkempt hair, comfortable in soiled clothing, and was known to sleep with his dirty boots on.

The Songster, the Okie, and the Recording Studio

In spite of being worshipped as traditionalists, the courses of Ledbetter's and Guthrie's actual careers rub directly against many of the autonomous ideals that had been essential to the definition of folk music up until that point. Both men recorded commercially – Lead Belly with ARC, Columbia, Bluebird, and Guthrie with RCA – and both men performed on scripted radio programs which were mediated by technology and produced within a commercial context.

Drawing on Walter Benjamin's theory of a work of art's natural "aura," the traditional folk music object – such as field recordings and spontaneous musical occurrences – is distinct from a mechanically-produced musical recordings (such as a popular records disseminated to record stores, radio stations, or jukeboxes). With each reproduction, the mass-produced artistic object becomes more and more distanced from nature, and likewise, it becomes less and less faithful to its source.[28] According to Benjamin's model, in addition to being "distanced" from the original live performances, Ledbetter and Guthrie's mass-mediated folk music performances and recordings are

[28] See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt and translated Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 217-251.

also un-spontaneous and contrived as evident in the production values of their commercial recordings and the adherence to pre-written scripts in the radio shows.

For example, in Alan Lomax's *Folk Music of America* CBS radio program broadcast on April 23, 1940, Lomax performs with Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly, and the African American gospel singing group, The Golden Gate Quartet.[29] A part of Lomax's *The American School of the Air* radio program, *Folk Music of America* "was to feature different folk artists each week and to help educate the general public about folk music."[30] In the April 23rd episode, they sing classic folk songs like "Goodbye Ol' Paint" (featuring Guthrie singing lead and the Golden Gate Quartet singing back-up), "Blow the Man Down" (with Lomax singing lead and the group singing the choruses), and "John Henry" (with an educational, spoken introduction by Lomax, Ledbetter singing lead, and the Quartet singing back-up).

Lomax runs the session like a sing-along with the performers teaching the songs to each other and the radio audience through call and response. Yet, the teaching parts come across as what sound like the products of clever editing. Lomax is heard directing the session, speaking directly to the audience and "asking" the singers to demonstrate the melodies and choruses of certain songs. When the singers are cued, their clips sound pre-recorded, edited for length and rehearsed for lyrical and melodic clarity. Upon additional cuing from Lomax, the clips even sound identical to the ones previously

[29] *Folk Music of America*, no. 25, Parts One and Two, April 23, 1940. The radio shows can be heard on reel-to-reel tapes at the Library of Congress' American Folklife Center as a part of the Alan Lomax CBS Radio Series Collection. Part one call number: AFS 13,498, tape LWO 5111 F reel 428a. Part two call number: Sound: AFS 13,499 tape LWO 5111 F reel 428a.
[30] Wolfe and Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Lead Belly*, 218.

played (indicating that the "calls" or "responses" were not played by the performers in real time, but actually cued repeatedly from a pre-existing recording). With the song-teaching portions of *Folk Music of America*, the oral tradition so treasured as "straight from the folk's mouth" is not such a straight path after all. While the audible styles, timbres, and song choices imply a strong, autonomous folk aesthetic (i.e. acoustic instruments, "uncultivated" voices, the types of folk repertoires that could conceivably been sung from those artists' first-hand experiences), the strong aura of the live event according to Benjamin's theory has theoretically been weakened by the intervention of Alan Lomax, radio technology, script writers, recording, manipulation, and mechanical reproduction.

Other contradictions to the traditional folk ideals and autonomous values are the classical arrangements of folk songs featured in many of the series' episodes. Although Lomax undoubtedly uses the *Folk Music of America* to educate and engage Americans in folk singing, the orchestral portions seem to be validations for the value of folk music. At the end of the April 23, 1940 episode (the last broadcast of that year), the announcer closes the program by declaring: "The orchestral portions of next year's broadcasts will demonstrate still further the influence of the folk on the art music of their respective countries. And we plan to trace this development also in the works of world famous European composers." By "European composers," the announcer really means "classical" or "high art," because in that same April 23rd episode, the two arrangements

– "Can't Ya Line Em?" by William Grant Still, and "John Henry" by Aaron Copland – are by "world famous" American composers.[31]

Prior to the orchestral portions, the folk performers introduce and perform the folk tunes, and only then does the CBS orchestra perform the classical, more "artistic" arrangements. Still's and Copland's respective arrangements do not take the folk tunes verbatim and set them for classical instrumentation. Rather, they quote them, allude to them, and write completely new musical pieces simply *inspired* by them. But why are these classical arrangements even necessary in a program dedicated to folk music education?

The program's makers were attempting to make folk music more applicable to the lives of the CBS radio audiences and to expand their listening audience. If judging by the announcer's statement that the program will continue to prove that folk music influenced art music, the arrangements are the endgame to the program, illustrating that we need folk music in order to make art music, a genre afforded a great deal of cultural capital and prestige (which, if true, could be interpreted as autonomous in that the ultimate goal was artistic and not monetary).[32] A second explanation more practical to the medium, is that listeners would be expecting at least incidental music by the radio station's house orchestra, as was the tradition at the time with stations like NBC and CBS. By using the CBS radio orchestra, Lomax and the network played into the

[31] *Folk Music of America*.

[32] Recall the value Cecil Sharp's placed upon the potential *usages* of the folk songs included in his ballad collections, specifically their applications to classical music.

expectations of the audience who were, by then, well versed in the radio program format. Even though the program was certainly meant to be educational, the presence of mass media and heteronomous commercial values are inescapable by the nature of the medium itself. Yet, because of the educational nature of the programs and the performers' seemingly unassailable sincerity, these contradictions did not prove controversial at the time. Many of the mass-mediated folk phenomena examined in the chapters that follow also veil their commercialism and their political projects by portraying themselves as educational documents (i.e. the map, library, and book imagery of the Walt Disney animated shorts and the Weavers' omnipresent mission to tell the world why Lead Belly was an important American historical folk figure).

Alan Lomax's CBS radio broadcasts of folk music educational programs quietly demonstrated the contradiction between the market-driven, heteronomous field of cultural production, and the autonomous, prestige-driven folk music field of cultural production. Broadcast on the radio, these programs were packaged as "live" performances or brief educational modules in American folk identity, to be heard one time only (unless, of course, the programs happened to be broadcast at a later date). In the case of these radio programs, mechanical reproduction distances the listener from the live performance: guided by scripts and perhaps a little rehearsal, the performers play and sing for some sort of recording device. Producers then edit the recording which is sent along the airwaves to a swath of individual radio sets. With the exception of a re-broadcast, a listener describing what they heard to another person, or a scholar

making the pilgrimage to the Library of Congress to listen to the reel-to-reel tape recordings, the mechanical reproduction generally stops with the listener at their radio set.

Commercial recordings present a different level of mediation and, therefore, a greater degradation of the object's aura according to Benjamin's argument. Mediated by the producer, the opportunity to select the most perfect "takes" for the actual record, the mass-reproduction of the performance's sound via records that listeners could, in turn, play over and over, and the resulting degradation of the technology over time and repeated use, commercial recordings present many more degrees of mediation, and hence, a potentially greater distance between original performance and listener.

Lead Belly's 1944 Capitol Records release of "Western Cowboy" demonstrates many of these levels of mediation as well as how his music encroached into the heteronomous field of cultural production in spite of John Lomax's aforementioned portrayal of Ledbetter as a traditionalist folk artifact. From the original recording field recording from John Lomax's first trip to Angola Prison through its Capitol Records release in 1944, "Western Cowboy" underwent many variations, evolving much in the same manner that many of Lead Belly's other tunes did during this era. While the early prison recordings of "Western Cowboy" from 1933 and 1934 feature Lead Belly singing fragmented lyrics accompanied by his twelve-string guitar, the 1935 version presents a more cohesive lyrical narrative. This version features spoken interludes that scholars

have attributed to John Lomax's backseat driving: he encouraged Lead Belly to speak atop his guitar vamping, adopt less of a southern accent, and better flesh out the story in order to make the recordings more appealing and approachable to northern urban audiences. John Lomax's audible intervention in these early recordings belies the claim that these records were mere documentations of spontaneous events in the field; rather, they could be viewed as early examples of the producer's potential influence on a recorded musical product. (For a more detailed analysis of John Lomax's influence on Lead Belly's early recordings, see Chapter 2's analysis of "Goodnight, Irene.")

By October of 1944, Lead Belly had moved west from New York City to Hollywood, California to seek out fame and fortune within the commercial recording industry. Always concerned with making a living and staying out of jail, Lead Belly knew he could achieve these ends as well as support his wife, Martha, by becoming a professional musician and not having to rely on domineering sponsors like John Lomax to cut him meager paychecks for exhausting hours or travel and work. Huddie signed a deal to produce twelve sides with Capitol Records during the summer of 1944 at the suggestion of his old friend, cowboy singer, Tex Ritter. "Western Plain" – as this version of "Western Cowboy" is titled – was recorded at the C.P. MacGregor studios on October 11, 1944. Although these recordings, mostly released as 78 rpm records, did not sell well, they do provide another link in Lead Belly's journey from folk paradigm to aspiring commercial artist.[33]

[33] Wolfe and Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Lead Belly*, 230-231.

Several differences are evident between the earlier field recordings and the Capitol side. First is the striking presence of Paul Mason Howard's zither accompaniment on top of Lead Belly's 12-string guitar. Howard, "a journeyman studio musician who played German zither…worked with a number of Capitol recording artists."[34] Howard strums his zither harmonically with Lead Belly's guitar, yet also adds in a series of bouncing, syncopated melodic embellishments. The presence and contributions of another studio musician already removes Lead Belly from his isolated, "natural" roots singing with only himself as accompaniment in Angola Prison that John Lomax valued so very much just a decade earlier.

The Capitol version also differs lyrically from the earlier field recordings (See Example 1.3, lyrics to the Capitol recording of "Western Plain"). Stanzas two and three from the 1935 version (those about his girl's house) have been combined, and the fourth stanza about riding deep down in his saddle, as well as the first spoken verse, have been omitted. According to the lyrics, the cowboy narrator of the 1944 version is slightly different. With the omission of the first spoken verse, the references to seeking and spreading fortune are gone. Here emerges a slightly more "mythical" cowboy, who appears to be roaming the frontier, encountering American legends like Jesse James and Buffalo Bill.

[34] Ibid., 231.

Example 1.3 Lyrics to the Capitol recording of "Western Plain." Lead Belly, "Western Plain," on *Lead Belly: Complete Recorded Works 1939-1947 in Chronological Order, Volume 4, May-October 1944*, compact disc, Document Records, DOCD-5310, 1994, Document Records.

"Western Plain"

Sung: When I was a cowboy, out on the Western Plain,
When I was a cowboy, out on the Western Plain,
I made a half a million, pullin' on the bridle reins.
Come a cow cow yicky come a cow cow yicky yicky yay.

I rode up to my girl's house, she was rockin' in a rockin' chair.
I rode up to my girl's house, she was rockin' in a rockin' chair.
"Oh, Western cowboy, please don'cha leave me here."
Come a cow cow yicky come a cow cow yicky yicky yay.

Oh the hardest battle, was ever on the Western Plain,
Oh the hardest battle, was ever on the Western Plain,
When me and a bunch of cowboys run into Jesse James.
Come a cow cow yicky come a cow cow yicky yicky yay.

When me and a buncha cowboys run into Jesse James,
When me and a buncha cowboys run into Jesse James,
All the bullets was a-fallin', just like a shower rain.
Come a cow cow yicky come a cow cow yicky yicky yay.

Oh the hardest battle, was ever on Bunker's Hill,
Oh the hardest battle, was ever on Bunker's Hill,
When me and a bunch of cowboys run into Buffalo Bill.
Come a cow cow yicky come a cow cow yicky yicky yay.
Come a cow cow yicky come a cow cow yicky yicky yay.

Spoken: The boys headed in for a man on the outskirts of town. All around that man's house them horses was walkin', and them forty-fives was a-talkin'. They done made the horses drunk, and they was already drunk, and the forty-fives was drunk. So they signed off their best regard to the man's house.

Sung: If your house catches a fire and there ain't no water 'round.
If your house catches a fire and there ain't no water 'round.
Through yo' jelly out the window, let the doggon' shack burn down.
Come a cow cow yicky come a cow cow yicky yicky yay.
Come a cow cow yicky come a cow cow yicky yicky yay.

On top of the lyrical and elocution styles encouraged by Lomax "the field recorder," for the first time in this recording the listener also hears the influence of a studio producer. Taking the recording session out of the prison, away from the Lomaxes' then state-of-the-art portable recording equipment and into the studio opens up the possibilities for new technologically-mediated effects possible only in the studio setting. Adding to the reverberant quality natural to Howard's jangly zither playing, reverb has been applied to Lead Belly's voice on words like "cowboy", "plain", and "battle."

As Eric Doyle writes, it was common practice of the time to apply reverb in commercial recordings of cowboy songs as well as in music either in or influenced by the country and western genre.[35] He argues that for listeners, reverberation constructs the illusion of wandering, unfettered, lonely cowboys' yodels resounding in the wide open spaces as they herd their cattle. Since aurally-constructed vast spaces are signatures and now tropes of the cowboy, it not only makes sense that reverb would have been applied to Lead Belly's cowboy, but also that Lead Belly would have heard reverb in the recordings of his two favorite commercial recording artists of the heteronomous field, singing cowboy Gene Autry and blue yodeler Jimmie Rodgers.

The implications of these different lyrics, production methods, and sense of artist autonomy go far beyond artistic growth or even "selling out." Since in their field recordings the Lomaxes were searching for this sincere, traditionalist folk, they

[35] Eric Doyle, *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording, 1900-1960* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005).

portrayed Lead Belly as the bearer of a tradition as old as the American people, and quite untainted by modern society. After all, this is precisely why they went searching for the folk in the prisons. These were places with a controlled population, literally boxed off from everyday life, many of whom came from rural, Southern towns, making them twice removed from what people like the Lomaxes perceived as modern, urban society. Yet, the 1944 Capitol recording features an urban Lead Belly, with a commercial performing and recording career, influenced by some of the most popular commercial artists of the era. Furthermore, the creative contributions of studio musicians and engineers change the music-making, and change the product from a record of events to a musical reproduction only possible through the mediation of technology.

Alongside the aforementioned *Folk Songs of America* radio broadcasts, the evolving audible production values in "Western Cowboy" over time reveal changing contexts for folk music in general, going from printed documentations in collections like John Lomax's *American Ballads and Folk Songs*,[36] to field recordings for the Library of Congress, to scripted radio shows and commercial records. They also bring to light the contradictions that get to the heart of this study. The line between the autonomous folk music field of cultural production and the heteronomous field of mass-mediated musical production is not a line, per se, but region existing between and overlapping with the two. Even Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie – two performers perceived as the epitome of traditionalist and autonomous folk music in the early- to mid-twentieth

[36] John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1934.

century – willingly participated in the heteronomous, commercial music and media industry. While it is valuable to consider why such folk music figures were so revered by collectors like John Lomax and political circles like the Leftists folksingers of the 1930s and 1940s, viewing these perspectives as the totality of these performers' experiences and identities presents an incomplete, romanticized account of their careers and performance personae, assigning little to no personal agency to performers themselves. It also takes the traditionalist label for granted, and neglects to recognize that this type of performer is a construct, a purist model of folk authenticity and music-making that has a tenuous relationship to these performers' real-life experiences and identities.

Contributions to Contemporary Scholarship

Because folk music and its study constantly negotiate between a sense of the past and how it relates to a sense of the present, between space and place, between the perception of the authentic and inauthentic, between text and act, I build upon more recent trends that support a dialectic approach to folk music scholarship. As Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison contend, while music works within a tradition in order to be perceived as music, it must also break that tradition in small (or large) ways to be perceived as "interesting" or "creative."[37] In their respective versions of folk music, mass-mediated artists like the Weavers, Harry Belafonte, Walt Disney and others looked back to an idealized past in order to construct a new present. Their music needed to

[37] Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 29.

operate within the traditions of American music and values (collectivity, equality, freedom of speech) while changing it (through topicality, the putting-on of Southern, everyman personae) in order to establish an American collectivity that their audiences could relate to and invest in.

I build upon scholarship from the past twenty years that reassesses the contentious and inescapable term "authenticity." Folklorists Regina Bendix and Benjamin Filene imply that authenticity does not lie inherently in an object, but in how people relate to it. Country music scholar Richard Peterson claims that in country music, "what is taken to be authentic does not remain static but is continually renewed over the years. The changing meaning of authenticity is not random, but is renegotiated in a continual political struggle in which the goal of each contending interest is to naturalize a particular construction of authenticity."[38] In other words, not only do definitions of authenticity evolve over time, *people's relationships to authenticity change over time and across context*.

Filene also views history through a less nostalgic and more realistic lens, thus deconstructing the longstanding belief that authenticity occurs naturally. Bendix claims that authenticity lies not in the past or in a primitive society, but rather in the comparison of a Self existing in modernity and an imagined Other *created* in an idea of the past.[39] Through this realization, those searching for authenticity do so in the

[38] Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, 220.

[39] In claiming that "the quest for authenticity is a peculiar longing, at once modern and antimodern," Bendix implies that only because one exists in modernity can they realize that there was once something else that came before. Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 8.

nebulous remnants of an idea of the past, in an "antimodernity." The result could be deemed the "commodified authentic," a term Elizabeth Outka uses to describe a world where "new objects and places were packaged and sold as mini-representations of supposedly noncommercial [and past] values."[40] Therefore, authenticity is *necessarily* a construction, one that changes with context. It is inherently reference to a specific (and, perhaps, imagined) "now" and "then."

Bendix, Filene, and Peterson write against folk music collectors like Francis Child who believed that a folk song was authentic if an only if its text could be traced through physical documentation back to an original. They also depart from an idea of authenticity based upon artist history, as embraced by Sharp, the Lomaxes, and the 1930s and 1940s revivalists (Pete Seeger, Alan Lomax, the Almanac Singers, People's Artists, etc.). Like Bendix, Filene, and Peterson, I depart from canonical or purely traditionalist understandings of authenticity. I build upon their work by simultaneously treating authenticity as both an unattainable ideal *and* a powerful agent in the folk music field's structural arrangements. Like any edifice, although constructed, authenticity still stands as a tangible idea that people continue to interact with, lending authority to revivalist *and* mass-mediated performances of folk music.

In order to account for the ever-changing definitions of folk music, identity, and authenticity without dismissing any as "wrong" or "inauthentic," I treat folk music as a series of context-specific processes and structures. Pierre Bourdieu's model of the field

[40] Elizabeth Outka, *Consuming Traditions: Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), 4.

of cultural production allows for fluidity between diverse understandings and usages of folk music, and helps contextualize a given musical phenomenon within its dynamic systems of relationships, rather than assigning rigid labels like "authentic," "folk," "popular," etc. Folk music, in this model, is more of how the music functions in relation to the field, and how the musickers – to borrow a term from ethnomusicologist Christopher Small[41] – perceive and construct the music within the field.

My goal is not to tear down preexisting models. After all, these models are vital to understanding why terms like "sincere" and "authentic" have been assigned to certain types of folk music while others have been dismissed as "produced," "rehearsed," "insincere," "inauthentic" or omitted from the discourse altogether. Rather, my goal is to better understand lesser-studied commercial folk music on its own terms, as part of dynamic fields of cultural production with its own relationships to authenticity, and to do so with a less romanticized lens.

[41] Christopher Small writes that "to music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composition), or by dancing." Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 9.

Chapter 2. A Craze in 3/4 Time: The Weavers, "Goodnight, Irene," and the Commercial Folk Music Phenomenon

In late 1950, Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, Fred Hellerman, and Ronnie Gilbert – the folk singing quartet known as the Weavers – took the commercial recording industry by storm and became the popular face of American folksong. Seemingly overnight, the Weavers' Jewish-inspired, folk dance single, "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena" and its B-side, a 3/4 time Huddie Ledbetter tune named "Goodnight, Irene" infiltrated the pop music charts and remained there for the better part of a year alongside such now-classic recordings as Nat "King" Cole's "Mona Lisa" and Kay Starr's "Bonaparte's Retreat." While "Tzena" achieved short-lived commercial popularity, "Irene" seemed to saturate the nation's musical landscape almost instantly: when "Irene" hit number one on the *Billboard* pop charts, there were at least fifteen other recordings of the song available to record-buyers that same week.[1]

The Weavers' 1950 Decca recording of "Goodnight, Irene" with bandleader Gordon Jenkins represents a strange moment, a *seam* between the politically-oriented folk music of the 1930s and 1940s and more overtly commercial phenomena of the 1950s. On one side of the seam was the folk, folk performer, and folk music practices best represented by the Almanac Singers (the Leftist, union-rallying musical group whose roster prominently featured Pete Seeger and Lee Hays of the Weavers). Heralding communal living and music-making, and scorning the commercial gain

[1] "Honor Roll of Hits," *Billboard Magazine*, August 26, 1950, 22.

associated with the burgeoning recording industry, the Almanacs eventually disbanded due to their political affiliations and their inability to sustain themselves economically or organizationally. On the other side of the seam were the folk music phenomena like Harry Belafonte and Walt Disney's animated folk heroes which achieved mainstream acceptance as "folk" through the support of mass-media apparatuses like print, television, film, radio, merchandizing, and mass record production.

In this chapter, I examine the seam itself, the moment when the Weavers toed the line between their politically-oriented and ideologically-driven music-making of the previous decades and the commercial folk music of the 1950s and beyond. The most visible example of this seam is the Weavers' 1950 rendition of "Goodnight, Irene." In addition to becoming a commercial success that further inspired a spate of popular and country & western recordings of the tune, the Weavers' "Goodnight, Irene" helped to define what mainstream 1950s America came to understand as the American folk music sound and identity. "Goodnight, Irene" was a watershed moment that both opened up the commercial music industry to folk music, thus setting the stage for numerous mass-mediated folk phenomena that followed, including Harry Belafonte and Disney's animated folk heroes.

Examining the "Goodnight, Irene" phenomenon during this transitional moment exposes several themes that re-emerge in the chapters that follow. First, the Weavers' evolution from political folk music activists to popular folk songsters and the corresponding changes in folk music sounds, practices, and purposes, demonstrates the

malleability of the label "folk." Second, the "Goodnight, Irene" phenomenon reveals the inherent contradictions between the autonomous values of earlier folk music movements and the heteronomous values of the commercial recording industry. As folk music ventures further and further into the heteronomous area of the field of cultural production in the 1950s, folk and pop artists constantly maneuver around these contradictions of purpose, authorship, identity, and credibility.

In this chapter, I examine how the Weavers' more mainstream, commercial folk personae were departures from the contemporary, urban, political everymen iterations championed by the Leftist Almanac Singers of the previous decade. Likewise, the Almanacs were themselves a departure from pre-existing definitions of folk music espoused by the earlier generation of ballad-collecting scholars like Child, Sharp, and John Lomax as described in Chapter 1. After the Weavers' rash of Hit Parade records and their fall from public grace, the public's understanding of "folk music" continued to evolve with artists like Harry Belafonte, the Kingston Trio, Bob Dylan, and beyond.

I then delve into the Weavers' newfound definition of American folk music as demonstrated throughout their "Goodnight, Irene" multi-media blitz in the early 1950s. Through the "Irene" phenomenon, the Weavers projected a new construction of American folk identity which appealed to American consumers and was based upon a believed proximity to a specific interpretation of folk authenticity – one that was deeply rooted in a reverence for contemporary, traditionalist performers like Lead Belly – in tandem with mainstream, popular music accessibility.

In the performances, recordings, and folk music personae surrounding "Goodnight, Irene," the Weavers capitalized on their proximity to Lead Belly – the man who was recognized as the "originator" of "Irene" – in three ways. First, they celebrated and constantly reinforced their personal relationship to the songster and his reputation as a traditionalist American folk figure. Second, they both constructed and positioned themselves within the natural lineage of "Goodnight, Irene," and as inheritors of the song's tradition. Last, the Weavers selectively maintained many of Ledbetter's structural-lyrical elements of the song in their Decca release.

Drawing connections to Lead Belly in these ways helped mainstream audiences appreciate the Weavers as "folk musicians," thus lending the aura of autonomous value in the act of purchasing a "Goodnight, Irene" record or dropping coins into a jukebox to play the tune. At the same time, the Weavers and their collaborators also drew connections to popular music and mass media of the era, thus making folk music more accessible to the broader, mainstream audience. In their Decca recording with bandleader, Gordon Jenkins, they juxtaposed Ledbetter's conception of "Irene" with musical-structural elements that were signatures of late-1940s and early 1950s popular music. The Weavers also participated in mass-media like print advertisements, *Billboard* magazine, radio play, critical reviews in mainstream publications, etc., and were *so* successful in these venues that they inspired an epidemic of commercial releases of the song. More broadly, they also spread the "good word" in that they made folk music

accessible to a wider audience, mobilizing mainstream America to value, seek out, and participate in their movement.

In examining the "Goodnight, Irene" phenomenon and the Weavers' negotiations between their autonomous folk roots and their newfound heteronomous success, one must maintain an awareness that the negotiations were, at times, fraught with the anxiety that Pete Seeger expressed over "going commercial." Seeger notes that it is not outside of the realm of possibility that a folk musician could find "a wide enough popular following to become interesting and useful to the communications industry….*But the artist who achieves this kind of success walks a precipice between deadly perils*."[2] One can languish in poverty maintaining some idea of artistic or social "integrity," just as one can achieve commercial success by bending too far in one's efforts to speak the musical language in which mainstream consumers are fluent.

When considered alongside the group's roots in Leftist political song in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Weavers' commercial success reveals a contradiction between autonomous ideology and heteronomous prestige – a contradiction that will arise again and again with any folk music that participates in the commercial music industry. However, their autonomy was defined even more so by their historically anti-capitalist stance and political idealism; more the "anti-heteronomous" than "art for art's sake" as Bourdieu would define the autonomous field. As I discuss below, the Weavers emerged from a field which denounced the type of American commercialism and greed

[2] Pete Seeger, "A Precipice Between Deadly Perils," in *Pete Seeger: in his Own Words*, ed. Rob Rosenthal and Sam Rosenthal (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 263, emphasis mine.

that led to excessive wealth of a powerful few at the expense of the masses in the 1930s and 1940s, making their extreme commercial success in the early 1950s seem that much more of a contradiction, and ultimately contributing to the group's initial break-up shortly thereafter.

The Weavers' Roots in the 1930s and 1940s Political Left

An appropriate place to begin the story is with the Almanac Singers, a Popular Front music group that shared both key personnel and persistent values with the Weavers. While garnering them a strong, niche following in the early 1940s, the Almanacs' Leftist politics would later prove problematic when the Weavers entered mainstream Americans' jukeboxes and personal record collections in the early 1950s. With the mid-1950s McCarthy-era anxiety surrounding all things "Left," the Weavers' history with the Almanacs would land Pete Seeger on the Black List and in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee, effectively ending the Weavers' career (at least, for the time being). The Almanacs' strong anti-capitalist message contradicted the utter commercialism surrounding successful recordings like the Weavers' "Goodnight, Irene." Furthermore, the Almanacs' sense of communal authorship challenged the heteronomous reward system of the commercial recording industry which was very much concerned with assigning or attributing authorship or ownership of a recording or composition.

A generally Left-leaning assortment of communists and "fellow travelers,"[3] the Almanac Singers aimed to live every aspect of their lives collectively, cohabitating, cooking communal meals, and sharing all proceeds from their performances and record sales. The concept of "the group" and a sense of freedom were paramount, as demonstrated by the fluidity of membership and the fleet of auxiliary musicians who were affiliated with the Almanacs at one time or another.[4]

The Almanacs lived and performed their politics, singing songs like "C is for Conscription," "Union Maid," "Billy Boy," and "Round, Round Hitler's Grave" for union meetings and political rallies, always with the goal of uniting and mobilizing the masses through song. The Almanacs further facilitated their audiences' participation in their music, using instruments like the guitar, banjo, and accordion – instruments which they believed everyone had the capacity to play – and often placed original topical lyrics on top of existing folk, country, religious, or pop tunes.

---

[3] Richard Reuss, Robert Cantwell, and many others describe the communist revolutionary philosophies that led to Leftist feelings in America, as well how these beliefs translated into the People's Music movement that peaked in the 1930s. Cantwell describes how in Russia, the Leftist revolutionaries – mainly "industrial and agricultural workers" led by a class of intellectuals – defined themselves and the working class proletariat pitted against the domineering, Right-wing conservative government. Reuss bolsters this depiction of the movement, writing that "Leninist ideology demanded a militant class consciousness, rigid personal discipline of one's thoughts and actions, and the *rejection of sentimental nostalgia* about the past in favor of socio-political alternatives designed to *bolster the modern proletariat*." Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 86. Richard A. Reuss, *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 30-31, emphasis mine.

[4] There is ample literature on the Almanac Singers' communal lifestyle. For more information on this topic, see: Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and Ronald D. Cohen and Dave Samuelson, booklet accompanying *Songs for Political Action* [CD Box Set] (Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 1996).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Popular Front's interpretation of the folk label included the living, breathing, sometimes urban everyman, and celebrated powerful contemporary performers. This definition of the folk differed from the idyllic folk ideal of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe and the early ballad collectors. Related to this significant relocation of the folk, definitions of authorship were repositioned as Left-leaning musicians like the Almanac Singers harnessed music's power for different aims than did the ballad collectors. Individualist approaches to authorship were eschewed by Leftists as they brought a communalist approach to every aspect of their lives.

Authorship was often attributed to the group who performed the song, or the person who penned the new lyrics. Borrowing tunes was considered common practice, and performers of the new versions often did not credit the composers or performers of the tunes' "original" versions. With his famous printed collections, Francis Child felt that a ballad lost its connection to an authentic folk source as it was altered too much over time from some conception of the "original" version.[5] Conversely, with performers like the Almanac Singers, the tune or harmonic changes seemed to *accumulate* power with their evolution over time. A previously popular country hit was already familiar to audiences at large union rallies, hootenannies, or sing-alongs, thus speeding up the song-learning process. With familiar tunes and sometimes, catchy, zipper lyrics, everyone could easily make the music together in the moment.[6]

---

[5] Francis Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York: Folklore Press, 1956).

[6] For example, Woody Guthrie's most famous song, "This Land is Your Land," features Guthrie's original lyrics on top of the song structure of "Little Darlin', Pal of Mine" as performed by the Carter Family.

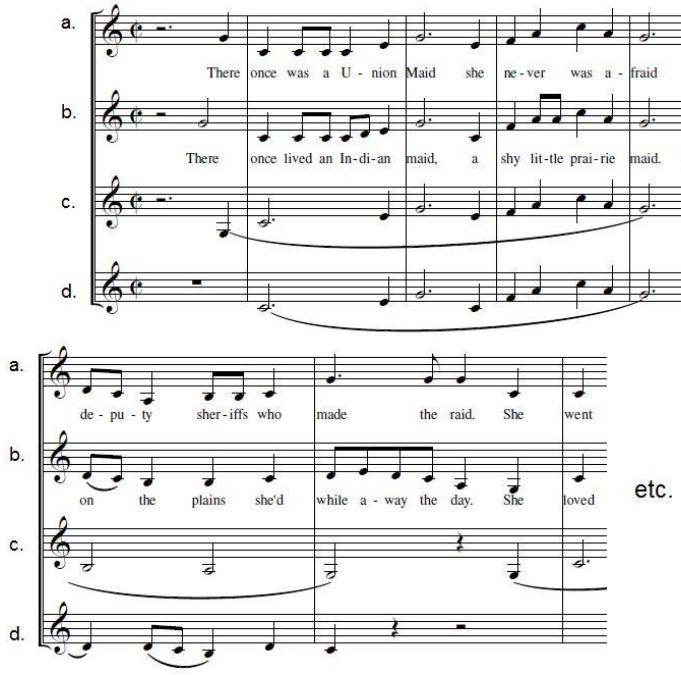
One example of the Almanacs' fluid understanding of song authorship and repurposing of previously existing tunes is their own "Union Maid" from the album *Talking Union and Other Union Songs*.[7] "Union Maid" feeds off the pastoral and "Otherly" connotations of many songs that had come before it. On one hand, it is famously built with the musical structure of "Red Wing: An Indian Intermezzo," the 1907 popular tune by songwriter, Kerry Mills. Music scholars William Schafer and Johannes Riedel note that Mills – who penned the music to such enduring popular hits as "Meet Me in St. Louis" – belonged to a group of "expert commercial songwriters, all gifted with the ability to observe or anticipate the public's ever-changing tastes and interests and to tailor their writing to every fad or trend that appeared."[8] In the case of "Red Wing," Mills was responding to an early-twentieth century craze for popular ditties claiming to represent the exotic "Indian." Mills manufactured his "Indian" sound by adapting the melody to Robert Schumann's 1868 piano piece, "The Happy Farmer, Returning From Work" from his Op. 68 *Album for the Young*, a classical tune which – although it did not claim to represent "Indians" – was associated with the pastoral and a sense delight after a hard-day's labor. Perhaps a more contemporary, even more popular usage of the tune, was in the underscoring to the famous cyclone scene from the 1939 MGM classic, *The Wizard of Oz,* which hit American theaters less than two years prior to the 1941

[7] The Almanac Singers with Pete Seeger and Chorus, *Talking Union & Other Union Songs*, Keynote 106, 78 rpm, copyright 1941, Keynote Records.
[8] William J. Schafer and Johannes Riedel, "Indian Intermezzi ('Play It One More Time, Chief!')," *The Journal of American Folklore* 86 (October – December 1973): 383.

release of the *Talking Union* album (see Example 2.1, melodic comparison of "Union Maid" and its melodic predecessors).

The Almanacs could have easily been influenced by any of these iterations of the "Union Maid" musical idea, but did not give credit or royalties to any of the above

Example 2.1 Melodic comparison of "Union Maid" and its melodic predecessors, transcriptions by the author. The staves are labeled as follows: melodies to **(a)** "Union Maid" as recorded by the Almanac Singers; **(b)** "Red Wing: an Indian Intermezzo," with music by Kerry Mills and words by Thurland Chattaway as recorded by George W. Ballard; **(c)** "The Happy Farmer, Returning From Work," by Richard Schumann as performed by Philippe Entremont, and; **(d)** underscoring from "The Cyclone Scene" from the film, *The Wizard of Oz*.[9]



[9] The recordings from which the transcriptions are derived include: (a) The Almanac Singers, "Union Maid," *Songs for Political Action: Folk Music, Topical Songs and the American Left*, Compact Disc Box Set, The Almanac Singers, copyright 1996, Bear Family Records. Originally released on The Almanac Singers, *Talking Union & Other Union Songs*, Keynote, 1941; (b) George W. Ballard, "Red Wing: an Indian Intermezzo," Indestructible Cylinder, U.S. Everlasting Cylinder 1150, 1909, last accessed on February 4, 2014 at http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/search.php?queryType=@attr%20=1016%20&query=red+wing&num=1&start=7&sortBy=&sortOrder=ia; (c) Philippe Entremont, "The Happy Farmer from Album für die Jugend, Op. 68," *National Public Radio Milestones of the Millennium: The Triumph of the Piano*, Compact Disc, Sony Classical, 2000 and; (d) MGM Studio Orchestra, "Cyclone (Extended Version)," *The Wizard of Oz: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, WaterTower Music, 2014.

sources or authors. Even though they did not explicitly reference them, the Almanacs could have benefited from the tune's previous usages as it had accumulated meaning over time, specifically associations with America, the pastoral, the farmer, and the worker. Authorship, therefore, was less about being the originator of the tune, harmonies, etc., and more about being the interpreter of the material: the wordsmith who composed the contemporary, topical lyrics, or the performers who brought the tune to the masses.

As focus shifted from the reification of the folk song object as demonstrated in Francis Child's, Cecil Sharp's, and John Lomax's printed folk song collections, the folk object became much more of an event with the Almanac Singers and their brethren. In the collections, People's Songs pamphlets, and instructional manuals that he helped publish, Pete Seeger was much less concerned with preserving the songs than disseminating them so that more people could make music together, thus empowering the masses through collective performance. Perpetuation of tradition through variation and contemporary practice was the goal, not canonization for posterity's sake.

In addition to driving much of *how* the Almanac Singers' made their folk music, their politics also guided *what,* exactly, the Almanac Singers presented *in* their folk music, most notably in their lyrics. Following the Hitler-Stalin nonaggression pact of August 1939, the Almanacs demonstrated their solidarity with Russia during those middle years of the Second World War. In a song like "Union Maid," they railed against capitalist, private interests, heralding:

> There once was a Union Maid she never was afraid
> Of goons and ginks and company thinks and the deputy sheriffs who made the raid.
> She went to the union hall when a meeting it was called
> And when the legion boys come 'round she always stood her ground.
>
> "Oh, you can't scare me I'm stickin' to the union, I'm stickin' to the union, I'm stickin' to the union.
> Oh, you can't scare me I'm stickin' to the union, I'm stickin' to the union, 'til the day I die."[10]

In "Billy Boy," a sweetly-sung ditty with somewhat chilling lyrics, the Almanacs sang from both the perspective of a war advocate, and the young, potential recruit, Billy, who rejects the possible trappings of being a soldier like a "silver medal," how much girls will like the "uniform," and shame in not serving ("Are you afraid to fight, Billy Boy?"). Billy rebuffs such shallow attempts to lure him into fighting by denouncing the violence and exposing what he views as the less-than-altruistic, capitalist motives of the war:

> Don't you want to see the world, Billy Boy, Billy Boy?
> Don't you want to see the world, charming Billy?
> No, it wouldn't be much thrill to die for DuPont in Brazil.
> He's a young boy and cannot leave his mother.
>
> Girls would like your uniform, Billy Boy, Billy Boy.
> Girls would like your uniform, charming Billy.
> They wouldn't get much chance to love me with six feet of earth above me.
> He's a young boy and cannot leave his mother.[11]

The staunch anti-capitalism, anti-war, and pro-peace message heard in early albums like *Songs for John Doe* (1941) and *Talking Union & Other Union Songs* (1941)

---

[10] The Almanac Singers, "Union Maid," *Songs for Political Action: Folk Music, Topical Songs and the American Left*, Compact Disc Box Set, copyright 1996, Bear Family Records. Originally released on The Almanac Singers, *Talking Union & Other Union Songs*, Keynote, 1941.

[11] The Almanac Singers, "Billy Boy," *Songs for Political Action*. Originally released on the Almanac Singers, *Songs for John Doe*, Almanac Records 102, 78 rpm, copyright 1941, Almanac Records.

shifted dramatically when Germany invaded Russia in mid-1941[12] at which time the Almanacs joined the rest of the nation in supporting the war effort against Germany and the Axis powers. As Ronald Cohen notes, "soon they were performing pro-war songs for the opening show of the widely broadcast *This Is War* series, for CBS's *We The People*, *The Treasury Hour*, and assorted Office of War Information overseas broadcasts."[13] In 1942, they released the album, *Dear Mr. President*, featuring the reeling "Round and Round Hitler's Grave" which calls for violence against the axis oppressors:

> Now I wish I had a bushel, wish I had a peck.
> I wish I had old Hitler with a rope around his neck. Hey!
> Round, round Hitler's grave, round, round we go.
> Gonna lay that poor boy down, he won't get up no more.[14]

It also features "Dr. Mr. President," a letter to President Roosevelt presented as a talking blues (a la Guthrie's "Talking Dustbowl Blues"), in which Pete Seeger riffs in support of the war effort while at the same time denouncing the social and economic problems that continued to plague the nation:

> Now, as I think of our great land with its cities and towns and farming land
> There is so many good people workin' every day, I know it ain't perfect, but it will be someday,
> Just give us a little time.
>
> This is the reason that I want to fight, not 'cause everything's perfect, or everything's right.
> No, it's just the opposite, I'm fightin' because I want a better America and better laws,

---

[12] U.S. Dept. of State, "The United States, the Soviet Union, and the End of World War II." Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, (Washington, D.C., 2005), http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/46345.htm (accessed February 3, 2014).

[13] Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 32.

[14] The Almanac Singers, "Round and Round Hitler's Grave," *Songs for Political Action*. Originally released on The Almanac Singers, *Dear Mr. President…"*, Keynote 111, 78 rpm, copyright 1942, Keynote Records.

> And better homes and jobs and schools, no more Jim Crow and no more rules, like
> You can't ride on this train 'cause you're a Negro.
> You can't live here 'cause you're a Jew.
> You can't work here 'cause you're a union man.[15]

Although the Almanacs now stood politically in line with the United States because they were now fighting against fascist forces that threatened to take over the Western world, they still could not let go of the social and economic issues that led them to their Leftist beliefs in the first place. Besides, their newfound support of the American war effort could not erase the anti-war, anti-capitalist (and hence, anti-American) principles expressed in their earlier work. As such, the Almanacs were labeled "un-American" at a time when such forces were seen as seditious. Consequently, they quickly fell out of commercial and political favor.

Although the Almanac Singers seemed to be victims of their own black-or-white idealism – with their strongly-expressed beliefs ultimately leading to the group's downfall – their short tenure was marked by many contradictions. First, the sudden conversion from the anti- to pro-war effort exposes inconsistencies in their message and belief system. The differences between their 1941 and 1942 political musical output demonstrate that their sympathies could be moved, that some things were, in fact, worth going to war and dying over. Second, their stage persona of the everyman worker differed greatly from their actual upbringings (i.e. Seeger's upper middle class origins and Harvard education, and Guthrie's comparatively privileged origins as

[15] The Almanac Singers, "Dear Mr. President," ibid.

compared to the impoverished Okie paradigm). Like so many folk performers who came before, the Almanac Singers' folk identity was a *construction*, a performance of how they thought American folk singers should look, act, and sound. These contradictions of politics versus practice, and performed persona versus person emerged once again when members of the defunct Almanacs re-formed as the Weavers around 1950.

Genesis of the Weavers Through "Tzena" & "Irene"

The Almanacs ultimately folded in 1943 due to hostilities towards their earlier anti-war message and a growing national fear of all things Left. Yet, politics were not the only contributing factor to the group's downfall. Frustration amongst group members regarding the ensemble's laissez-faire attitude towards bookings, attendance, and rehearsals, as well as the group's general lack of professionalism surfaced as early as 1941 when Lee Hays left the group. Pete Seeger guesses that Hays "was dissatisfied with our unorganized way of working, or my unorganized way of working – my slipshod way of letting just anybody who wanted to join sing with the Almanacs. And he was increasingly dissatisfied."[16]

Yearning for a more organized singing group, Seeger and Hays formed the Weavers in late 1948. Seeger brought in guitar-playing, baritone, Fred Hellerman, who, in turn brought in his old fellow camp counselor, the non-belting alto with the powerful

[16] Pete Seeger to Millard Lampell, "'History of the Almanacs,' 1987," in *Pete Seeger: in his Own Words*, 21.

voice, Ronnie Gilbert.[17] While they had a small, insider following, the Weavers floundered financially in those early months of performing together. According to Seeger, the Weavers originally "had never intended to be a commercial group. We were dead broke and about to go our separate ways. As a last desperate gasp we decided to do the unthinkable: get a job in a nightclub."[18] Already, the idealistic and autonomous values so fiercely proclaimed by the Almanac Singers were shifting over to the commercial sphere; not necessarily out of an intentional adoption of heteronomous values, but more out of necessity and self-preservation.

That club was New York City's famous Village Vanguard, a tiny venue where folk lions like Josh White and Lead Belly had performed in the previous decades. For four months, the Weavers perfected their act.[19] After obtaining a management team consisting of popular song-plugger Harold Leventhal[20] and Pete Kameron, they were "discovered" by Decca Records' bandleader, Gordon Jenkins, who advocated for the Weavers' signing to the label. By early May, they had recorded what would become their first hit record. On the A-side was the Hebrew-inspired "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena." On the B-side was "Goodnight, Irene."[21]

---

[17] Pete Seeger, "'Finally, a "Success,"' 1972," in *Pete Seeger: In His Own Words,* 259. Originally published in *The Incompleat Folksinger* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).
[18] Ibid.
[19] Seeger biographer, David Dunaway, writes that "every night was a rehearsal. By reworking and rearranging, they wove the songs into a dense harmonic tapestry, trading parts midsong." David Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing: Pete Seeger* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981), 181, 141.
[20] Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 178.
[21] Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 68-69.

Pete Seeger wrote that even as recently as the late 1940s – in fact, right before the Weavers had signed with Decca and "Irene" made them household names – he had "never expected, nor particularly wanted, to try and get jobs or publicity in the mass media."[22] The Weavers' political and performance track record from the 1930s and 1940s coupled with their once-vehement declarations of anti-commercialism support this statement. By 1950, however, Pete and the rest of the Weavers found themselves very much entrenched in the American mass media machine, with their faces splashed across the pages of popular magazines, and their records in stores, on the Hit Parades, and played on radios and jukeboxes across the nation.

Seeger recognized the about-face from proudly labeling himself "anti-commercial" to a self-awareness of the necessity of participating in the commercial music machine. He shares an interaction with a fan after a concert, sometime between the late-1940s and mid-1967 when Pete published the anecdote in *Sing Out!*. The fan commented to Pete: "'I'm so glad you haven't gone commercial.'" His reaction was self-aware, to say the least: "I had to disillusion her. I've been commercial for a long time. In fact she probably would never have heard me sing if I hadn't been. Still, I know how she felt. But you have to work out a balance."[23]

Seeger and the Weavers understood what it meant to bring their folk music into the commercial sphere. Not only was it necessary to "go commercial" to some degree if one hoped to receive payment for one's services, but Seeger recognized that a degree

[22] Pete Seeger, "'Someone Who Can Bring in An Audience, 1967," in *Pete Seeger: in his Own Words*, 258.
[23] Ibid.

of notoriety was necessary to bring in an audience and to spread their message. Professionalism was necessary for the music group to endure, and publicity was necessary to build their following.

With the Weavers' political folk roots, perceived folk authenticity was linked with sincerity, a sense of social and economic justice, and the ability to mobilize the masses. Professionalism was pitted against amateurism, with the former smacking of pretense, and the latter correlating with honesty and the ability of *all* mankind to participate. In spite of vaulting into the professional music field beginning with the success of "Goodnight, Irene" in 1950, the Weavers maintained connections to their autonomous roots by drawing connections between themselves and their old friend, Lead Belly.

Steps Away from Authenticity: The Weavers and Lead Belly

To this day, when one thinks of a specific recording of "Goodnight, Irene," they are most likely referring either to the version released by the Weavers in 1950 for Decca,[24] or the live recordings of their now-famous Carnegie Hall concert recorded on New Year's Eve in 1955, later released in 1957 by Vanguard under the title *The Weavers at Carnegie Hall*.[25] However, when one considers the *idea* of "Goodnight, Irene" – the song's perceived origins, its place in the folk song canon, and what it means to interact with the song as a musician or listener – they are most likely thinking of the versions

[24] Gordon Jenkins and His Orchestra and The Weavers, "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena" / "Goodnight, Irene," Decca 27077, 78 rpm, copyright 1950, Decca Records.
[25] The Weavers, *The Weavers at Carnegie Hall*, VRS-9010, LP, copyright 1957, Vanguard.

recorded by Lead Belly, even if they had never actually heard them. As activistic students of the American folk, the Weavers were no different. Since they began singing "Irene," they continually drew connections between their take on the song and Lead Belly, both idealizing Ledbetter as a folk original and celebrating their proximity to his constructed folk authenticity.

While Lead Belly was recognized as an important historical figure, he was also touted as an incredibly significant, living, breathing force in the 1930s and early 1940s American folk music movement. After all, the Lomaxes did not leave Ledbetter in the rural South; they "gathered him" along with their recordings from American prisons. When he severed professional ties with the elder Lomax, Lead Belly settled in New York City with his wife, Martha, and participated in the People's folk music scene there. Although he did not champion the communist cause to the same extent as did contemporaries Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly did sing with and for Leftist circles and labor groups, and furthered the movement's political goals like uplift of the working classes, racial equality, power through the masses, etc.[26] Lead Belly was the epitome of folk authenticity to the folk circles that gave birth to the Weavers. What made him so much more powerful for these circles was that these urban folksingers could speak to him, learn from him, and claim their connections to his authenticity: it was authenticity by association.

[26] Charles Wolfe & Kip Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Lead Belly* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 205-207.

Pete Seeger summarizes his admiration and reverence for Ledbetter in a 1957 article in *Sing* magazine, where he describes what, exactly, made Lead Belly so powerfully "folk" in his eyes:

> Perhaps this modern age is not liable to produce again such a combination of genuine folk artist and virtuoso. Because nowadays when the artist becomes a virtuoso, there is normally a much greater tendency to cease being folk. But when Leadbelly rearranged a folk melody he had come across – he often did, for he had a wonderful ear for melody and rhythm – he did it in line with his own great folk traditions. Looking back, I think that the most important thing I learned from him was the straightforward approach, the direct honesty.[27]

To Seeger, Lead Belly's legacy was not only his song catalogue, but his way of interpreting, of infusing his songs with an "honest," *sincere* approach "in line with his own great folk traditions."[28]

These traditions emerged from roots in Lead Belly's well-worn origin story. Lead Belly was an African American from the rural South who sang blues such as his "How Long Blues." He was a convicted, violent felon who sang murder ballads like "Ella Speed" and prisoners' ditties like "Sylvie." And as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, Lead Belly spent time in Southern plantations as a child, and later sang about field work in "Cotton Fields." To those who valued the seemingly traditionalist performer as a vessel of authentic American identity, this type of one-to-one correlation between folk

[27] Pete Seeger, "'I Knew Leadbelly,' 1955" in *Pete Seeger: In His Own Words, 5*7. Originally published in *Sing* Magazine, no. 4.3, August/September, 1957.

[28] The theme of sincerity as an important component in many critics' and audiences' perception of someone as "folk" will resurface with Harry Belafonte in Chapter 3 and Disney's folk figures in Chapter 4.

practice, person, persona, and character[29] turns up time and time again when discussing Lead Belly. Unlike Harry Belafonte who was a self-described "actor in song," Lead Belly and his proponents constructed a persona which led audiences to believe that – however misguided – the songster had no need or want to put on theatricalities. Lead Belly's performance persona, his real-life person, and the characters of his songs were *perceived to be* one and the same.

In addition to his supposed sincerity and lack of artifice, Lead Belly embodied folk ideals so valued by American, urban folksingers of the 1930s and 1940s. He was a product of the pastoral, growing up in the South, picking cotton with his mother when he was a child. He also personified the antimodern in that he played acoustically and was peddled by the Lomaxes as a living and a modern relic of a by-gone era: collected – even captured – in live performance and field recordings, rather than produced or recorded like the more ephemeral commercial pop singers of the time. Perhaps most of all, Lead Belly was viewed as *isolated* from contemporary urban culture, and was, therefore, more grounded in his authentic, American roots. He lived in the South, away from those Northern, industrialized cities, and as legend goes, he was "discovered" by folk song hunters who had to actually mine the American frontier in order to find him. The Lomaxes portrayed Lead Belly as the bearer of a tradition as old as the American people, and quite untainted by modern society. After all, this is precisely why they went searching for the folk in the prisons: these were places with a controlled population,

[29] Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 4-6.

literally boxed off from everyday society, with many prisoners who hailed from rural, Southern towns, making them twice removed from the weightlessness of modern, urban culture.[30]

This association with Lead Belly and what was then professed to be true, American folk music-making afforded the Weavers a degree of folk credibility in that they were able to be physically close to both the person they perceived as the creator of the song, *and* the song itself. Already-established and institutionalized folk music canons discussed in Chapter 1 praised "the song" or "the text" as the folk object, and the singers (in the case of Sharp) as mere vessels for their transmission.[31] These collections cited individuals only as "milestones," markers of time and place along the way. Citing something as mundane as an individual author or originator of a tune would diminish the auras of timelessness and naturalness that scholars attributed to these texts. The Weavers, however, valued the author and the musical practice as the sources of folk authenticity.[32] By labeling Lead Belly as *the* author of "Goodnight, Irene," they could claim they had first-hand knowledge of a folk mainspring.

As Walter Benjamin writes in his famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," close proximity to the original object in its original context is

---

[30] Jackson Lears describes a sense of weightlessness that led to the antimodernist urge to find one's roots in an idea of the past. T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture: 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[31] See Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads,* 1956; also see Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Songs From the Southern Appalachians* (London; Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1932).

[32] It should be noted that this type of authorship based upon the celebration of one author in some ways contradicts the Almanac Singers' sense of communal authorship.

the most authentic experience of an artistic object or practice. By reproducing this object mechanically – as occurs with the commercial recording industry – not only would the listener become further and further removed from the authentic object, but the object would lose its potency, becoming inherently less authentic. Benjamin describes

> the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'close' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows strong to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. *Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former*. To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.[33]

In an era of a burgeoning mass media, the commercial recording industry, and a changing sense of what it meant to be American and "folk," Lead Belly was one of very few artists whose artistic output afforded both the strong aura of authenticity that accompanies an original, traditionalist folk performer with rural Southern roots, *and* accessibility within contemporary, Northern, urban society. To these urban folk performers with political purpose, Lead Belly was the vessel, the bearer of both object (his enormous catalogue of songs and styles) and context (his rural upbringing as a black man in the American South, non-conservatory, non-professional musical training, and

[33] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 223, emphasis mine.

the “street credibility” that came along with his crimes and time in Angola Penitentiary). Lead Belly was an icon of the American folk, seen by many as a living object of authenticity (however problematic this construction was), and in being close to the man and his legend, these folk artists benefited from the association, wearing it like a badge of authenticity.

Even as they branched out past their live gigs and hootenannies to more mass-mediated performance opportunities, the Weavers deliberately celebrated both their personal connection to Lead Belly, and “Goodnight, Irene’s” place in his repertoire. They seemed to do this not only to benefit from the association with Lead Belly’s “authenticity,” but perhaps even more so to keep tradition alive, and to educate their new audiences much how Belafonte would seek to educate his audiences towards racial equality and awareness in his music (see Chapter 3), and how Disney would animate his folk heroes into large leather-bound books and libraries (see Chapter 4).

Take for an example one of their earlier filmed performances of the song, a 1951 “telescription” recorded by Louis D. Snader. In the early 1950s, Snader produced a series of short “music videos” featuring the Weavers, complete with title cards and set pieces, one for each their songs, “Tzena, Tzena, Tzena,” “Goodnight, Irene,” “All Around the World,” “So Long (It's Been Good to Know You),” and “The Roving Kind.” The “Irene” telescription opens with a short close-up of Fred Hellerman’s guitar before moving to a wide shot of the quartet standing in what appears to be a formal living

room or study. Their attire is somewhat formal, with the men wearing buttoned-up suits, and Ronnie wearing a tea-length, strapless gown and jewels adorning her neck.

The group begins by singing the chorus together: "Irene, goodnight, Irene, goodnight. Goodnight, Irene, goodnight, Irene, I'll see you in my dreams." Instead of jumping into any of the verses, Lee Hays dives into a spoken interlude on top of instrumental vamping:

> We learned this song, "Irene," from a friend of ours. His name was Huddie Ledbetter. [Hays pulls out a photograph of Lead Belly.] He called himself Lead Belly: King of the 12-String Guitar. [The camera cuts to a closer shot of the photograph, which the viewer can now see features Lead Belly in a natty suit, mouth open in song, with his 12-string. Next to him is Woody Guthrie in his "everyman" button down shirt and slacks, with his guitar.] Some people thought that he was the greatest folk singer that ever lived in America. We knew him best as a rememberer of folk songs, and he taught us dozens of 'em, especially "Irene." This was his theme song, and he sang it for over thirty years before he died. Well, he died before "Irene" got to be known to so many millions of Americans. Huddie had a hard and wonderful life. It's over now, but his songs are still very much alive.[34]

When reflecting on those exciting years prior to the Weavers' great commercial success, Lee Hays recalls a New York City hootenanny where he and a bunch of folk singers – including Lead Belly, himself – "swapped verses" singing "Irene." "Came my turn to take a verse and I picked up a verse which I forever after sang, it was usually the last verse – the one which begins 'stop rambling, stop gambling, stop staying out late at night, go home to your wife and family, stay there by your fireside bright.' Leadbelly liked the way I sang that verse so much that he gave it to me. After the show was over he said,

[34] The Weavers, "Goodnight, Irene" (Snader Telescriptions Corporation, 1951), 3 min. 20 sec.; from Youtube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_HCsW0xh1Mk (accessed May 1, 2013), 9:17.

'That's your verse.'"[35] As is evident from both the telescription and Hays' pride in "inheriting" an "Irene" verse from Ledbetter, himself, the Weavers actively both perpetuated the idea of Lead Belly as authentic American folk and wrote themselves into the narrative, painting their folk singing as authentic-by-association and by practice. They took great pride in their relationship with Ledbetter and his music, even in later years.

Origins of "Goodnight, Irene": From Popular Roots through Lead Belly

Before delving into the phenomenon that surrounded the Weavers' interpretation of Lead Belly's version of "Goodnight, Irene," it is important to examine what, precisely, the Weavers were interpreting and referring to. First, the Weavers revered the myth that surrounded Lead Belly and "Goodnight, Irene." Second, in spite of the many and varied versions of "Goodnight, Irene" that Lead Belly recorded and performed throughout his life, they grasped onto certain musical elements that tied these versions together into a bigger idea of "the song," "story," or "tune," elements that were later copied and reproduced in a spate of popular and country & western commercial recordings.

The "Goodnight, Irene" legend hearkens back beyond the day when Lead Belly first recorded the song for John Lomax on his portable recording equipment in their first

[35] Lee Hays, *"Sing Out, Warning! Sing Out, Love!": The Writings of Lee Hays*. Ed. Robert S. Koppelman (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 82.

Library of Congress session at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola.[36] Although Lead Belly first recorded the song in 1933, the song's history reaches back to at the least the late nineteenth century. According to Lead Belly biographers Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell, Ledbetter "was apparently singing the song as early as 1908 or 1909; family folklore has him creating the song while singing lullabies to his seven-month-old niece Irene Campbell."[37] As Lead Belly's family remembers it, the song came about quite organically, with Ledbetter fiddling around with his guitar until the song just "clicked." This tender story of familial love endures to this day.

However durable this sweet narrative may be, Wolfe and Lornell also claim that Lead Belly had most likely embellished "Irene's" creation story. While the Ledbetters perpetuated this romantic tale of spontaneous composition, Lead Belly most likely learned the song almost exactly how he came to sing it from his Uncle Bob Ledbetter from West Texas, who, in turn, had heard it from his brother, Terrell. "When Lomax directly asked him if Huddie had made up the song, Uncle Bob answered categorically, 'No sir! It came from my brother. I don't know who made it up. Huddie got it from us.'"[38]

Lornell and Wolfe also link the melody and lyrics to a tune collected by the Library of Congress from Gilbert Fike in Little Rock, Arkansas, titled "The Girls Won't Do to Trust," with the chorus: "Irene, goodnight, Irene, / Irene, goodnight, my life, / I'll kiss

---

[36] Charles Wolfe & Kip Lornell, "Huddie Ledbetter Discography 1933-1949," in *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*, 289-290.
[37] Wolfe & Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*, 52.
[38] Ibid., 53.

you in my dreams." This version traces even further back to an 1888 pamphlet distributed by a traveling minstrel show. In that pamphlet, the song is attributed to singer Lew Randall, and was later discovered to have been written by African-American, Tin Pan Alley songwriter, Gussie Lord Davis.[39] "Either the Ledbetters or other anonymous singers stripped its archaic diction, simplified the text into a standard verse and chorus pattern, and added new verses derived from other black folk-song stanzas."[40] This type of "borrowing" or "adaptation" from popular song to folk practice was not unheard of, even in the decades that followed (consider the previous example of the Almanacs' "Union Maid" borrowing its melody almost verbatim from the popular song, "Red Wing").

The Lomaxes support this version of the song's origin story. In their 1936 printed song collection, *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly*, they claim to tell the story of Ledbetter's life through printed melodies, lyrics, and prose vignettes of the back-stories to almost fifty of his songs. To demonstrate the breadth of Lead Belly's style, each song is grouped into one of seven categories: reels, work songs, hollers, the blues, the talkin' blues, ballads, and "A Miscellany" of "white influences" and "pardon songs." It is in this last category that they place "Irene."

To the Lomaxes, the white, popular influence on "Irene" was palpable from the very beginning:

---

[39] Charles Wolfe, Kip Lornell, and Robert Cantwell all describe "Goodnight, Irene's" before Lead Belly, specifically the links to Tin Pan Alley and Gussie Lord Davis. Wolfe & Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*, 53; Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 179.
[40] Ibid., 53-56.

> The melody is certainly not a Negro folk melody. A gentleman in Providence, Rhode Island, believes he heard the same air on a ranch in west Texas twenty years ago. One of the old-line members of the Communist party in New York insisted that it was a steal from a famous aria in 'Martha.' Sigmund Spaeth, the tune detective, had never heard it, but agrees with us that it is of the Stephen Foster or 'Sweet Adeline' vintage and certainly of written origin. However mysterious its background, we prophesy that it will some day be one of the best known American folk songs.[41]

While the Lomaxes attribute "Irene" to another source, specifically a popular, American white, or even European classical tradition, they still attest to both the song's American-ness, as well as Lead Belly's authorship of the version they capture in their printed collection. While adapting a popular tune or classical aria may not seem the most authentic way of singing a folk song, the Lomaxes validate Ledbetter's "Irene" by connecting him to the pastoral and the isolation of his prison life. In justifying adaptations of songs that do not fit into a traditionalist understanding of Lead Belly's history and identity, the Lomaxes claim that "since Lead Belly learned them all from hearing other people sing them, and practiced most of them for years in isolated penitentiaries, we may feel pretty sure that his tunes are not precisely like other versions."[42] Because he learned the song by oral transmission and was "isolated" from the outside world, Lead Belly's folk credibility still rose above that of his source material. Because of who Lead Belly was listeners could forgive him singing a song with roots he did not share.

---

[41] John Lomax & Alan Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs as Sung By Lead Belly* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), 235-236. "Martha" could refer to the 1847 Friedrich von Flotow opera, *Martha, oder Der markt zu Richmond*.

[42] Ibid., xi.

"Authorship" as it relates to sincerity, authenticity, and ownership is a murky concept in both folk and popular song. On one hand, the traditionalist model supports those who came across their musical practice "honestly" and "organically," which could mean they absorbed the music from those around them in their natural surroundings. This model would support the social construction of a tune and style, the togetherness of learning from others. On the other hand, what could be more honest than a person performing an original composition, a song from their mind, born out of their own experiences, sung by no one else before? This model would support the idea of a lone composer developing his work in isolation. Even in these earliest recordings and printed collections, it was evident that Lead Belly's "Goodnight, Irene" straddled the line between folk tradition and popular songwriting.

Lead Belly's Early Recordings of "Goodnight, Irene"

Like most Lead Belly tunes, "Goodnight, Irene" took on many forms throughout the years. Judging from his recordings, Lead Belly was quite the chameleon: he adapted his tunes to the situation and audience at hand, and his performances evolved through his own styles and tastes. When so many versions of a tune exist – ranging from distant relatives like a nineteenth century pamphlet, a Tin Pan Alley ditty, or even a German aria, to those in the more immediate family like Lead Belly's numerous recordings, or those by the Weavers – how can we know that we are still, in fact listening to the same song? Although Lead Belly seemed to constantly adapt his signature tune, several

unifying elements like the story, the melody, and tonal structure, draw all of these versions and variants together, thus making up the greater umbrella of Lead Belly's "Goodnight, Irene."

These elements are present even in the very first Library of Congress recordings of the song.[43] The early recordings are each quite short, include only segments of the chorus and two verses, and feature Lead Belly's singing accompanied by his own guitar. Due to the overall poor quality of these initial recordings, detailed analysis of the guitar playing and vocal nuances is not possible. Listeners are still able, however, to discern elements of Lead Belly's lyrical structure at the time.

Example 2.2 Select versions of "Goodnight, Irene," from Lead Belly through 1950.[44]

Date	**Location or Label**	**Artist**
ca. July 16, 1933	Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola	Lead Belly
ca. July 1, 1934	Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola	Lead Belly
January 21, 1935	Wilton, Connecticut	Lead Belly
June 1950	Decca Records	Gordon Jenkins and his Orchestra and the Weavers
June 1950	Columbia Records	Frank Sinatra
June 1950	Decca Records	Ernest Tubb and Red Foley
ca. July / August 1950	Capitol Records	Jo Stafford

[43] Lead Belly, "Irene / Take a Whiff On Me / You Cain' Lose Me, Cholly / Irene / Ella Speed / Irene" on *Field Recordings Vol. 5: Louisiana, Texas, Bahamas (1933-1940)* compact disc, DOCD-5579, copyright 1997, Document Records. Originally recorded for the Library of Congress by John Lomax and Huddie Ledbetter, LOC 120-A1, 120-A6 & 120-A7.

[44] The Lead Belly recording locations and dates are drawn from Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell's Lead Belly discography in *The Life and Legend of Lead Belly* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 289-291. The other dates and labels are drawn from the records, themselves, or their appearances in *Billboard* (1950).

Lyrically, the 1933 fragments feature the familiar "Irene, goodnight, Irene, goodnight…" chorus that is present in all of Lead Belly's versions, as well as those released in the early 1950s by pop artists (see Example 2.2, select versions of "Goodnight, Irene" from Lead Belly through 1950). They even include several of the verses that tell the story of the song's narrator and his beau, Irene. In the first fragment, he implies a parting of ways as the narrator describes the "last words" he ever heard Irene say. In the second fragment, the narrator asks Irene's mother for permission to take her daughter, presumably as his wife; and in the third fragment, the narrator speaks to an unspecified scoundrel, advising him to stop engaging in disreputable behavior like "gambling" and "rambling" and "go home to his wife and family" (see Example 2.3, lyrics to Lead Belly's 1933 Angola Prison recordings of "Goodnight, Irene").

A year later, the Lomaxes returned to Angola Prison to record Lead Belly, and this time they captured a longer, seemingly more complete version of the Irene song and story (see Example 2.4, Lyrics to Lead Belly's 1934 Angola Prison recordings of "Goodnight, Irene"). Like the 1933 recordings, the 1934 versions are fragmented; the story flows more as a series of snapshots rather than a fluid narrative.[45] However, as is evident by the content of Lead Belly's later recordings, these fragments are two parts of the same rendition (the first fragment includes the first portion of the song, and the

[45] Lead Belly, "Irene (124-A-2)" and "Irene (124-B-1)" on *Leadbelly: The Remaining ARC & Library of Congress Recordings, Vol.1 (1934-1935)*, compact disc, DOCD 5591, copyright 1997, Document Records. Originally recorded for the Library of Congress by John Lomax and Huddie Ledbetter, LOC 124-A2, 124-B1.

Example 2.3 Lyrics to Lead Belly's 1933 Angola Prison recordings of "Goodnight, Irene." LOC 120-A1, 120-A6, & 120-A7.

Fragment 1: 120-A1

Sung: Irene, goodnight,
Irene, goodnight.
Goodnight, Irene, goodnight, Irene,
I'll get you in my dreams.

One day, one day, one day,
Irene was a-walkin' along.
Last word that I heared her say:
"I want you to sing one song."

Fragment 2: 120-A6

Sung: I asked your mother for you.
She told me you was too young.
I wish to the Lord that I never seen your face,
I'm sorry you ever was born.

Irene, goodnight,
Irene, goodnight.

Fragment 3: 120-A7

Sung: …you in my dreams.

Quit ramblin', quit gamblin',
Quit stayin' out late at night.
Go home to your wife and your family,
Sit down by the fireside bright.

Irene, goodnight,
Ir-…

Example 2.4 Lyrics to Lead Belly's 1934 Angola Prison recordings of "Goodnight, Irene." LOC 124-A2 & 124-B1.

Fragment 1:124-A2

Irene, goodnight,
Irene, goodnight.
Goodnight, Irene, goodnight, Irene.
I'll get you in my dreams.

Quit ramblin', and quit gamblin',
Quit stayin' out late at night.
Go home to your wife and family.
Sit on by the fireside bright.

Irene, goodnight,
Irene, goodnight.
Goodnight, Irene, goodnight, Irene.
I'll get you in my dreams.

Last Saturday night I got married.
Me and my wife settled down.
Now me and my wife have parted.
Wanna take me a stroll uptown.

Irene, goodnight,
Irene, goodnight.
Goodnight, Irene, goodnight, Irene.
I'll get you in my dreams.

I asked my mother for you.
She told me you was too young.
I wish to the Lord that I never seen your face.
I'm sorry you ever was born.

Irene, goodnight,
Irene, goodnight.
Goodnight, Irene, goodnight, Irene.
I'll get you in my dreams.

One day, one day, one day,
Irene was a-walkin' along.
Last words that I heard her say
"I want you to sing me a song."

Fragment 2: 124-B1

And she caused me to moan.
She caused me to leave my home.
Last words that I heared her say:
"I'm sorry you ever was born."

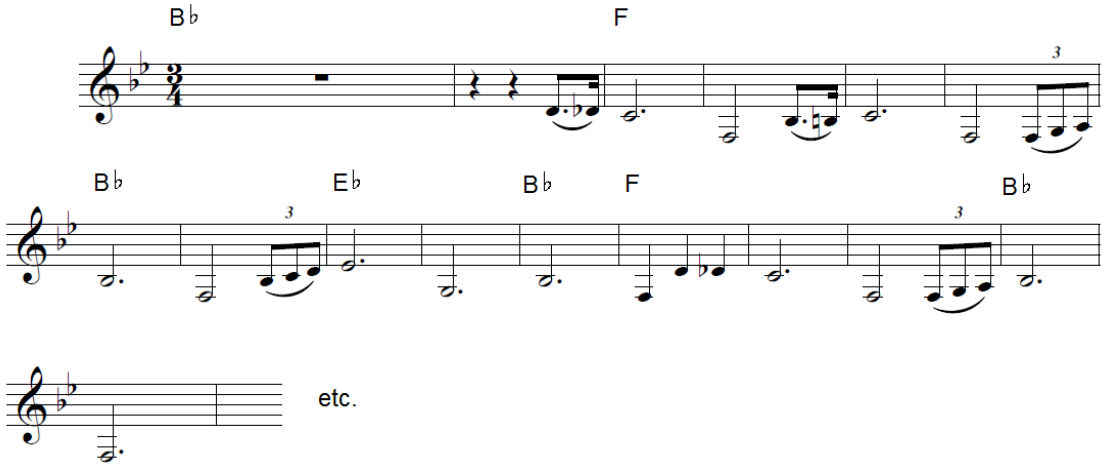
Irene, goodnight,
Irene, goodnight.
Goodnight, Irene, goodnight, Irene.
I'll get you in my dreams.

I love Irene, God knows I do.
Love her till the seas run dry.
If Irene turned her back on me,
I'd take morphine and die.

(sung more quietly, and with a weaker voice)
Irene, goodnight,
Irene, goodnight.
Goodnight, Irene, goodnight, Irene.
I'll get you in my dreams.

second the conclusion). The 1934 recordings of "Irene" flesh out the story of the narrator who loves and marries Irene, in spite of her mother's disapproval ("I asked my mother for you. / She told me you was too young…"). However, due to his late nights and seedy behavior ("ramblin'" and "gamblin'"), their marriage falls apart, and the narrator laments that if he were ever to lose Irene, he would "take morphine and die."

Example 2.5 Introduction to Lead Belly's 1934 recordings of "Goodnight, Irene." The guitar's melody is illustrated below. Lead Belly simultaneously plays the assigned harmonies in a 3/4 pattern, one strum to the beat.



Being of better audio quality and less fragmented than the 1933 versions, it is much easier to discern Lead Belly's guitar playing and voice in these 1934 recordings. Lead Belly fluidly sings and plays in B-flat major, 3/4 time, with an underlying, two-pronged guitar accompaniment. His guitar establishes the meter and harmony with a single root pitch on each measure's downbeat, followed by two quarter-note chords. At the same time, his guitar plays small, countermelodic embellishments, often two descending pitches or three ascending triplets leading from a measure's third and final beat into the next measure's downbeat (see example 2.5, Introduction to Lead Belly's

1934 recordings of “Goodnight, Irene”). When combined, the voice’s fluid, slower rhythmic speed and legato phrasing sitting atop the guitar’s gentle harmony and countermelody propel the song forward.

When considered alongside each other, the 1933 and 1934 Lead Belly prison recordings of “Goodnight, Irene” begin to illustrate some of the crucial elements that will tie not only Lead Belly’s versions of the song together, but many later versions, including the Weavers’. First, the song is in 3/4 time. As in Lead Belly’s interpretations of the song, the accompaniment – whether an orchestra, chorus, single guitar, or folk combo – chugs along in an “oom-pah-pah” pattern on each beat of the measure. Second, the song generally uses simple tonal harmonies (I, IV and V). Third, the chorus and many of the verses remain largely intact when it comes to lyrics, melody, and general harmonic structure (although as I will discuss in the pages that follow, some of Lead Belly’s more ominous verses and several key words were eliminated in many of Lead Belly’s later recordings and in the more mass-market versions released by other artists after his death). Lastly, the song’s story endures in the broadest of terms: the song’s narrator has loved a woman (Irene), marries her, and loses her due to his immoral habits (“rambling,” “gambling,” or “staying out late”). In the song’s chorus, the narrator sings to Irene (who we assume is the woman he lost), wishes her goodnight, and vows to meet her again in his dreams.

Although the Angola recordings of “Goodnight, Irene” are similar in their poetic and musical structure, the next version recorded in early 1935 exhibits changes that folk

historian Benjamin Filene attributes to John Lomax's backseat driving.[46] According to Filene, Northern, white audiences just could not understand Lead Belly's Southern accent as heard in the 1933 and 1934 recordings, so they encouraged him to – in the words of Alan Lomax – "'bring his words out plain.'" Filene suggests that "the Lomaxes may also have urged Lead Belly to insert spoken comments in the middle of his songs…outlining its plot, explaining obscure words and symbols, and providing transitions between verses."[47] In order to construct and display an authentic American folksinger who adhered just enough to Northern audiences' standards as to not be rejected, John Lomax had to be certain that the lyrics were understandable and contained appropriate content. In other words, he needed to be sure Lead Belly was exotic enough to establish his folksy authenticity, but familiar enough as to remain effective and not be rejected entirely.

These spoken interjections are present in the third version of "Goodnight, Irene," which was recorded by the Lomaxes on January 21, 1935 in Wilton, Connecticut. Listeners comparing versions of the song over time can hear in this recording not only the influence of John Lomax on Lead Belly's recording and performing process and output, but also the impact of a musician beginning to adapt his style for new audiences. What was once a song with interchangeable lyrics in no apparent, chronological order becomes a lengthy narrative with fully fleshed out back stories for

[46] Lead Belly, "Irene" (4:39) & "Irene" (2:09) on *Midnight Special: The Library of Congress Recordings. Volume 1*, compact disc, CD 1044 Rounder, copyright 1991, Rounder. Originally recorded for the Library of Congress by John Lomax and Huddie Ledbetter, LOC 44-A, 44-B1.
[47] Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 65.

the song's three protagonists (the narrator, Irene, and Irene's mother). In between each chorus and verse, Lead Belly has inserted spoken interludes – five in total – which leave very little to the listener's imagination.

The 1935 recordings begin with a similar guitar introduction, followed by the by-now familiar chorus. Unlike in his previous recordings, this time after the first chorus, Lead Belly launches directly into a spoken interlude on top of his guitar vamping. The interlude is spoken from a third person perspective, rather than the first person perspective heard previously. Where the listener once heard Lead Belly as the song's protagonist, here, he takes himself out of the action, and assumes the role of the omniscient songster: "This song was made about a man and a woman who was walkin' along one Sunday evening…", and finishing the interlude with "and here is what he said." Only then does Lead Belly step back towards the familiar verse of the previous versions, now singing from the perspective of the song's jilted lover: "I asked your mother for you, She told me you was too young. I wish to the Lord I never seen your face. I'm sorry you ever was born." Then, Ledbetter takes a step back, asking in his speaking voice: "What was it about?" before moving to the chorus. The song repeats this structure – chorus, spoken interjection, verse, spoken interjection – four times. He deviates only in the last repeat, where the verse is followed directly by the chorus, and *then* the spoken interjection. Lead Belly hums the melody of the chorus, and ends the song on four decisive strums. (See Example 2.6, Lyrics to Lead Belly's 1935 recordings of "Goodnight, Irene.")

Example 2.6 Lyrics to Lead Belly's 1935 recordings of "Goodnight, Irene." "Irene" (4:39) & "Irene" (2:09) on *Midnight Special: The Library of Congress Recordings. Volume 1*, compact disc, CD 1044 Rounder, (copyright 1991, Rounder). Originally recorded for the Library of Congress by John Lomax and Huddie Ledbetter, LOC 44-A, 44-B1.

Fragment 44-A

Chorus: Irene, goodnight,
Irene, goodnight.
Goodnight, Irene, goodnight, Irene,
I'll get you in my dreams.

Spoken: This song was made about a man and a woman who was walkin' along one Sunday evening. And the woman didn't have one child in the world and that's this little girl. And just before the man done got to the house, she said, "Will you as mother for me when you get home?" And the man told her, "All right." He go and ask the woman for her daughter and the last child she had, you might know what she told the man. She didn't get mad with him and she didn't talk rough but she told him. And he went back to the girl, and she said, "What did momma tell you?" He looked at Irene – her name was Irene – he looked at Irene, and here is what he said:

Verse 1: "I asked your mother for you,
She told me you was too young.
I wish to the lord I never seen your face.
I'm sorry you ever was born."

Spoken: What was it about?

Chorus

Spoken: She called him and sat down, said, "Now listen. Momma won't give me up, but if you slip back here some night at twelve o'clock, I'll slip off with you, and you and I will marry." He told her, "All right." She says, "Just before you leave, I wants to marry a town man." He knowed he lived ninety miles in the country. There wasn't even much of a country store around him. Two chances to one he never had been to town before in his life. But he looked at Irene and here is what he told her:

Verse 2: "Sometimes I live in the country.
Sometimes I live in town.
Sometimes I haves a great notion
Jumpin' into the river and drown."

Spoken: What was worrying him?

Chorus

Spoken: Sure enough the man slipped back there at night at twelve o'clock and stole her away from home. And he didn't stay at home with her that night. So he had stole her away from home, and she looked at him when he come in one night, she sit down and she wanted to talk to him. (cont.)

Verse 3 "You caused me to weep, and you caused me to moan.
You caused me to leave my home."
Last word I heard her say,
"I want you to sing a song."

Spoken: What was the song?

Chorus

Spoken: Sure enough, she told him, say "If you don't stay at home with me, I'm gonna leave." He didn't believe twice four was eight, and he didn't believe twice ten was twenty. But he went off one night too many. So when he left, he came back and found a clean house. All the doors was open, and he walked straight on through the house, and he went onto the back side and here is what he said:

Verse 4:"Last Saturday night, I got married.
Me and my wife settled down.
Now me and my wife have parted.
Gonna take me a stroll uptown."

Spoken: What was the trouble about?

Chorus

Fragment 44-B1
Spoken: When he come in and found his wife gone, he walked out on the back side of the house and he went and he found his wife. When he found his wife he go'ed to Irene and he fall down to his knees. And he fall down on his knees. (I'll tell you about a woman. She can love you to death, and she can hate you just like she loves you.) He went and begged Irene to take him back, and Irene walked out, and he's down on his knees. He put both hands on her hips and tell you to "get away from me. I can't use you no more. You called me away from my momma, and I didn't have no where to go. I couldn't go back home, and you wouldn't stay at home with me. Gone out and found me a place to stay, and you just might as well just stay away." He left Irene, and he looked down and here's what he said:

Verse 5 "I love Irene, God knows I do,
Love her till the sea runs dry.
And if Irene turns her back on me,
I'm gonna take morphine and die."

Chorus

Spoken: He walked away from Irene and here the last words he said:

Sung to the melody of the chorus: Mmmmm….

In addition to the construction of Lead Belly, the folk icon, as a sort of artistic original who bears the supposedly authentic context of his music, there are the actual, durable artistic objects he produced, namely his songs and field recordings. And at the time he severed ties with John Lomax and settled in New York City in 1935-1936, his songs' "aura" had not been diluted by the type of mechanical reproduction associated with the 1930s mass media.[48] In spite of some studio recordings made with the American Record Company (ARC) in 1935, Lead Belly was still best-known for the collection of prison recordings he had made with the Lomaxes. These recordings had not been pressed into thousands of records and sold across the nation, as were recordings of Duke Ellington's big band, Bing Crosby, or even Beethoven's symphonies. Rather, they were captured for posterity, held in an archive and studied, through pilgrimage by students of folk music to the present day.

This difference between the perception of Lead Belly's early body of field recordings and any of the countless records released since by the commercial recording industry reflects another grey area that arose between the mass-mediated, heteronomous field of American musical production and the anti-heteronomous, autonomous field from the 1930s-1950s. John Lomax regarded and advertised the practice of field recording as the most effective means for documenting folk music. According to the elder Lomax, the technology and field worker merely bore witness to the act, and captured it for future listeners to witness precisely how it occurred. For

[48] See Benjamin, "The Work of Art."

these reasons, the field recording has come to occupy a place of privilege, just as Lead Belly's earliest field recordings have come to represent the height of his unmediated, folksy authenticity, long before his moves to New York City and Los Angeles and the commercial recordings he completed there.

Kenneth Goldstein, a folk music scholar with experience recording folk artists during the 1960s folk revival, sees these ethnographic field recordings as essentially different than commercial – or, as he refers to them, "aesthetic" – recordings like the Weavers' "Irene." Goldstein writes that "the aesthetic record is not meant to be a document of an actual ongoing happening, a stream of activity."[49] Rather, with aesthetic recordings, "you go into a studio, you record in a studio, and you have the singer do it over and over until you get the take you like, if you don't get a take you like, you put it off until the next day and then you have to do it again until eventually you get a take you like or decide not to use the song."[50] Goldstein views the studio recording process differently than the intended "documentation" style of the Lomaxes' prolific field recordings. Of course, after carefully listening to only Lead Belly's three earliest versions of "Goodnight, Irene" as discussed above, it becomes clear that any representation of these recordings as mere documentations must be taken with a grain of salt, for John Lomax's influence as "record producer" with a featured performer is palpable in the clearer enunciation, inserted spoken verses, and clarification of story.

---

[49] Kenneth Goldstein, "On Folk Song Festivals and Kitchens: Questions on Authenticity and the Folksong Revival," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. by Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 119.
[50] Ibid., 117.

Another element of problematizing the folk authenticity of these recordings and locating them among the heteronomous *and* autonomous fields of cultural production is the understanding that as an entity in and of itself, a folk song usually undergoes some sort of variation over time. Since the very beginning of modern folk song study, collectors such as Francis Child have been fascinated with obsessively gathering, documenting, and painstakingly tracing these variations all the way back to their roots.[51] Across time, these versions are linked by "certain aspects of plot and wording…but they also differ from each other in significant ways, reflecting the cultures, times, and personalities of their singers" according to Pauline Greenhill.[52] The case of Lead Belly's "Goodnight, Irene" is an interesting twist on folk variation because the song's changes occur across specific performances by one musician, each captured on a recording at very specific social, cultural, and historical moments. The recordings serve to give snapshots of Lead Belly's musical evolution over time, more than the evolution of the song itself. The agency of the performer finally steps into the forefront, rather than some abstract agency assigned to a tune as was the case with the earlier printed song collections of Child and Sharp. This phenomenon is further complicated by the commercial proliferation of the song in the 1950s, and issues of authorship, copyright, and, of course, money.

---

[51] Child, *The English and Scottish Ballads.*

[52] Pauline Greenhill "'Barrett's privateers': Performance and Participation in the Folk Revival," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 139.

From “Irene’s” roots as a Tin Pan Alley tune, minstrel ditty, or classical aria, from the durable myth of the song originating in Lead Belly’s personal life experiences, and from the versions and variants captured on field recordings all the way through the commercial adaptation by the Weavers and the subsequent explosion of popular recordings of the tune, “Goodnight, Irene’s” trajectory through time and context illustrates the grey areas between the heteronomous and autonomous fields of cultural production in a much different way than does the music and career of an artist like Harry Belafonte. While Belafonte’s recordings were commercially popular during his own lifetime, Lead Belly’s music did not achieve even a modest degree of commercial success until after his death. In the 1950s Harry Belafonte used theatricality and his prowess as an “actor in song” to inhabit folk characters and styles, while other artists and institutions celebrated and manipulated the mere *idea* of Lead Belly in their recordings of his music in order to associate themselves with his established folk authenticity. This tactic proved quite profitable and powerful in the coming decades.

Reaching for the Folk While Participating at the Present: The Weavers’ “Goodnight, Irene”

How, in practice, did the Weavers express folk sincerity to the extent that audiences looked to them as an authority in folk music, while at the same time projecting the type of professionalism and commercial viability industry insiders valued? Like Harry Belafonte and Walt Disney did with their interpretations of folk songs and

heroes, the Weavers managed to juxtapose elements of the most fashionable pop music of the time (in components of their song structure, length, and arrangement), with elements drawn from their folk values and experiences (in parts of their instrumentation, vocal timbre, storytelling, and the aforementioned, hearkening back to Lead Belly's music and perceived authenticity).

Lyrics and Perspective

Much as is the case when a folk song is passed down from person to person or generation to generation, the Weavers both drew directly from their predecessor while at the same time personalizing the tune to fit their own context. Similar to many pop songs of the era, the Weavers performed "Irene" with a verse/chorus structure, and drawing from their folk roots, they sang selected excerpts from Lead Belly's interpretations of the song practically verbatim (see Example 2.7, lyrics to "Goodnight, Irene," as recorded by the Weavers with Gordon Jenkins and his Orchestra). However, the Weavers omit some of Lead Belly's more violent lyrics, most notably, the verse that ends "And if Irene turned her back on me, I'm gonna take morphine and die," and their minor – but meaningful – changing of the chorus' last line to "I'll *see* you in my dreams," rather than "I'll *get* you in my dreams" (emphasis mine). The Weavers also excluded verses that referred to more unsavory themes such as the stanza where Irene's lover notes that she could be much too young for him ("I asked your mother for you, She told me you was too young") and another where Irene describes the negative effects he has

had on her ("You caused me to weep, you caused me to moan. You caused me to leave my home"). Lastly, the Weavers did not include those spoken interludes that John Lomax urged Lead Belly to include in order to flesh out the story and "bring out the words plain."

Example 2.7 Lyrics to "Goodnight, Irene," as recorded by the Weavers with Gordon Jenkins and his Orchestra (1950). Gordon Jenkins and The Weavers, "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena" / "Goodnight, Irene" (Decca).

"Goodnight, Irene"

Chorus: (sung by the Weavers)
Irene, goodnight,
Irene, goodnight.
Goodnight, Irene, goodnight, Irene,
I'll see you in my dreams.

Chorus: (sung on "oh" by the chorus)

Hellerman: (over very quiet "ah's" by the Weavers)
Last Saturday night I got married,
Me and my wife settled down.
Now me and my wife are parted,
I'm gonna take another stroll downtown.

Chorus: (with lyrics sung by the Weavers atop "ah's" by the chorus)

Gilbert: (over very quiet hums by the Weavers)
Sometimes I live in the country,
Sometimes I live in the town.
Sometimes I take a great notion,
To jump into the river and drown.

Chorus: (with lyrics sung by the Weavers and the chorus)

Hays:
Stop ramblin'. Stop your gamblin'.
Stop stayin' out late at night.
Go home to your wife and family,
Stay there by the fireside bright.

Chorus (with lyrics sung by the Weavers and chorus)

Fade out:
Goodnight, Irene, Goodnight, Irene,
I'll see you in my dreams.

Goodnight, Irene, Goodnight, Irene,
I'll see you in my dreams.

On the Decca recording – and in the vast majority of their performances and recordings that came after – Hellerman takes the first verse, singing "Last Saturday night I got married" followed by Gilbert's "Sometimes I live in the country." Hays chimes in

last with the verse he claims Lead Belly bestowed upon him: “Stop ramblin’, stop your gamblin’.” (Seeger does not take a vocal solo on this recording.)

When sung by the Weavers, Lead Belly’s lyrics impart a different sense of perspective in regards to the relationship of the singer’s person or persona to the character(s) in the song’s story. As demonstrated by the folk intelligentsia’s lionization of Lead Belly because he sang from a place of personal experience (or, from a place they *perceived* to be personal experience), the issue of an artist’s perspective, and the audience’s conception of the artist as honest and sincere is very important in deciding whether or not the artist is “folk” and therefore, successful from an autonomous standpoint.

Like many folksingers who carry a song with them for a long period of time, Lead Belly had many versions of his signature song, and had the option to sing it from different perspectives on different recordings or in live performances. For instance, some of his versions were sung in a first person perspective (i.e. Lead Belly sang the song as if *he* was the spurned lover) and others in a third-person, narrative perspective (i.e. Lead Belly sang the song as if he had witnessed it firsthand). The narrative perspective seems to have surfaced in the 1935 field recording with the addition of those spoken interludes which situated Lead Belly, “the performer,” as a narrator, and also removed him from the action of the story. Both of these perspectives bolstered the Lomaxes’ and the New York Left’s vision of Lead Belly as a traditionalist, and therefore, *sincere*, folk performer: hearing Ledbetter sing from the first-person perspective, or

even narrating as if he witnessed the saga of Irene and her lover, listeners would believe that this song organically emerged from his history and surroundings. Furthermore, the song's more scandalous lyrics supported his "dangerous" persona as a Southern, black man, convicted of violent crimes and "preserved" in the isolation of prison.

Because they do not share in Lead Belly's origin story, and because as a vocal quartet their performance format is inherently distinct from Lead Belly's, the narrative perspective portrayed by the Weavers' is intrinsically different. Although listeners could not perceive the Weavers as a singular character in "Irene" as they could with Lead Belly, they could interpret their solo verses as expressions of different characters in the song: the male lover, Irene herself, and the wise narrator or third party. For example, in the first verse, Hellerman could be viewed as the male lover in the story ("Last Saturday night I got married. Me and my wife settled down…"). In the following verse, the lyrics do not have as obvious a perspective in isolation from the other verses, but emerging from Gilbert's big, bellowing, alto voice, the despondent words could be the voice of Irene, reeling from the breakup of her marriage, as referred to in the previous verse ("Sometimes I take a great notion to jump into the river and drown"). With his dignified and clear bass, Hays seems to sit outside of the doomed duo, singing from the perspective of the omniscient Greek chorus, or at least a wise witness ("Stop ramblin'. Stop your gamblin'. Stop stayin' out late at night. Go home to your wife and family, stay there by your fireside bright"). Hays could be singing to the male lover, or he could be singing to us all: he delivers the moral in this sad tale. The Weavers work around the

problem of perspective and origin by editing down the verses and strategically assigning them within the group.

When combined with their verbal connections to "Lead Belly, the man," the Weavers' lyrical choices could have contributed to the group being perceived as sincere or honest. Yet in another sense, the Weavers' lyrical editing also helped the recording fit more into the popular commercial formats of the era. By removing any lyrics that might be interpreted as "scandalous" and cutting out other verses altogether, the Weavers rendered a song that clocked in at three minutes and nineteen seconds, very much near the three-minute pop-song format that had emerged as the norm. In 1950, "Goodnight, Irene" was released in both a ten-inch, 78-rpm format which was prevalent in the prior decade, in addition to a seven-inch, 45-rpm format which came into widespread usage in the 1950s.[53] As Andre Millard notes, many types of live, improvised music were "inconsistent with the time limitations of the 78-rpm disc record. The music had to fit within the 3-minute boundary of sound recording, although the original blues, as sung in the rural South, was not constrained by time or technical considerations of the recording studio….Putting it on record shaped its structure and its sound."[54] We even hear similar limitations on song length with the original Lead Belly field recordings, as each version is catalogued in fragments, too lengthy to be included in its entirety on one recording.

---

[53] See the records themselves: Decca 27077 (the 78-rpm release), and Decca 9-27077 (the 45-rpm release).

[54] Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 101-102.

Although we have no recordings of the Weavers singing "Irene" prior to the 1950 commercial hit, anecdotally, the Weavers describe trading and playing on verses when singing the song at hootenannies and live performances. Unlike the flexibility afforded by such participatory, communal singing, a commercial recording is quite concrete, sounding exactly the same upon each listening, accounting for any degeneration of the technology. As they would be bound to them in perpetuity, Weavers had to choose their lyrics and sounds wisely.

"Folksy by Comparison" and the Popular Sound: Gordon Jenkins' Arrangement of "Goodnight, Irene"

The Weavers, themselves, undoubtedly made many choices that impacted the way their Decca recording of "Goodnight, Irene" sounded. Yet, it only takes one look at the record as a physical object to deduce that other forces were also at work in manufacturing this disc.

The record's label was black with gold lettering, with "DECCA," printed above the hole. To the right, the label lists the recording's prominent instrumentation and reads "Vocal Quartet with Chorus and Orchestra." Below is printed the title of the song, the holders of the song's copyright, the artists, the record's identification number, and the running time:

GOODNIGHT, IRENE
(Hudie [sic] Ledbetter-John Lomax)

GORDON JENKINS

AND HIS ORCHESTRA
AND
THE WEAVERS

27077
(3:19)[55]

The record company made sure that composer, arranger, bandleader, and successful Decca artist, Gordon Jenkins (and his orchestra) had top billing. (However, on the right side of the label, the "Vocal Quartet" is billed above the chorus and orchestra, implying that the Weavers are more prominently featured in the recording, itself.) After all, Jenkins was the tried and true, successful pop artist, and the Weavers were virtual unknowns in the commercial sphere.[56]

What did Jenkins bring to this recording and how did his efforts contribute to "Irene" becoming a pop phenomenon? Moreover, how did Jenkins' contributions interact with those of the Weavers in order to both increase the song's pop appeal *and* strengthen the quartet's folk credibility with mainstream audiences? The answers lie in the song's arrangement, which bears many of the markers of the top pop and even country tunes of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

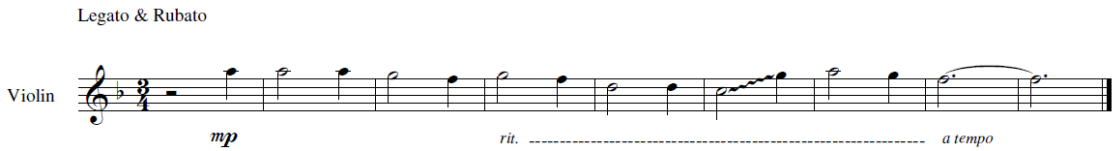
In "Irene," Jenkins arranges his orchestra around and under the Weavers' solo verses, Hellerman's guitar strumming, Pete Seeger's gentle and unobtrusive banjo-

[55] See the label for the 78-rpm release, Decca 27077 (B-side).
[56] In *Billboard*'s summary of 1949's top artists and songs, Gordon Jenkins scored very big. In "The Year's Top Popular Records" charts, Jenkins had four songs out of the thirty listed both in the retail sales and juke box plays categories. He ranked highly in "The Year's Top Pop Artists" charts, as well, sitting at number 3 according to retail sales (behind Vaughn Monroe and Perry Como) and number 4 according to juke box plays (behind Russ Morgan, Monroe, and Como). See "The Year's Top Popular Records," & "The Year's Top Popular Artists," *Billboard Magazine*, January 14, 1950, 14, 15.

picking, and the ensemble's vocal support (i.e. the "ooh's" and "ah's" the Weavers sing underneath the solo verses). Jenkins' orchestra has a robust string section (the typical violins, violas, cellos, basses), in addition to a smaller wind contingency that provides more color than structural support (like the flute "flourish" at the end of the introduction at 0:14).

On top of a pianissimo, string accompaniment that moves in block chords (with the exception of a few passing tones), a solo violin introduction kicks off the track, playing the last eight measures of the chorus' melody (see Example 2.8, violin introduction melody from the Weavers & Gordon Jenkins' 1950 version of "Irene"). The violin plays with a pronounced vibrato, an at-times free interpretation of meter, and a legato movement from note to note. The schmaltzy and sentimental solo even has a distinct slide between the pitches that correspond to the chorus' words "see you" (as in: "I'll see you in my dreams"). Once the violin lands on its last tone (the note that corresponds to the word "dreams" in the chorus' lyrics), the 3/4 time kicks in with an "oom-pah-pah" pattern, accompanied by the flutes' aforementioned rising, arpeggiated flourish.

Example 2.8 Violin introduction melody from the Weavers & Gordon Jenkins' 1950 version of "Irene," transcription by the author.



Joining next are the Weavers at 0:16, singing one chorus atop a very simple and quiet 3/4 harmonic pattern. The strings mostly play pianissimo, sustained chords, which provide more texture than harmony. A string bass mostly helps situate the harmony on beat one of each measure, while Hellerman's guitar plunks out supporting chords on beats two and three. Seeger's banjo can barely be heard in the background, finger-picking within the harmony in typical Seeger fashion. At 0:36, the orchestra has its other big moment in the song, stepping into the forefront with a sweeping interlude, again outlining the music of the song's chorus section. This moment is less the simple, folksy, 3/4 time accompaniment of Lead Belly's and even the Weavers' later version of "Irene" from their 1955 Carnegie Hall performance. Rather, it is more a Viennese waltz with the orchestra's sweeping, smooth, and circular, rise-and-fall pattern.

More than simple accompaniment, Jenkins' orchestra provides *atmosphere*. His orchestra is unobtrusive, with a quiet wash of strings and winds, a sort of early, more middle-of-the-road, 1950s version of the "wall of sound."[57] This atmospheric use of the orchestra to support the featured vocalist was quite common in the late 1940s. Another very successful Gordon Jenkins collaboration from 1949 is a prime example of the typical atmospheric use of orchestra in pop songs at the time. In "I Can Dream, Can't I?" Jenkins again shares his billing with another vocal group – this time the Andrews Sisters, another ensemble in Decca's stable of artists.[58] Like in "Irene," the orchestra in "I Can

[57] The "Wall of Sound" is a term used to describe record producer, Phil Spector's approach to recording 1960s pop artists like the Ronettes.

[58] Andrews Sisters, "I Can Dream, Can't I?" on *20th Century Masters: The Best of the Andrews Sisters*, compact disc, copyright 2000, Geffen Records. Originally recorded for Decca Records by the Andrews

Dream" has its big moments, such as at 0:35 where the orchestra plays a luscious and legato countermelody to Patty Andrews' main vocal line. For the rest of the song, however, the orchestra primarily plays long, shimmering chords further back in the mix than the Andrews Sisters' vocals. Neither Jenkins nor Decca could claim this type of orchestral support as their signature sound. From the Vaughn Monroe Orchestra's driving cowboy epic "Riders in the Sky" (RCA-Victor), to crooner Vic Damone's ballad "You're Breaking My Heart" (Mercury), twenty out of the thirty songs on *Billboard*'s list of 1949's top popular records by retail sales featured an orchestra of some sort supporting the featured vocalist(s).[59]

Gordon Jenkins' arrangement also contributes to "Irene's" popular appeal by including a chorus of mixed voices which was another common device of many pop songs of the late 1940s. This chorus first joins during the aforementioned orchestral interlude at 0:36, vocalizing the melody of the chorus along with the strings on a very neutral "oo." They drop out during Hellerman's verse, re-joining in the second chorus again vocalizing around the melody on a rounded "ah." Rather than singing on more harsh sounds like "ee" or "oh" which would penetrate the wash of Jenkins' arrangement, the chorus' vowels are more neutral, sitting somewhere between "ah" and "oh" and "oo." They continue through the piece singing on open vowels or hums, finally joining the Weavers in choruses three and four singing "Irene, goodnight…" Even

---

Sisters with Gordon Jenkins and his Orchestra, "The Wedding of Lili Marlene" / "I Can Dream, Can't I?" 78 rpm, Decca 24705.

[59] "The Year's Top Popular Records," *Billboard Magazine*, January 14, 1950, 14.

when they join the featured vocalists, they sit far back in the mix, in a supporting role. Although seemingly a minor musical choice, opting to use such neutral, more open vowels contributes to the shimmering, atmospheric sound that surrounds the Weavers; in "Irene," the chorus functions more like an orchestral section than a separate vocal feature.

Although this particular chorus has roots in popular trends, the Weavers had strong roots, themselves, in group singing. In addition their strongly-held belief that joining the masses together in song was a powerful weapon in effecting social change, the Weavers also believed that their particular blend of voices unlocked the potential of their repertoire. Pete Seeger notes that "to our delight we found we could give a big solid warmth to the songs of Leadbelly and to many songs which had seemed ineffectual with one voice."[60] Moreover, the orchestral chorus lent itself nicely to the sing-along traditions that the Weavers practiced in live performance: like a live audience, the chorus hums along at first, but finally seems to get the hang of it in the third chorus when they sing the lyrics along with the Weavers.[61]

In comparison to Jenkins' orchestral-choral arrangement, Hellerman's guitar-playing and Seeger's banjo picking sound untrained, simple, and improvised. Furthermore, the Weavers' voices have more of a penetrating timbre that those of the chorus, with more casual, everyman pronunciations of the words (i.e. "ramblin'" and

[60] Pete Seeger, "'Finally, a "Success,"' 1972," in *Pete Seeger: In His Own Words*, 259. Originally published in *The Incompleat Folksinger* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).

[61] For an example of the Weavers encouraging audience participation and group singing, listen to their recording of "Goodnight, Irene" on their 1957 Vanguard release, originally recorded at Carnegie Hall in 1955. The Weavers, *The Weavers at Carnegie Hall*, Vanguard LP 9010, copyright 1957, Vanguard.

"gamblin'"), even without imitating Lead Belly's Southern accent. *Metronome* notes as much, declaring that "the kind of arty feeling…is completely missing, and one reason for it is because the group doesn't try to duplicate the dialect in which the song was originally sung. 'Why put on an accent; we can sing them as songs,' says Pete."[62]

The Mainstream Celebrates the Everyman: the Weavers, Folk Personae, and the Media Machine

The song that started as a charming, insider wink to Lead Belly and American folk history rocketed to an outright craze featuring imitations and musical-stylistic fads. Trade publications reflect how successful the Weavers really were at the time, as well as how Decca chose to market them as a group. The song was first mentioned in *Billboard,* in a full-page ad issued by Decca on June 17, 1950. The top two thirds of the page are dedicated to "Irene," the bottom third of the page features "10 DECCA Best Sellers" in much smaller print, using less dynamic, non-italicized typeface. In large print, the left side of the ad heralds "An exciting new DECCA hit!" while the right side reads "TZENA, TZENA, TZENA coupled with GOODNIGHT IRENE by GORDON JENKINS with His Orchestra and Chorus and THE WEAVERS"[63] (see Example 2.9, Decca ad for "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena" and "Goodnight, Irene" from *Billboard Magazine*, June 17, 1950). Ads like this were common in *Billboard*: they showcased an up-and-coming record, and capitalized on its

[62] Bill Coss, "The Weavers: These modern folk-singers speak up for modern jazz," in *Metronome*, October 1951.
[63] See full-page Decca Records ad for "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena," in *Billboard Magazine*, June 17, 1951, 17.

success to promote other promising or already-successful records by artists in their stable. Once it had been successful for quite some time, the Weavers' "Irene" was relegated to the smaller print of these types of ads, as it was for a November 11, 1950 ad featuring country artists Red Foley and Ernest Tubb's current releases, "Texas vs. Kentucky" and "The Lovebug Itch."[64]

Example 2.9 Decca ad for "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena" and "Goodnight, Irene" from *Billboard Magazine*, June 17, 1950.

In addition to the advertisements, "Irene" also had an extraordinary run on the *Billboard* charts. While "Tzena" first appeared on the "Best-Selling Pop Singles" and "Most-Played Juke Box Records" on July 1, 1950 at numbers 23 and 25, respectively,

[64] See full-page Decca Records ad highlighting Red Foley and Ernest Tubb, *Billboard Magazine*, November 11, 1950, 17.

when "Irene" made its debut only two weeks later at number 19 on the "Records Most Played By Disk Jockeys Chart," it quickly overtook "Tzena" the following week, rising to number 5. In the weeks that followed, the Weavers' recording crept into and climbed virtually every pop music chart – "Best-Selling Sheet Music," "Most-Played Juke Box Records," etc. – before beginning its reign at number 1 of the "Best-Selling Pop Singles" chart on August 26, 1950, where it remained until it was overtaken by Sammy Kaye's, slow, crooning, island-pop ballad, "Harbor Lights" on November 18th. "Irene" slowly declined in the rankings until it quietly made its exit in the December 30th issue that same year. These successes contributed to *Billboard* naming "Goodnight, Irene" the "top tune" of 1950, *and* the most commercially successful in regards to retail sales and jukebox plays in the January 1951 retrospective issue. *Billboard* also crowned Gordon Jenkins the top pop artist of the year (by retail sales and juke box plays), and declared the Weavers number 3 and 4 in the same categories.[65]

Record sales and rankings show only one facet of the Weavers' mass media blitz with "Goodnight, Irene." As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in 1951 the Weavers made a brief foray into film with their "telescriptions" with Louis D. Snader. They also quickly became a much-coveted, live, musical act and played at venues like New York City's Town Hall in December 1951. Of this performance, *The New York Times* noted that the

> volatile quartet of folk singers, took over Town Hall last night and whipped the packed audience into a state of excitement. It was a young

[65] *Billboard Magazine*, various issues from July 1950 through January 1951.

> crowd and it chortled and cheered and sang along with the artists….The music was almost invariably dewy-fresh in melody and the words had that particular naivete that no songwriter would dare use. The rhythms ranged from the quiet lullaby from Indonesia to the resounding pulsation of the African 'Weemahweh' as the three men and a girl threw back their heads and shouted aloud.[66]

Billboard also noted the new demand for their live act, deeming them a "hot class spot and concert property." In their typical trade lingo, they list the group's upcoming engagements as of January 1951:

> The quartet is skedded to kick off the location work with a two-weeker at the Thunderbird in Las Vegas, Nev., January 18. This date is followed with a one-month engagement in Ciro's in Hollywood beginning February 1. The group is also being sought by the Palmer House, Chicago, and may also work at the Waldorf Astoria Roof during this summer. Pete Kameron, the Weavers' manager, will take the road to work on deejay exploitation of the unit's disking and will accompany the group during its Las Vegas and Hollywood bookings.[67]

The language of these reviews, charts, and previews certainly reflect the success of the Weavers' live performances, but they also suggest one way the Weavers were straddling the line between commercial appeal and folk credibility. The charts and previews celebrate the commercial successes like increased bookings, record-sales, celebrity status, etc. Yet the language used in the reviews – "dewy-fresh," "naivete" – reflect those qualities that audiences found so intriguing and beguiling about the group.

Metronome's feature reinforces these associations, celebrating both the group's professionalism, and their seeming lack of artifice in these professional performances. "I can't remember having seen a more enthused, warm and thoroughly professional

---

[66] "Program of Songs Given By Weavers," in *The New York Times,* December 22, 1951.
[67] "Weavers Decca Hits Pull Clubs," in *Billboard Magazine*, January 13, 1951, 14.

group of entertainers. Yet the professional touch is strictly unintentional, according to Pete Seeger, the nominal head of the group….The keynote of the whole group is a kind of ingenious spontaneity which projects itself so well that the audience is captivated from the start."[68] As was the case with Harry Belafonte later in the decade, the Weavers' aura of spontaneity was interpreted as honest, sincere, and hence more authentic in spite of their professionalism.

Like Belafonte, the Weavers also sounded and looked authentically folksy "in comparison." In comparison to the popular artists with whom they shared space on the *Billboard* charts, the Weavers' persona came across as unpolished, spontaneous, and sincere. Rather than the sophisticated, meticulously crafted images of pop artists like Jo Stafford or Frank Sinatra who were often pictured in evening gowns or tailored suits, professionally lit and made up, Seeger, Hellerman, and Hays were often pictured in the attire of the average man, wearing slacks and button-down shirts, sometimes with the top button undone, sometimes with a tie. Their slacks often did not even match their jackets, and their shirts often looked worn. Just as the men were known to put on a tuxedo for special events like their 1955 performance at Carnegie Hall, Ronnie Gilbert did also, on occasion, wear formal attire such as the tea length gown she donned in the aforementioned Snader telescription. However, she most often wore more "everyday" styles like calf-length, a-line shirt dresses cinched at the waist. The Weavers typically appeared as if they had just plucked their performance attire right from their own

[68] Coss, "The Weavers," 1951.

closets, as opposed to other pop artists who looked as if they had been dressed by their label's stylists.

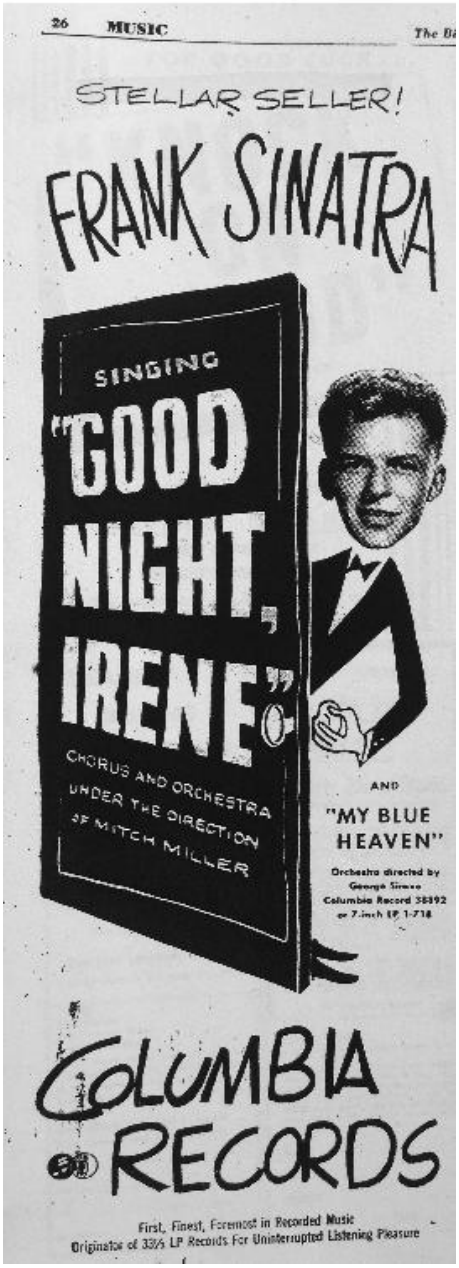
The Weavers' everyman image was bolstered by the way they were portrayed in print advertisements. Decca's earliest *Billboard* placement for the Weavers was the one placed on June 17, 1950 as mentioned above (see again Example 2.9). This ad was strictly text, featuring the songs' titles and the names of the artists, "Gordon Jenkins and His Orchestra and Chorus" and "The Weavers."[69] Absent from the ad were any of the artists' photographs, likenesses, or even illustrations like those featured in two Columbia Records ads for Frank Sinatra's version of the song on July 22nd and 29th.[70]

Sinatra's first ad is dominated by his name in bold, italic typeface above a centered photograph of the clean-shaven, smiling, and suited singer's head and shoulders (see Example 2.10, Frank Sinatra ad from *Billboard Magazine*, July 22, 1950). Perhaps attesting to the rising power of the *song* as opposed to the *singer* in the popular sphere, the half-page, July 29th ad still includes Frank Sinatra's name in large, black text at the top, while the boldest, most centered and eye-grabbing text is "GOOD NIGHT, IRENE" printed in large, white, bold typeface upon a sketch of a black door (see Example 2.11, Frank Sinatra ad from *Billboard Magazine*, July 29, 1950). A drawn, tuxedoed body peeks out from behind this door, with its hand seemingly turning the knob. A photograph of Sinatra's head has been cropped off his actual body, and sits perched

[69] Decca Ad, *Billboard*, June 17, 1950, 17.
[70] Sinatra "Goodnight, Irene" ads, *Billboard*, July 22, 1950, 20; and *Billboard*, July 29, 1950, 26.

Example 2.10 Frank Sinatra ad from *Billboard Magazine*, July 22, 1950.

Example 2.11 Frank Sinatra ad from *Billboard Magazine*, July 29, 1950.



atop the collar of the cartoon figure opening the door. In this ad, Sinatra literally stands behind the song.

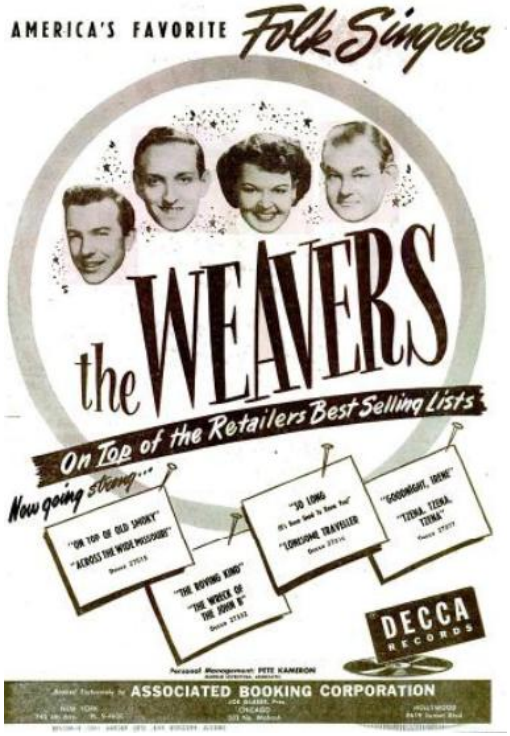
As the popularity of "Irene" grew, Sinatra's image stepped more and more into the background of Columbia's ads for his recording. However, as the Weavers'

popularity grew with their later recordings, their images seemed to crop up more and more in Decca's placements for their subsequent releases. In these images and the text that supports them, the ad-makers seem to play up their folksiness rather than the slick sophistication promoted in other pop artists. An ad placed in *Billboard* on July 14, 1951 by the Associated Booking Corporation boasts that the Weavers are "America's favorite *folk singers*," explicitly labeling them as unique from a pop artist (see Example 2.12, Weavers ad in *Billboard Magazine*, July 14, 1951).[71] However, the photographs of the Weavers were less caricatures of American frontier identity like those images in ads for country & western artists – a genre that was considered synonymous with "folk" prior to the Weavers' breakthrough into the pop charts – which included images of the artists wearing cowboy hats and overalls, or illustrations of nature like snow-capped mountains, the plains, and other wide-open places. In the July 14th ad the reader's attention is drawn to photographs of the Weavers' disembodied heads floating above their name, all enclosed in a large circle in the center of the page. No folksy clothing or images that would set the Weavers apart from everyday people; just their faces surrounded by text. When the ad includes more than just their heads, the reader is able to see their attire: everyday suits and a casual dress (see Example 2.13, Weavers ad in *Billboard Magazine*, July 21, 1951).[72] Hence, the Weavers were folksy enough to set them apart from the popular artists, but not as "exotically American" to group them with some of the most popular country & western stars of the era.

---

[71] Associated Booking Company ad, *Billboard*, July 14, 1951, 34.
[72] Weavers ad, *Billboard*, July 21, 1951, 15.

Example 2.12 Weavers ad from *Billboard Magazine*, July 14, 1951.



Example 2.13 Weavers ad from *Billboard Magazine*, July 21, 1951.

This type of earnest and studied sincerity could make a middle-of-the-road audience feel as if folk music was accessible to them, and that they, too, could participate with their own degree of credibility. In the case of the Weavers, their constructed authenticity was a lifestyle, ultimately a choice that any person could make; and many did. Not only did amateur musicians buy the sheet music to "Goodnight, Irene," both in the United States and in Europe,[73] professional musicians of many styles commercially-recorded the song on their own respective record labels.

Yet, such advertisements, images, celebrity, and commercial success could prove quite problematic to the more autonomous folk field of the early 1950s. As a holdover from the previous era from which the Weavers emerged, the autonomous folk music

[73] For example, see *Billboard*'s "England's Top Twenty" chart, November 18, 1950, 23.

field of the time valued music making by the everyman in everyday life over commercial success or celebrity status. While magazines like *Sing Out!* (first published in 1950) also affixed the labels of "authentic" and "valuable" to artists like Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly, and Josh White as did the Weavers and the Almanacs before them, the "everymen" *Sing Out!* hoped to mobilize in song were less the oppressed working class and more the growing "youth" class, who they claim "were the ones who were hungry to assimilate old and new folk songs."[74] The 1950s autonomous folk music sphere celebrated Seeger and the Weavers as folk educators who spread the good word to the largest audience ever – which happened to include a growing consumer class of young people – yet still assigned more autonomous prestige to musical practices that brought people together and fought against injustice than they did to the economic prestige of the commercial sphere.

As Seeger noted in his story about the fan that was so grateful he had never "gone commercial," the divide between the social-cultural goals of the autonomous and the economic-celebrity goals of the heteronomous is, by necessity, fluid and messy. Without having a "name" which would pull in a crowd, one's social message would be slow to reach the masses. Without the money that comes with being a professional who is paid to perform, an artist could not subsist on their ideals alone, afford to take their act on the road, or make recordings through which their message could be disseminated. And without a relationship to some accepted construct of "the folk," the

[74] "'If I Had a Song ...' A Thumbnail History of Sing Out! 1950-2000 ... Sharing Songs for 50 Years!" by Roger Deitz, Last accessed January 27, 2013, http://www.singout.org/sohistry.html.

Weavers would not have garnered the type of fame they did, for their seemingly fresh-faced, simple, and safe sincerity appealed to the American mainstream at a time when the greater world (with its complex international relations and the looming Cold War) and their local communities (with the explosion of new technologies and media in their homes) seemed so complicated and, at times, fraught with anxieties.

Covers and Conclusions

"Irene" had been passed by oral tradition from a Southern, black, convict songster, to white, urban, intellectual folk activists. Somehow, these activists – whether intentionally or not – had passed that song along to millions of people worldwide through their records, live performances, and sheet music sales. Yet, in those first months following their 1950 record release, perhaps the most powerful way they passed the tune along was inspiring other commercial artists and labels to record and release their own versions of "Irene."

As Jenkins' and the Weavers' "Irene" was still rising to number 1 on the *Billboard* charts, other artists released their own versions of the song, which, in turn, seemed to multiply exponentially each week that passed. In 1950 and 1951, "Goodnight, Irene" was everywhere. At its peak on September 16, 1950, *Billboard* advertized that there were a staggering *eighteen* different recordings of "Irene" available to purchase, each attributed to a different artist (including pop powerhouses like Frank Sinatra and Jo

Stafford, and country & western superstars like Ernest Tubb and Red Foley).[75] On one hand, the proliferation and popularity of other artists' recordings of "Goodnight, Irene" was the ultimate expression of heteronomous success: the tune had become a commodity. On the other hand, it could be viewed as one of the most effective folk transmissions ever: in commercially recording and mass-producing the song, the Weavers were able to deliver their material to the masses with an unprecedented breadth and speed.

Beyond inspiring so many commercial recordings, the Weavers' "Irene" also influenced popular taste, setting off a minor sheet music and recording craze for songs in 3/4 time such as Patti Page's "Tennessee Waltz."[76] *Billboard* winked that when the "Waltz" began to rise and "Irene" began to fall on the charts, Lee Hays changed the lyrics to reflect the song's fall from popularity: "Stop ramblin', stop gamblin'. Confess your sins and faults. You'd still be singing Goodnight, Irene if Pattie Page hadn't recorded Tennessee Waltz."[77]

The song had become so pervasive that even it inspired several parodies. At the height of the "Irene" craze, novelty singer, Ziggy Talent, released his answer to the song, "Please Say Goodnight to the Guy, Irene!" in which he plays the part of Irene's sleep-deprived neighbor, begging, *pleading*:

> Please say goodnight to the guy, Irene, and let me get some sleep.
> Please say goodnight or I'll die, Irene.
> Won't ya give us both a break?

---

[75] See the "Honor Roll of Hits," in *Billboard Magazine,* September 16, 1950, 26.
[76] "Sheet Sales in 3/4 Time," in *Billboard Magazine,* December 30, 1950, 1, 22.
[77] "Hello, Patti; G'Nite, Irene; or Let's Waltz," in *Billboard Magazine,* June 2, 1951, 1.

Say goodnight for heaven's sake!

We've been having thundershowers, and his clothes are soaking wet.
He's been hangin' 'round for hours, and you haven't answered yet. Have mercy!

Please say goodnight to the guy, Irene.
Get lost, Irene!
Go west, Irene!
Go north, go south, go east, I need some rest, Irene.
And let me get some sleep."[78]

RCA Victor even advertized for Talent's single, showcasing it in a full-page spot in order to grab readers' attention to the other recordings they were promoting at the time (see Example 2.14, Ziggy Talent ad in *Billboard Magazine* on November 11, 1950). Although Talent's parody was the most timely, country & western singer, Hank Thompson, offered up his parody, "Wake Up, Irene," in 1953, through which he pleads for the opposite of what Talent's zany song cries out for. After being wished goodnight for so many years, perhaps it was finally time for her to get up.[79]

Example 2.14 Ziggy Talent ad from *Billboard Magazine,* November 11, 1950.

[78] Ziggy Talent, "Please Say Goodnight to the Guy, Irene," (RCA Victor Records, 1950), 2 min. 27 sec.; from YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJn6Xdg2i9U (accessed February 17, 2013). Originally recorded for RCA Victor 20-3925 – (47-3925).
[79] Hank Thompson, "Wake Up, Irene," (Capitol Records, 1953), 2 min. 15 sec.; from YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TV2f2-puhjw (accessed, July 1, 2013). Originally recorded for Capitol Records, F2646.

Consumers craved all things "Irene," and created a demand for that which surrounded the tune (things like sheet music, and parodies), as well as a demand for the tune itself (in the form of the Weavers' recording and the subsequent versions by other artists). Out of all of the recordings available, the one released by Gordon Jenkins and the Weavers, was, by far, the most commercially successful both at the time and since.

Beyond the sound, *all* of these versions (including the Weavers') broke that cardinal rule of the folk field of cultural production, namely that the art be autonomous from the commercial sphere. They were a part of a self-perpetuating, demand-creating, money-making, commercial music machine. As demonstrated by their respective and collective receptions in *Billboard*, the advertising red-carpets that their record companies rolled out for the singles, and the exponential proliferation and purchase of recordings of a song that was virtually unknown for at least twenty years prior, these recordings were deeply embedded in the commercial process, and were very successful by its standards.

Distance or proximity to some perception of an original – whether that original is a recording or even the performer's notion of the song's author or originator – is also a vital element of the Weavers' performances of "Goodnight, Irene." The Weavers chose "Irene" less because it was a sweet, sing-able melody, and much more because of their proximity to Huddie Ledbetter as a man, artist, and representative of a certain construct of American folk authenticity. In performance, the Weavers repeatedly drew and reinforced these connections, bringing themselves closer and closer to the song's

authentic originator as they understood him to be. While the Weavers' "Goodnight, Irene" was recorded under the umbrella of a commercial record label and ultimately became an enormous financial success, their reference to an original – their intertextuality – was steeped in a particular understanding of history and folk identity.

"Irene" is not an inert musical text, or even a predetermined arrangement of lyrics and tune. Rather, it is a thread with many strands, a musical and cultural idea that continues to extend across time with its many versions, variants, and even covers. The Weavers' version is just one of these threads. It just so happens that their interpretation of the song arrived at a moment when the heteronomous field of cultural production intersected with the autonomous field, at a moment when commercial recording and mainstream American society embraced a particular construction of the folk and what they believed it represented.

As recorded by the Weavers and Gordon Jenkins, "Goodnight, Irene" demonstrates how the musical field of cultural production shifted in the early 1950s, and the rules of evaluating "folk" or "pop" songs as such, had shifted along with it. Not only had the lines between the two fields blurred in that a song or artist could toe the line in between the two areas, the Weavers' "Goodnight, Irene" somehow coexisted in the most extreme ends of the spectrum. It was *so* mass-produced and *so* mass-mediated that it not only sold an incredibly number of copies, but it inspired over a dozen commercial artists to record their own respective versions of the song which *also* sold many copies. At the same time, it was also so very folk in that the Weavers pulled

on the threads of Lead Belly's musical tradition and those of the Weavers' conception of American folk music. The Weavers' "Goodnight, Irene" was the quintessential commercial success, and the quintessential folk tribute.

Even in achieving such success in a very short period of time, the Weavers were still not able to escape their past. By 1950, communism had once again emerged as the national American enemy with the hatred and distrust of all things "Left" growing ever stronger through mid-decade. Although the Weavers were known for their commercial recordings of seemingly harmless and not overtly political folk songs like "Goodnight, Irene," "On Top of Old Smokey," and "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine," a series of fiercely political recordings, press, and *Daily Worker* pamphlets from the early 1940s bore witness to the Almanac Singers' unabashed, Leftist political activism. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) had struck gold when they connected one of the most popular American recording acts of the era to what they viewed as a Red scourge on society. In naming the likes of Pete Seeger as a communist, HUAC sought to arouse Americans' anxiety that the Red forces could infiltrate anything, even in their seemingly innocent folk music record collections.[80]

While the mainstream, commercial music field was tolerant of the Weavers' "exotically American" folk music and personae, it could not tolerate their history of Leftist political activism. Like their Decca-released "Goodnight, Irene" with Gordon

[80] Robert Cantwell describes how the House Un-American Activities Committee was tipped off to the Weavers history with Leftist politics. Harvey Matusow, a distributor for the *Daily Worker*, "testified before HUAC that three of the group [the Weavers], excluding Lee Hays, were party members. Matusow was later convicted of perjury – but he had destroyed the Weavers." Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 181.

Jenkins sounded, the Weavers appealed to the commercial recording industry and mainstream American as long as it looked and sounded folksy enough to appeal to a sense of national identity rooted in sincerity and a shared history while at the same time looking and sounding familiar enough as to not scare off middle-of-the-road audiences. Once Communism gained the national spotlight, the Weavers' careful balance of the folk and popular was thrown into disarray, and soon proved commercially unviable.

As the Red Scare slowly subsided in the mid-1950s, the Weavers would experience a resurgence in popularity, exemplified with their triumphant 1955 reunion concert at Carnegie Hall. This performance would be released by Vanguard in 1957 as *The Weavers at Carnegie Hall*, and featured selections of American and world folk music.[81] Several songs credited to Lead Belly were also on the bill that evening, most notably, "Goodnight, Irene." While they sang all of the same verses that were featured in the Decca release from 1950, this version was stripped bare of Jenkins' orchestral wash and the chorus of professional singers. Rather, this song was just the Weavers' vocal harmonies accompanied by a guitar, with the Carnegie Hall audience singing along at times. After being abandoned by the commercial recording industry during the Red Scare, the Weavers seemed to leave the industry behind in their return to the national stage; and Americans still wanted to sing along.

[81] The Weavers, *The Weavers at Carnegie Hall*, LP.

Chapter 3.The Common Man Meets the Matinee Idol: Harry Belafonte, Folk Identity, and the 1950s Mass Media

With his velvety voice, matinee idol looks, appearances in film and television, and dramatic, emotional renderings of folk songs and styles, Harry Belafonte received critical accolades and charted highly among some of the most successful pop artists of all time. Just as his handsome face was splashed across the pages of magazines and large, record-store displays, Belafonte's hit songs seemed to saturate the majority of *Billboard's* popular music charts during his peak recording years. The 1956 *Billboard* "Packaged Album" charts were dominated by Belafonte records, which jockeyed for the number one position with greats like the soundtrack to *The King and I*, and several Elvis Presley releases.[1] For all of 1956, he had at least one album constantly in the top ten: first *"Mark Twain"* (peaking at #3 on January 28th), soon joined by *Belafonte* (which also peaked on top of the "Best Selling Pop Albums Chart" on March 24th), and finally crowned by *Calypso* which eventually hit #1 on September 8th, and stayed there for a record-breaking tenure. In addition to his coverage in trade publications, Belafonte was embraced by mass media print outlets like no folk artist before. He was the subject of many feature articles, fan magazines, and even tabloid gossip about his health and love life. On March 2, 1959, a colorful image of Harry Belafonte at the microphone graced the cover of *Time*.[2]

---

[1] *Billboard* 68, all issues (1956).

[2] "TIME Magazine Cover: Harry Belafonte – March 2, 1959", from *Time Magazine*'s online cover archive. JPEG. http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19590302,00.html (accessed June 14, 2012).

In spite of this celebrity treatment, Harry Belafonte was no ordinary superstar. While his music and films were consumed in mass markets, earned millions upon millions dollars, and vied for popular attention alongside pop artists of the era, his story pushes past the boundaries of the popular, heteronomous sphere of the musical field of cultural production.

Like the quintessential pop artist of the 1950s, Harry Belafonte's success was measured by his songs' rankings on the *Billboard* charts, record sales, jukebox and radio plays, ticket sales, and saturation of mass media outlets like print, television, and film. These criteria were strictly *heteronomous* in the sense that prestige was allotted by measuring proliferation of the artistic product (number of records produced, radio plays, spaces occupied in jukeboxes, etc.), popularity (number of records bought, jukebox plays, etc.), and sheer economic value (profits). According to the above criteria, Belafonte was incredibly successful.

However, because he was a "folk" artist, Harry Belafonte was held to many additional standards of success which had little to do with his popularity and record sales. Because the vast majority of his repertoire could be categorized as "folk," and because he was so forcefully framed as a folk artist by his record company, the press and the fans, many believed in order to be successful as a folk artist, Belafonte also needed to achieve success according to the criteria of the autonomous, folk music sub-field of cultural production.

Traditionally, folk music was to some degree assessed by its non-commerciality, as "art-for-art's sake," or as a living artifact. What, precisely, defined the folk field and its corresponding values was often murky and ever-changing. The older, more scholarly guard of the folk field measured folk music by its universality (like the well-known, well-traveled folk tunes like the Child Ballads),[3] its relationship to a specific racial-national identity (like the English and Scottish ballads or the early collections of African American spirituals), and in others by its scarcity (such as the very specific and unique versions and variants of tunes so painstakingly collected by folk song hunters). As exemplified by the Almanac Singers, the Left-leaning political folk singers of the 1930s and 1940s valued folk music's ability to mobilize the masses towards political change. Overall, prestige in the autonomous folk music field was not even measured as "success," per se, but measured more as "authenticity" as determined by the performer, style, or song's adherence to an understanding of the traditional folk ideals.

Because Harry Belafonte's artistic and commercial output claimed strong positions in two distinct, even idealistically opposing ends of the field of cultural production, critical responses to his performances and persona were mixed. To those gauging his career from the heteronomous, popular music perspective, he was successful beyond anyone's wildest dreams and was – by comparison to many of his pop music contemporaries – an authentic folk performer. To those gauging his career from a purely autonomous, folk music perspective, he may have seemed an insincere, sell-out

[3] Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York: Folklore Press, 1956).

charlatan, with no true claim to perform folk music with sincerity. Because of this contradiction between popular success and folk music values, scholars have tended to omit Harry Belafonte from folk music scholarship.

In this chapter, I present evidence for the many ways Belafonte constructed a new folk identity – something I call a "modern everyman persona" – which, although falling well outside the non-commercial personae of artists like Lead Belly or Woody Guthrie, nevertheless struck a chord with mainstream, mass audiences who perceived him as an "authentic folk singer." First, I illustrate the contradictions between Harry Belafonte and the traditionalist folk ideals as framed by 1950s mass media critics, and supported by examples from his artistic and commercial output. Then, I demonstrate how Harry Belafonte was able to achieve mainstream success as a folk artist and why a vast American audience perceived him as "authentic" in spite of these contradictions. Through an analysis of selections from his recorded and televised output – specifically selections from the records *Calypso* (1956) and *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall* (1959), and his Emmy-award-winning television special, *Tonight With Belafonte* (1959) – I explore how Belafonte and the 1950s American media highlighted and repeated aspects of his biography that connected him to the traditional folk model (while subsequently underplaying those aspects that separated him from it), and framed him as an emotional and empathetic performer who demonstrated (through acting) that he truly felt what his songs' culturally diverse characters felt.

A Problem of Sincerity: Critical Responses to Harry Belafonte from an Autonomous Perspective

One way one can assess the different criteria by which Belafonte could be judged – from both the heteronomous and autonomous perspectives – is to examine critical reviews in mainstream publications of the time. Although the vast majority of critical reviews bordered on adulation, the handful of negative or, at least, skeptical critics wielded one of the most damning adjectives possible against Belafonte, deeming his folk performances "insincere." "Both the singing and the production are premeditated," writes Brooks Atkinson of *The New York Times*. "Obviously, the microphone is the biggest factor. It locks Mr. Belafonte in one spot on the stage and separates him from the audience.…Just about everything…in the show has been studied to the point where it has lost its spontaneity. Mr. Belafonte's personal figure gives an impression of having been produced.…Technique has begun to triumph over talent."[4] This contrast was noted by Murray Schumach (also of *The Times*), who pitted Belafonte (the technique) against his supporting act, bluesmen Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee (the talent). "They [Terry and McGhee] had no chorus. They sat, without affectation, on high chairs, with a harmonica, a guitar and their own voices. But they brought down the house with fervent spirituals, lusty folk songs and compassionate blues. *They have what Mr. Belafonte is throwing away – simplicity and sincerity, without which there is no*

[4] Brooks Atkinson, "The Theatre: Belafonte: Singer's Engagement at the Palace Begins," *The New York Times* (December 16, 1959).

artistry."[5]

Critics like Schumach and Atkinson perceived the traditionalist ideal as an honest, folk expression while they perceived Belafonte as a carefully studied and painstakingly prepared *performance* of folk identity. According to their standards of authenticity, a true folk performance would be somewhat "raw": the sound would be 1) unproduced: unmediated by recording or amplification technology; 2) untrained by classical standards; 3) not imitative of popular sounds and styles; and 4) would seem spontaneous and unrehearsed. Training, rehearsal, or production would not be necessary with a traditionalist performer because folk music would be an innate expression of their identity. Of course, the true traditionalist performer is necessarily an illusion, for all musicians construct their art in some way (whether by formal rehearsal, lessons, apprenticeships, or repetition of methods like jam sessions, improvisational techniques, etc.). What the critics responded to was the *appearance* of spontaneity and the traditional folk ideals.

While the "unstudied" and "spontaneous" personae of artists like Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee are convincing to the critics assessing their performances from an autonomous perspective, they nonetheless did not wield the same degree of power as did an artist like Belafonte. Rather than striving to create art-for-art's sake, his goal was to use the weight of his immense star-power and resulting economic success to further his social message of racial and economic equality.

---

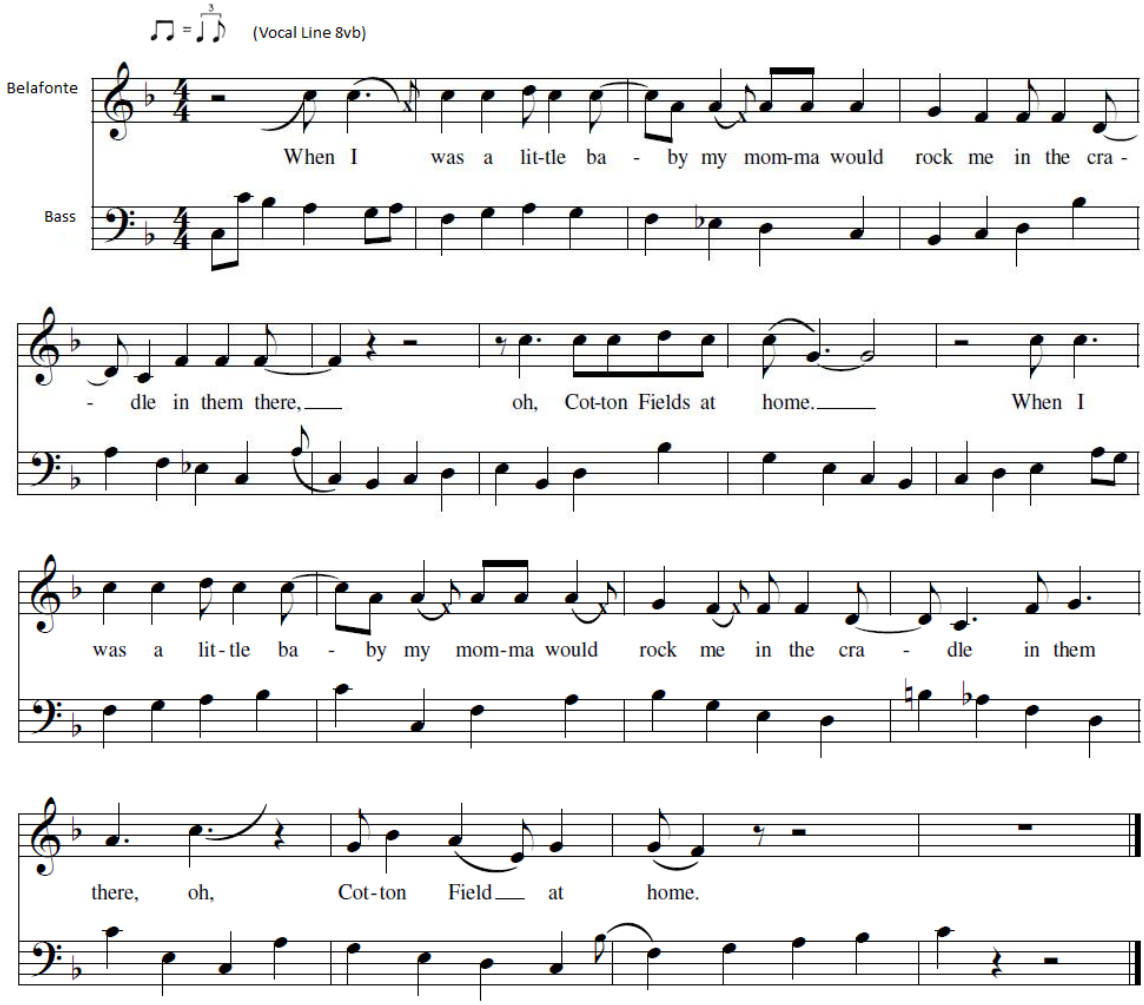
[5] Murray Schumach, "Belafonte Sings in Forest Hills; Terry and McGhee Win Cheers," *The New York Times* (August 1, 1964), emphasis mine.

Born in New York City, Belafonte did not "emerge" out of the rural isolation typically associated with "authentic" folk singers. Although he did perform folk repertoire from all over the world, Belafonte's sound was heavily influenced by pop and jazz. He also strayed from the straight-toned head voice, or the speaking-voice timbres used by many folk singers of the time, and opted instead for an affected sound, adapting his diction and accent to the repertoire at hand, adopting theatrical quavers and shouts into his lines, and inserting pre-written, spoken interludes and commentary into some songs. These spoken interludes are not unique to Belafonte's music. As described in Chapter 2, Lead Belly utilized spoken interludes to better flesh out his songs' narratives and create a distance between himself and his song's sometimes unsavory characters. Spoken interludes re-emerge in Disney's folk music models as presented in the *Davy Crockett* television serials as described in Chapter 4.

"Cotton Fields" – as released on the 1959 album *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall* – is a recording that illustrates many of the facets of a typical Harry Belafonte performance that led critics like Schumach and Atkinson to label him as an insincere folk artist.[6] In "Cotton Fields," Belafonte sings "When I was a little baby my momma would rock me in the cradle, in them there, oh cotton fields at home," high up in his chest voice, first over a walking bass, then over a small jazz combo (see Example 3.1, "Cotton Fields"). Contrary to the typically straightforward singing voices of male folksingers of the 1930s and 1940s like Pete Seeger or Woody Guthrie – voices which lay in the registers and

[6] Harry Belafonte, "Cotton Fields," on *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall*, LP, RCA Victor, LSO-6006.

Example 3.1 "Cotton Fields," from *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall*, mm. 9-25, transcribed by author. "x" note heads are ghosted pitches, which are sung as very short, implied notes on the syllable they are attached to. Vocal scoops both into and out of notes (see "When" in m. 9 and "oh" in m. 22) are also marked.



even timbres of the singers' speaking voice – and tunes with little melodic ornamentation, Belafonte's singing style features many aspects typical of a pop-jazz performance. Like a jazz musician, he scoops up into pitches (like in his first word "When" in measure 1 of Example 3.1). Furthermore, Belafonte "ghosts" or "implies" pitches (marked by the x note-heads in Example 3.1), giving the impression of both bent pitches and rhythmic swing when heard in conjunction with the walking line of Norm

Keenan's upright bass. Borrowing from the crooning style so popular in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Belafonte's diction features phonated consonants at the ends of phrases (in measures 15-16 and 23-24, the "n" in "Cotton," the "m" in "Home" as well as the "n" and "m" in the words "in them" in measure 21). By 1959, the American public had come to read these vocal techniques as markers of jazz, swing, and pop through the recordings of crooners like Tony Bennett and Frank Sinatra. By peppering his folk songs with such markers of pop, jazz, and swing, some critics felt his singing style was unnatural and tainted by influences outside folk music. However, Belafonte was successful precisely *because* he drew\ from non-folk influences. Markers of pop, jazz, and swing made folk music more accessible and appealing to mainstream audiences, thus giving major record labels incentive to advertize Belafonte's albums.

Belafonte continues to display markers of popular music and jazz past the first verse. He deliberately bends a few notes, (usually in the phrase "It was down in Louisiana, just a mile from Texarkana"), sounding at times like a jazz singer, and at others, a cabaret crooner, especially with increased syncopation and melodic ad libs in each subsequent verse. As the song reaches its climax, his voice lets out small bursts of air at the beginnings of words – much like Tony Bennett would in his more upbeat songs – and even ends the song on a gruff "Yeah."

In addition to "Cotton Field's" jazz and pop vocal stylings, the jazz combo that joins Belafonte and bassist Keenan after the first verse, and the many layers of recording technology and production (both in the live Carnegie Hall experience *and* in the

knowledge that the live performance was actually a recorded amalgamation of *two* evenings' performances engineered into a single album that simulates one continuous concert performance), *the song's story is not Belafonte's*. Actually, the song was first recorded in the summer of 1947 for the Folkways label by Lead Belly,[7] who wrote the song about his own mother rocking him in a cradle in the cotton fields while she worked. Lead Belly's account strengthens the aura of credibility surrounding his song by placing it within his own autobiographical experience:

> When I was a little baby, my mother used to tell me about how she used to take me to the field and rock me in the cradle. She was pickin' cotton for 25 cents a 100 pounds. When I got to be a boy, she was telling me all about and I got to pickin' cotton in Louisiana and I was pickin' 250 lbs. of cotton a day and I was thinkin' about what my mother told me.[8]

Just as Pete Seeger did not sing "Goodnight, Irene" from a place of personal history and how in his real life, Woody Guthrie did not completely personify the poverty-stricken Okie as he did in his songs, Harry Belafonte never picked cotton, and neither did his mother who was a housekeeper in New York City. In fact, Belafonte's personal story – coming up in New York City, spending several years in Jamaica, returning to the states and working his way through the theater, film, pop and then folk music – had been so well publicized by the late 1950s, it would be near impossible for audiences to take the

---

[7] In their Ledbetter biography, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*, Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell provide a detailed Lead Belly discography, which describes the recording date, city, label, or field recorder (i.e. John Lomax) of each known Lead Belly track as of the book's publication in 1992. According to this discography – and the liner notes cited below – "Cotton Fields" was first recorded as "Cotton Song" on Folkways LP 14 & 2014 in New York City in the summer of 1947.

[8] Jeff Place, liner notes to the Lead Belly compilation album "Where Did You Sleep Last Night: Lead Belly Legacy vol. 1", p. 9, (Compact disc), Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings, Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

story of "Cotton Fields" as his own. Rather than singing from personal experience, Belafonte was a self-described "song actor," and inhabited the character of the songs he chose.

In using the term like "insincere" as a way to assess the value or strength of Belafonte's musical performances, critics signaled that they were not assessing Belafonte as a part of the heteronomous, commercial side of the cultural field; rather, they judged him using more autonomous – and less tangible – factors borrowed from a construction of the traditional folk ideals. This language has a long history in institutional understandings of folk music and the folk. Historically, terms "simplicity" and "sincerity" have been invoked to describe an "authentic" folk expression, while "complexity" and "insincerity" have been understood to mean the opposite. Folk scholar Regina Bendix writes that scholars have tended to "use the term authenticity in conjunction with truth…[thus invoking] an internalized, *sincere* sentiment, a stage of being that contains only the unadulterated, nonposturing self."[9] This correlation between an inherent sincerity and truth links folk authenticity to a pure, natural honesty that cannot be learned or faked; either one has it or one does not.

According to these standards of sincerity and authenticity, the ideal folk performance (which was truly an ideal, as it is a rather impossible standard to attain) would have been traditionalist: a spontaneous expression, organically sprung forth from an artist's personal history, and unmediated by modern tools like amplification,

[9] Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 34, emphasis mine.

mechanical reproduction, rehearsals, etc. Performers like Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie who were portrayed as traditionalist were seen as sincere because their music was perceived as an organic consequence of their upbringings (although in reality, there was a certain level of artifice and "acting" in each). Furthermore, they were deemed sincere because audiences identified the performers' person, persona and character as one and the same. The traditionalist folk archetype would fit into this category, hence seeming more "honest" and "sincere." Performers portrayed as traditionalists – like Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie – were the standard-bearers of folk authenticity to these critics and the revivalists.

The fact that Harry Belafonte was a more openly theatrical performer certainly contributed to Atkinson's and Schumach's negative reactions to his live performances. Belafonte was careful to perform what seemed to be traditional, even canonical, folk repertoire, such as Child ballads like "Lord Randall," or the Lead Belly tunes "Sylvie" and "Cotton Fields." But to the trained ear, his sound was shaped by pop and jazz, genres that had a much greater reach (and much greater power) into the heteronomous spaces of the cultural field. Belafonte did not "emerge" out of the rural isolation typically associated with traditionalist folk singers, or even the characters of his songs. He still felt the tension between his person, his persona, and his songs' characters. As he notes, he was further from his "roots" than his obvious competitors:

> I hadn't hung out in the Dust Bowl with Woody Guthrie, or played banjo around hobo campfires. I wasn't from the American South, like Leadbelly, I couldn't play a six-string guitar, much less a twelve-string, as he did. I'd never done the fieldwork that inspired field hollers; I'd never

> been on a chain gang, from which some of the most powerful folk songs had come. I wasn't even a full-fledged Jamaican, or a black from Harlem with full Afro-American roots. All this mattered, deeply, in the burgeoning folk movement of the early 1950s, because *authenticity was what the songs were about, and an inauthentic singer, which was what I appeared to be, had no right to sing them*.[10]

Although he laments that he lacked the typical traditionalist folk origin story, Belafonte still admits – even boasts – that he did not learn the vast majority of his folk repertoire through "absorption." Instead, he learned them by combing through the recordings at the Library of Congress, very much like countless twentieth century folk scholars.[11] To folk intelligentsia like Pete Seeger, Alan Lomax, etc., making such a pilgrimage to the Library of Congress was a construction of "insider" behavior, a way to *earn* one's folk authenticity, or was seen as authentic behavior in and of itself.

While Belafonte's academic method of learning folk music lent him credibility by the standards of the mid-century folk *scholars*, it contradicted the traditionalist nature of many of the characters he played in enacting his songs, as did his sleek, polished, theatrical, and larger-than-life public persona. Moreover, Belafonte's persona actively saturated all aspects of American media during the mid- to late-1950s. Prior to his successful television variety shows like *Tonight With Belafonte* (CBS, 1959), and *New York 19* (CBS, 1960), Belafonte appeared as a featured guest on popular prime-time network programs such as DuMont's *Calvacade of Stars* (November 16, 1951), and NBC's *The Bell Telephone Hour: Adventures in Music* (January 12, 1959). Harry had also

---

[10] Harry Belafonte and Michael Schnayerson, *My Song: A Memoir,* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011) 95, emphasis mine.

[11] "Headliners: Lead Man Holler," in *Time Magazine,* (March 2, 1959), http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,892273,00.html (accessed September 16, 2010).

graced the dramatic stage with the American Negro Theatre in 1946,[12] and musical stage in productions like the musical, *John Murray Anderson's Almanac* (1953), and Paul Gregory's production of *Three for Tonight* (1955). While often politically-oriented or socially-conscious, these multi-mediated performances afforded Belafonte a level of exposure that was not within reach of more "traditional" artists like Terry and McGhee.

Harry's presence was also felt on the radio as a guest on radio programs (such as the December, 1953 episode of the theater series *Stage Struck*, hosted by Mike Wallace) in addition to his records receiving abundant radio play. In its July 21, 1956 issue, *Billboard* premiered the "Most Played By Jockeys" chart, where "albums are ranked in order of the greatest number of plays on disk jockey radio shows thruout (sic) the country. Results are based on The Billboard's weekly survey among the nation's disk jockeys."[13] In the chart's inaugural week, *Calypso* premiered in the number two spot (right below Frank Sinatra's *Songs for Swingin' Lovers*), peaked at number one on February 2, 1957 (above fellow RCA Victor artist, Elvis Presley), and remained at number one until April 20th of that same year. Many weeks, multiple Belafonte albums appeared on this chart at the same time.

On the silver screen, Belafonte was featured prominently in big Hollywood films such as director Gerald Mayer's *Bright Road* (1953), Otto Preminger's musical with an all-black cast, *Carmen Jones* (1954), Robert Wise's controversial 1957 film, *Island in the Sun,* which tells the tale of forbidden interracial love between Caribbean David Boyeur

[12] Belafonte and Schnayerson, *My Song,* 57-64.
[13] "Most Played By Jockeys," in *Billboard Magazine*, (July 21, 1956) 28.

(Belafonte) and Caucasian Jocelyn Fleury (played by starlet Joan Fontaine), and the Belafonte-produced, box-office flop, *Odds Against Tomorrow* (1959). Belafonte's social agenda of racial equality was evident in these mainstream, commercial films, and with their widespread release his agenda was given a much wider-reaching stage than the agendas of artists like Guthrie and Seeger who worked more with recording and live performance.

Circling around Belafonte's ample television, film and audio presence, were the abundant articles, blurbs, reviews, photos, chart appearances, and advertisements that featured, mentioned, or exploited Belafonte's image, name, or artistic products. His image was so powerful that RCA even placed ads featuring Belafonte *not* for his albums, but for other products. For instance, in the January 17, 1957 issue of *Billboard*, RCA ran a full page ad with a large picture of Belafonte's face, with the bold headline: "BELAFONTE HELPS YOU SELL." Below, the ad continues: "Now you can offer 39 hits by Harry Belafonte (America's leading album-seller!) for $5 with any of these RCA Victor 45 'Victrolas'"[14] Underneath the text and a large picture of the singer's face, Belafonte albums are scattered amongst five RCA record players in the ad's foreground. Another RCA Victor ad from the February 16, 1957 issue of *Billboard* is geared towards the record-seller, and publicizes Belafonte promotional products such as a "Merchandiser display" featuring a "colorful display kit" which "holds five each of the 20 Belafonte 45 singles – a total of 100 records," in addition to "Belafonte photo sleeves" which are

[14] RCA Victor ad, *Billboard Magazine*, (January 17, 1957) 23.

touted as "Real traffic-stoppers! On every record, an eye-catching four-color sleeve, featuring a picture of Belafonte."[15]

While the product tie-ins between a best-selling RCA Victor artist, record players and artist merchandise are apparent, Belafonte's image was used to sell more abstract products like advertising itself. In the March 30, 1957 issue of *Billboard*, RCA runs a full-page ad with an inset in the upper right hand corner of a scaled-down ad for the album *An Evening with Belafonte* (1957). In bold letters, the headline reads:

> Here's the ad that will keep the ball rolling for Belafonte's newest! Appearing in all these major publications: The New Yorker, Seventeen, The Long Player, This Month's Records, The Forty-Fiver. And that's not all! The newest album by the country's biggest-selling album artist is being promoted heavily all along the line: An Evening with Belafonte is the March popular-record selection of the RCA Victor Save-On-Records programs. It will be featured in the Save-On-Records bulletin for March. An Evening with Belafonte is featured in RCA Victor's exciting, full-page "World of Romance" advertisement in Holiday, Esquire, The New Yorker and The Saturday Review. And…RCA Victor further supports your selling with radio promotion and ready-to-run ad mats in 3 sizes. Contact your RCA Victor Record Distributor today! YOU'RE IN THE MONEY WITH *AN EVENING WITH BELAFONTE!*[16]

This advertisement for an advertisement itself demonstrates the power and far-reaching commercial effects of an artist of Belafonte's level of success and saturation in American media. Certainly, his music was a huge contributing factor to this phenomenon. However, even his image – the mere *idea of* Belafonte – was so powerful and prevalent during the time, that it was used to drive sales of all types of commercial products.

---

[15] RCA Victor ad, *Billboard Magazine,* (February 16, 1957) 35.
[16] RCA Victor ad, in *Billboard Magazine*, (March 30, 1957) 49.

While his persona and image bombarded Americans through print, television, film, radio, records, and advertisements, his songs' characters had to be sought and found. Many audiences believed Belafonte's characters reached to the present from a faraway place and time like little gems both they and Belafonte had to carefully seek and mine. This aspect of his performative folk identity reflects the contradiction between the school of thought that values traditionalist performers who learned their music by absorption from their "natural surroundings" as the only true authentic sources of folk music, and the school of thought that also values the dedicated, at times, scholarly study, the forceful soaking up of folk music as an authentic and respectful mode of learning folk song. While the traditionalist mode of learning is perceived as somewhat passive, figures like John Lomax and Pete Seeger also valued this active pursuit – the "hunt" – as a way of earning one's stripes and *achieving* authenticity.

Compounding the contradiction between the traditionalist ideal and his larger-than-life celebrity persona, Harry Belafonte also prided himself in being considered a savvy music businessman and political activist, a label that contradicts the traditionalist, autonomous, "art-for-art's-sake" understanding of folk musicians that prevailed in the first half of the twentieth century. Belafonte describes how he built a multi-media business empire as a black man, much to the irritation of the many who ran the white-dominated music and film industries:

> This *business* thing – I liked it! I liked being responsible for rising or falling by my own decisions. I also liked working with black professionals who understood where I came from and what I was trying to do…So now I created Belafonte Enterprises, Inc….The music-publishing company

> became one subsidy of BEI. For film projects, I formed HarBel Productions, both to scout for good scripts and to pitch them to the studios, not just as some supplicant on bended knee, but as a business – a black business – coming at them on their own level. Another aim of the company handled my concert tours. Yet another backed Broadway plays…All this black corporatizing stirred mixed reactions in the entertainment world. I was described as arrogant…Even among whites in the industry who never used the N-word, the whole concept of BEI rankled. Black people weren't supposed to make contract demands. They were supposed to be grateful for what they got.[17]

While Harry Belafonte's performances hearkened to seemingly faraway times, places, and cultures, his actions as Belafonte the man were quite modern and urban. Furthermore, unlike the public's understanding of black artists of the previous decades (i.e. Lead Belly, Josh White, or many jazz and blues performers), he publicized his *agency* in his own affairs. In incorporating his businesses, Belafonte protected himself legally, and staked a claim on artistic and financial credit for his artistic products. Furthermore, he ensured that if successful, his art would be forever linked to heteronomous gains like critical acclaim *and* commercial profit. Belafonte self-identified as a *professional folk musician* in the fore of the mainstream entertainment business, as opposed the image of the virtuosic amateur that surrounded the traditionalist performers.

Harry Belafonte was a transitional figure in two ways: first, he represented the larger, more difficult-to-accept transition between the more autonomous, deterministic, and traditionalist first wave of the folk revival (those who were successful in the 1930s and 1940s), and the more heteronomous, democratic, participatory, and commercial, second wave of the folk revival that boomed in the 1960s. Moreover, he represented

[17] Belafonte and Schnayerson, *My Song*, 157-158.

the more subtle transition between folk performers like the Weavers who had personal roots in the wave that struck during the 1930s and 1940s revival, and the next generation of late 1950s and early 1960s folk performers who were typically younger, learned of the first wave second hand, and incorporated many more stylistic fusions and repurposings into their performances.

In calling Belafonte "insincere," critics like Schumach and Atkinson were picking up on the differences between Belafonte's savvy, business-like, theatrical approach to his music and the traditionalist folk image that had been accepted for decades by institutions like the Popular Front, folk scholars, and audiences. Because Belafonte was such a transitional figure who in many ways defied clean-cut genre categorization, it must have been both difficult for critics to gauge the quality of his work using correct criteria, *and* quite easy for critics to measure his success using whatever criteria was most comfortable for them. Hence the contradiction: how the critics determined Belafonte's sincerity, or authenticity depended greatly on from which part of the cultural field they were evaluating Belafonte's work. The critics who felt Belafonte was insincere came from a much tighter, isolated corner of the field, and evaluated his work using autonomous standards. The critics and fans who were not as concerned with this type of insincerity, or found him to be sincere *in relation to* other more popular entertainers, evaluated his work a broader, more inclusive, heteronomous space within the field of cultural production.

In the following section, I illustrate how in carefully constructing a new American folk identity I define as a "modern everyman persona," Belafonte negotiated the contradiction between autonomy and the traditional folk ideals on one hand, and heteronomity and commerciality on the other. Three primary elements contributed to Harry Belafonte's ability to craft and embody the modern everyman persona. First, he placed a great emphasis on elements of his biography which forged stronger bonds between himself and paradigms of folk authenticity and American identity like Guthrie and Ledbetter. Second, he capitalized on his training and talent as a stage and screen actor to perform his songs with such physical and audible emotion that the audiences truly believed that Belafonte truly felt what the characters in his songs felt. Lastly, he and the publicity machine of the 1950s mass media conscientiously manufactured his physical image in such a way that set him apart from the seemingly more ephemeral and forward-looking popular musicians like Elvis Presley who may have disturbed and offended the middle of the road sensibilities in the 1950s.

Overcoming the Contradiction: Manufacturing the Modern Everyman

Belafonte made no claims to traditionalism or folk purity; in fact, he seemed to scorn the idea. Emily Coleman of *The New York Times* wrote that Belafonte had "no patience with purists who say that he takes too many liberties in rearranging his material and in theatricalizing its contents. 'Purism,' he snorts, 'is the best cover-up for mediocrity. They [purists] hate to change. If there is no change we might just as well go

back to the first 'ug,' which must have been the first song.'"[18] Rather than strive to exude traditional folk ideals as they were understood by folk purists or accept the notion that he had no right to perform folk music because of the circumstances of his life, Harry viewed his music as something new, and instead created a new folk persona that bypassed his race and put him in a position to bring about his desired political change.

Belafonte tapped into tradition while simultaneously looking forward in his construction of the modern everyman persona, which I define as a 1950s sense of American identity based not only on a traditionalist or proletariat folk identity celebrated by folk figures like Alan Lomax, Pete Seeger, and Woody Guthrie, but also on consumerism, the American Dream of upward economic mobility, and a growing embrace of celebrity culture. Belafonte certainly had political urges, especially in his missions for racial and class equality. Yet Belafonte differed from the revivalists of the 1930s and 1940s mentioned above in that he chose to use his celebrity status and the corresponding monetary wealth it to fuel his desired social change.

Historian and journalist, David Halberstam, describes this shift in American identity as a result, in part, of the growing economic power of the emerging youth class. "At the beginning of the decade, their music was still slow and saccharine, mirroring the generally bland popular taste. In the years following the traumatic experiences of the Depression and World War II, the American Dream was to exercise personal freedom

[18] Emily Coleman, "Organization Man Named Belafonte," *The New York Times Magazine,* (December 13, 1959) 40, 42.

not in social and political terms, but rather in economic ones."[19] The 1950s American identity was interlocked with individuals' participation in the commercial, heteronomous portions of whatever field of cultural production one chose to participate in. Prestige and political power was offered to those who were commercially successful, and Americans reveled in their power of being able to assign that prestige, and speak with their wallets.

An artist like Harry Belafonte offered Americans a dual opportunity to reshape their national folk identity: while he was an artist who afforded Americans the chance to participate in the forward-looking and ever-growing commercial landscape, he also provided Americans the chance to hearken back to that which was perceived as their "roots." Belafonte pushed his construction of the folk aesthetic into the mainstream. In doing so, he appealed to America's sense of collective identity, antimodernist urges and anxieties. In some ways Belafonte also managed to rearrange white audiences' conceptions of black performers, turning his race and the associations that came along with it into an asset, something that was understood to be a signal of folk credibility in this case.

Writing the Authentic Folk Origin Story

The first way critics, fans, and Belafonte overcame the contradiction between new and old constructions of American folk identity, was to place great emphasis on

[19] David Halberstam, *The Fifties*, (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1993), x.

aspects of Belafonte's coming-up story that "boost" his folk credibility in the traditionalist sense. One way this was accomplished was the continuous emphasis on the part of Belafonte's childhood spent living with family in Jamaica, implying that Belafonte has first-hand knowledge of the Caribbean music he popularized on his record-breaking album *Calypso*. Whether published in full-length biographies or mass-market fan magazines, announced by a radio deejay, press releases, or Belafonte, himself, a romanticized, even quixotic view of Harry's time in Jamaica is a fundamental portion of all Belafonte biographies. In fact, stories of this time in his life were exaggerated to the point of myth. Arnold Shaw's 1960 Belafonte biography features a typical representation of the singer's time in Jamaica as both musically and emotionally transformative for the young Harry.

> As against the cold, dirty streets of Harlem, his playground was miles and miles of sun-drenched beaches, made exciting by the unceasing roar of the surge and the ebb and flow of the blue-green Caribbean. Exotically scented flowers and tropical fruits grew in profusion, filling a growing youngster's eyes and mouth with easily accessible delights. There was a sense of freedom and lonely peacefulness in wandering along the white sandy beaches and over endless winding roads. In Kingston's crowded streets, Harry's ears became attuned to the sound of calypso singers whose lifting and crazily accented songs later figured so prominently in his career.[20]

This type of sentimental language – "sun-drenched beaches," "exotically scented," "easily accessible delights," etc. – juxtaposes the island of Jamaica and it's dark-skinned inhabitants against the urban, industrialized landscape of New York City, thus situating Jamaica in the past, in a simpler time where a boy could wander the beaches and

[20] Arnold Shaw, *Belafonte: An Unauthorized Biography*, (Philadelphia: Chilton Company, 1960), 25.

experience nature without any mention of the hustle, bustle, and worries of modern life. Even though the "past" painted by this type of romantic language was not "American," it was nostalgic, and fed into America's definition of the traditional folk ideals of the isolated (an island far away from "here"), the antimodern (as set apart from contemporary, urban American society), and the pastoral (with the imagery of the beaches, and untamed wildflowers and tropical fruits). And by expressing familial and experiential associations with Jamaica, Harry and his promoters touted Harry's natural, innate, first-person relationship to the culture of the Caribbean.

Belafonte highlights this aspect of his history in his 1959 Carnegie Hall performance of "Jamaica Farewell," a song adapted (some claim stolen) from the old Jamaican tune "Ironbar,"[21] with new lyrics and arrangements by Irving Burgie, who was better known as Lord Burgess (see Example 3.2 "Jamaica Farewell," and Example 3.3, vocal lines from "Jamaica Farewell" and "Iron Bar"). By the time he performed the song at Carnegie Hall, "Jamaica Farewell" had become one of the defining singles of *Calypso*, and one of Belafonte's signature songs in live performance. The song was advertised as the "A" side of a single ("B" side of "Once Was") in an ad from a September 1956 issue

[21] Music Copyright Infringement Resource, "Walters v. Shari Music Publishing Corp. 126 U.S.P.Q. 268 (S.D.N.Y. 1960)," UCLA and Columbia Law Schools, http://cip.law.ucla.edu/cases/1960-1969/Pages/waltersshari.aspx (accessed June 15, 2012). In this case brought against Harry Belafonte's music publishing house, Lionel Walters (complainant) claimed that Harry Belafonte and Lord Burgess infringed upon the copyright of the Jamaican song "Iron Bar" with their recording of, copyrighting of, and profiting from their hit "Jamaica Farewell." The court found that "Iron Bar" was a traditional Jamaican folk song, and hence, not subject to copyright law. Although Belafonte was not penalized in this instance, this case illustrates the complex matter of adapting, copyrighting, and profiting from traditional folk song. While "Iron Bar" does not have one definitive author – and therefore, Belafonte did not legally offend a particular individual – he did profit off of Jamaican culture, and did "assign" himself and Lord Burgess as authors of "Jamaica Farewell." It should be noted that Belafonte and Burgess always maintained and profited from the assertion that "Jamaica Farewell" was (or derived from) traditional Jamaican song.

of *Billboard*,[22] and first hit The Top 100 on November 3rd of that year, peaking at number eighteen the following February 9, and remaining on the chart until the week of April 23, 1957.[23]

On *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall,* Belafonte introduces "Jamaica Farewell" without musical accompaniment, speaking in a far-off voice, trailing off the ends of his words into silence, and speaking in short phrases punctuated by pauses, (illustrated below by ellipses).

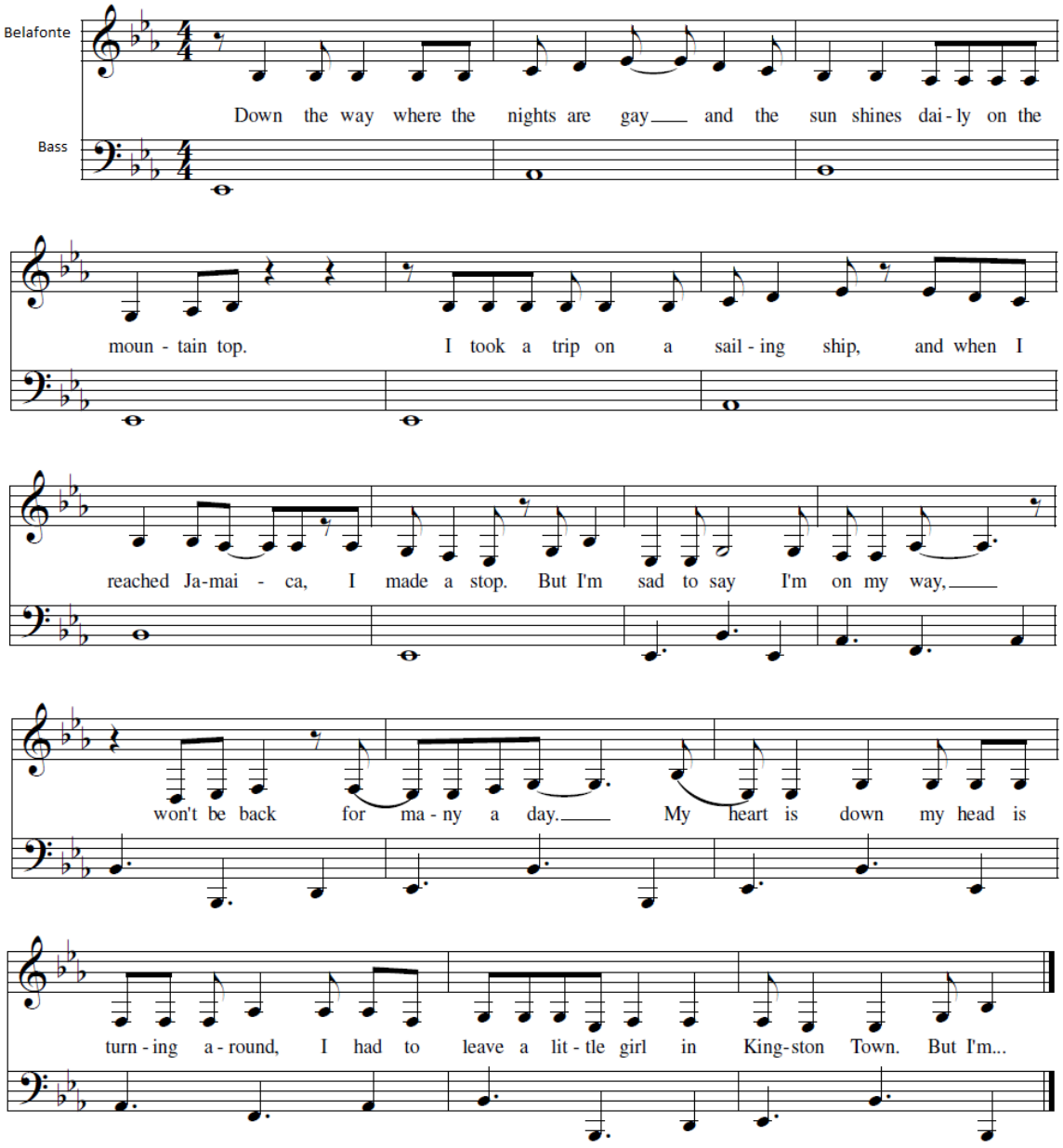
> As a small boy…I spent many, many years down in the West Indies…To the many hours of the many days…and the many weeks that I was there…I spent most of my time down at the docks…swimming with the other boys…mainly… but also listening to the songs and the stories that the sailors used to sing and tell. Many of them…I will never ever be able to repeat…But of the ones that I can…I can always remember that when the sailors were leaving from their island…for some far-off country…they would sing…the "Jamaica Farewell." [Acoustic guitar introduction…][24]

Belafonte's spoken introduction sets up the song that follows as a memory, rather than a musical composition enacted and re-enacted on millions of copies of several different albums and singles. From this introduction and the subsequent song, one would never know that "Jamaica Farewell" was not a song Harry heard as a young boy sung by sailors leaving their sweethearts, with the chorus of "Sad to say, I'm on my way, won't be back for many a-day. My heart is down, my head is turnin' around, I had to leave a little girl in Kingston town." The traditional Jamaican *mento*[25] tune "Ironbar" had been

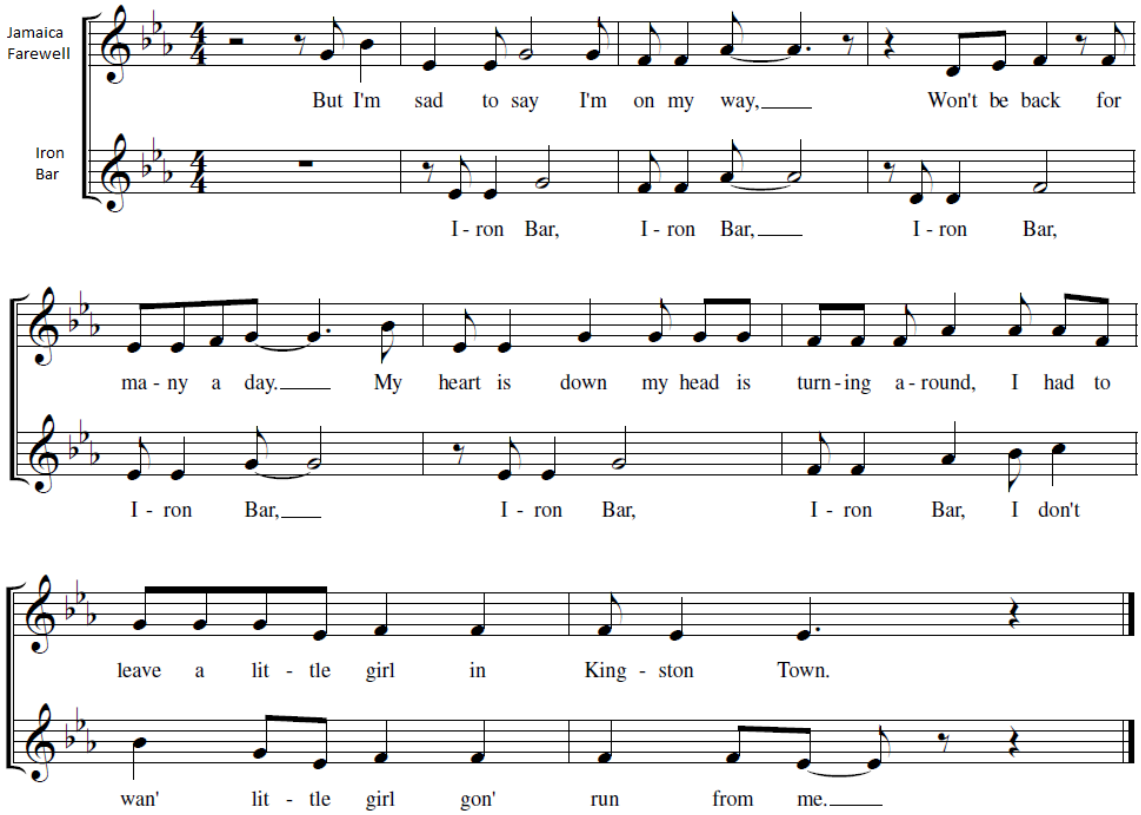
---

[22] RCA Victor ad, *Billboard* , (September 15, 1956), 19.
[23] "The Top 100," in *Billboard*, (February through April 1957).
[24] Harry Belafonte, "Jamaica Farewell," on *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall*, LP, RCA Victor, LSO-6006.
[25] Donald R. Hill, *Calypso Calaloo: Early Carnival Music in Trinidad*, (Gainesville, FL: The University Press of Florida, 1993), 93. Hill describes mento as a common style of Jamaican folk song.

Example 3.2 "Jamaica Farewell," from *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall*, vocal and bass line, mm. 2-18, transcription by the author. Belafonte sings with rhythmic freedom while the bass line and accompaniment remains steady. For example, in m. 10, Belafonte hurries on "made a stop," and takes his time on "But I'm" leading into the chorus.



Example 3.3 The vocal lines of the choruses from "Jamaica Farewell" from *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall* by Harry Belafonte, and "Iron Bar" from *Beer Joint & Tailoring* by the Jamaican group The Jolly Boys (1991) (First Warning Records, 1991), transcriptions by the author. With regards to melody, rhythm, and lyrics, the chorus of The Jolly Boys' "Iron Bar" is a typical representation of the majority of the versions of the song I was able to find. For ease of comparison between the vocal lines, "Iron Bar" has been transposed down from its original key of F major to E-flat major.



transformed and adapted from the aggressive romantic pursuit of some versions and sexually provocative lyrics of others, into a nostalgic, first-person memory, linked to the original by its melody and general harmonic structure. By linking himself to his Caribbean heritage, and by sharing his personal experiences supposedly hearing this music in its "original context," Belafonte frames himself as a traditionalist. His skillful acting allows people to believe that this exotic dream is a reality, at least for Belafonte if not for the audience.

Forging Authenticity by Promoting Connections to the Lower Classes

Belafonte's life was also advertised as a "rags-to-riches" story, thus linking him to the American Dream and the revival's "everyman" model. This was accomplished through storytelling and the reinforcement of select facts and anecdotes from his life, and through visual imagery. As someone who was photographed often, appeared in film, in television, and on album covers, Belafonte's physical appearance and style went a long way towards building his everyman image. For example, on the cover of the 1957 fan magazine, *The Belafonte Story*, Harry sits outside by the ocean, smiling, and gazing off into the distance, wearing the clothes of a common man: trousers, and a loose, white button-down shirt with his sleeves rolled up and his chest exposed. The text emphasizes the magazine's contents, which include the lyrics to many of his Caribbean songs, description of his musical career, and the story of "THE MAN: from New York to Jamaica to Hollywood." Already this is the story of someone who started from commonplace beginnings, and ended up with a glamorous Hollywood lifestyle. In the magazine's table of contents, the rags-to-riches story is fleshed out in greater detail: "In 1946, he was a janitor. In 1950, he was a partner in a sandwich shop. In 1957, already the idol of a whole generation of American teen-agers who were beginning to tire of rock and roll, the boy who was searching for artistic meaning in his life was also banking close to $500,000 a year."[26] Virtually all of the press on Belafonte told this same story: the hard-working boy who came from modest beginnings and had trouble making his

[26] *The Belafonte Story* (fan magazine), ed. in chief, Josi Gameaux, (New York: Almanac Publications, 1957), 3.

way, but he had a dream, he had perseverance, and with that good old American pluck and a spiritual revelation against the "ephemeral" popular trend of the time, Belafonte was able to make it to the top without compromising his artistic integrity.

Although audiences perceived this to be Belafonte's "natural" look, this snapshot of a beach-dwelling, casual, relaxed, beautiful man was a part of a carefully crafted image perfected by Belafonte and his team of agents, producers, record companies, etc. in order to better relate to the lower and middle classes, and thus link himself to the disenfranchised masses. According to Belafonte, he and his team made a decision to change his performance attire when he chose to make the leap from aspiring pop singer to folk singer and activist in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In his memoir, Belafonte recalls how in order to appear to have more folk credibility for his 1951 debut at Max Gordon's Village Vanguard in New York's Greenwich Village – where the likes of Josh White, Lead Belly, and more recently, the Weavers had had acclaimed engagements – theater producer, Jack Rollins, encouraged Harry "to change from those suits [he'd] worn as a pop singer to a fitted shirt (unbuttoning a critical button or two), tight pants, and a heavy-buckled sailor's belt."[27]

This uniform – the tight pants, belt, open shirt – became a signature of Harry Belafonte's performances and of his persona. Writers almost always mention his attire, remarking on how his clothing choice helped define his casual, folksy style, and also how it amplified his sex-appeal (without perpetuating the image of the "dangerous black

[27] Belafonte and Schnayerson, *My Song,* 96.

man"). The author of a 1957 Belafonte fan magazine comments that "so there was Harry on stage, wearing one of his colorful bullfighter shirts, open at the collar, and those black silk trousers made with a minimum of black silk. Said Harry: 'I couldn't see myself singing work songs or about chain gangs in a dinner jacket.'"[28] Such attention was not limited to fan frenzy; Emily Coleman of *The New York Times* also asked "What is this mysterious ingredient that sends both men and women – young, middle-aged, and old – running to the box office and into the record stores? That a good part of it centers around his handsome head and lean, lithe body is undeniable. Most women, for example, will take an oath that the colored cotton shirts he always wears on stage are open all the way down to the leather belt and brass rings which buckle his well-cut black trousers. In reality, the shirt is open only to the center of his chest, or to about where the third button comes on an ordinary man's dress shirt."[29] Therefore, not only was Belafonte playing off his sex-appeal to attract audiences, he offered an alternative to the suits of the upper crust and many pop singers at the time like Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Nat "King" Cole – or even those *aspiring* to gain access to the upper crust – for a more casual uniform, thus linking himself to an exotic idea of a more pastoral Other. And according to these writers, his efforts were successful: audiences found him visually intriguing while not perceiving him as racially threatening, and viewed his attire as a marker of his folk authenticity and working-class upbringing.

[28] *The Belafonte Story*, 14-15.
[29] Coleman, "Organization Man," 35.

In fact, Belafonte continued to associate himself with the lower classes even after he attained great fame and fortune. Growing up in Harlem, Harry's mother had to work incredibly hard as a maid to support her sons, and once he was an adult, Harry worked constantly, but never had any money to spare. He writes: "I never forgot the camaraderie of poverty, and never stopped feeling I was a member of that tribe."[30] His association with the lower classes was not only evident in his activism for the poor and underserved, but also in his music performances and production. In spite of the fact that Belafonte's concerts attracted wealthy patrons, and sold out the hallowed venues of high art such as Carnegie Hall, Belafonte was notorious for ensuring that inexpensive student seats were available for his performances.

Belafonte's political associations with the lower classes are audibly present in his recording of "Matilda" from his 1959 album, *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall*. In this performance of the song – an eleven-and-a-half minute long, call-and-response calypso that became another of Belafonte's signature live pieces – Belafonte asks different members of the audience to take turns singing the chorus: "Matilda, Matilda, Matilda, she take me money and run Venezuela…" After singing the chorus and verse himself, Belafonte first asks the members of his onstage band to take a crack at it. First, he calls upon the trio and the bongo / conga player, Danny Barrajanos, then section by section (he even asks the winds to take a turn, calling on the "windy group"). Hearing the musicians sing in unpolished voices, the audience's chuckles are audible on the

[30] Belafonte and Schnayerson, *My Song*, 18.

recording, and to their collective delight, Belafonte calls out the conductor, Robert Corman, for singing his solo with his back turned to the theater. In the distinct Jamaican-American accent used in his Caribbean songs – an affectation in which he changed initial "th" sounds into "d" (as in "dee" instead of "the"), and shortened the long "a" and "e" sounds into "eh" (as in "beh-beh" for "baby") – Belafonte cuts off the orchestra and reproaches his Maestro: "Good heavens, Bob. We've been together a good, long, time, man. You can't do that. You must learn. You can't turn your back on the masses, man. (Audience laughs) Turn about! Face them! Splendid! (Thunderous applause) Now sing! A-one, two, three, four…"[31]

Following a chorus by the entire band, Belafonte then invites the audience to join in all together. Once the group seems to get the hang of it, Belafonte singles out different sections, or even *classes* of his audience: first geographic sections within the concert hall, followed by "the glee club" (a particularly quiet section), and "all de big spenders" – to which the audience reacts with uproarious laughter and applause, recognizing they have the best seats (and most likely spent the greatest sum of money) – followed by the entire ground floor of the theater. Belafonte continues his call-and-response down the economic strata that is theater seating, and calls upon the "people in de tiers, dear," followed by "those people on scholarship!" again, to uproarious laughter and applause. Strangely enough, the scholarship seats seem to be *so* far away that the group has trouble singing in time with the band, evident in a half-beat of

[31] Harry Belafonte, "Matilda," on *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall*, LP, RCA Victor, LSO-6006.

phasing with the onstage orchestra. After calling upon the entire audience to sing together once more, Belafonte flings his greatest zinger at the audience calling upon "women over forty" to identify themselves. The most silent section in the theater, only a few women own up to their age, and Belafonte jokes: "I know they're out there!"

This call-and-response helps promote Belafonte's political agenda in several ways. First, in calling out the different sections he acknowledges not only the difference in the socio-economic statuses of his audience, but also of the social implications of the theater, itself. In so openly drawing attention to the fact that some of his audience is wearing furs in the floor seats while others paid discounted prices to sit in the balcony, Belafonte asks his audience to confront their economic inequality and then unite in laughter and unison singing. Each group has a chance for their voice to be heard individually before being asked by their song-leader to identify as a group. The call-and-response model also hearkens to the sing-alongs of the folk song revival of the 1930s and 1940s. Groups like the Almanac Singers, and countless other union and populist groups believed in the importance of harnessing the power of raising their voices together in song to identify themselves as a united force, and further their collective interests. In linking himself to this model, Belafonte also links himself to the populist singing of the previous generations who believed in the power of the masses and the rise of the lower class, in spite of the highbrow venue of Carnegie Hall. Furthermore, the concert itself is a testament to Belafonte's commitment to the common man, students, and the disenfranchised. In the album's liner notes, Bob Bollard writes that

"there was also the sharp exhilaration for soloist and audience sharing the same emotional setting: a huge house packed two nights in a row for a splendid charity. (Belafonte's singing contributed $58,000 on one night alone to the Wiltwyck School which works with emotionally disturbed boys,)" while the other night benefited the students of The New Lincoln School in New York City.[32] Belafonte was turned onto these causes by one of his close friends and the great humanitarian and activist, first lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

Simulating Sincerity Through Song-Acting

Belafonte – who considers himself an "actor in song,"[33] rather than "folk singer" – writes that his goal in singing folk music was to enact "different voices, but with a shared humanity; this was my platform, my authenticity, my politics. My song."[34] Although song acting and the changing personalities and characters may seem insincere, they actually seemed to have the opposite effect on Belafonte's audiences. The fact that Harry Belafonte acted out the character of "every man" in his performances with such conviction, changing personalities as quickly as he changed songs, contributed strongly to his construction of the modern everyman image. Through acting, he created the aura of unadulterated honesty *within each song*. Each moment was an opportunity

[32] Bob Bollard, Liner Notes to *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall*, LP, RCA Victor, LSO-6006.
[33] *The Belafonte Story,* 7.
[34] Belafonte and Schnayerson, *My Song*, 99.

for a new character to be completely honest and authentic, when considered in that moment.

This type of theatrical, emotive, song performance is demonstrated in Belafonte's interpretation of the Lead Belly tune, "Sylvie." "Sylvie" is sung from a jailed man's perspective to his beloved, who brings him several things while he is in prison – coffee, tea, her love – but not what he really needs, things like water, and the jailhouse key. In the cut from *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall*, Belafonte uses the microphone to simulate a sense of intimacy with the audience, alternating between soft murmers, and big, open-throated declarations.[35] The microphone also allows the audience to hear every crackle and quaver in his voice, which can be interpreted as a sign of vulnerability, or, as what critic Howard Taubman describes as "not at all cultivated. It has the tinge of hoarseness that makes you wonder whether he will get through a whole group of songs, but you realize after a while that this quality is an asset, particularly for his wide assortment of folk songs which are all the more persuasive when projected by *an untutored voice*."[36]

When the visual element is added to "Sylvie" in the December 1959 CBS television special, *Tonight With Belafonte*, Harry uses his entire body to inhabit the intense emotion and character of an inmate.[37] The faceless chorus we heard in *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall* now correlates to silhouetted inmates sitting idly on sparse

[35] Belafonte, "Sylvie," *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall*, LP.
[36] Howard Taubman, "A Folk Singer's Style: Personality and Integrity Worth More Than Cultivated Voice to Belafonte," *The New York Times*, (February 7, 1954), emphasis mine.
[37] Harry Belafonte, "Sylvie," *Tonight With Belafonte*, (CBS television special, originally aired on December 10, 1959); digital video content accessed at The Paley Center for Media, New York City.

scaffolding in the background, as stage lights cast the implied shadow of prison bars over Belafonte's face. With its multi-tiered cell-block theme, the "Sylvie" set reminds one of another cell-block filmed musical performance from Elvis Presley's 1957 "Jailhouse Rock."[38] Yet, with "Jailhouse Rock's" metal bars, hinged doors, and even the horizontal black-and-white stripes of the dancers' costumes, Elvis' set is more literally "prison" than Belafonte's. Rather, Belafonte's sets are so simple – makeshift, even – that they evoke folksy arts and crafts, and belie the technology and backstage dealings (like a lucrative sponsorship from Revlon cosmetics) that made such a television production possible. They even echo the simple, modernist, and *implied* farm setting of the 1959 filmed ballet of Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, as conceived and choreographed by Martha Graham, with set design by Japanese-American landscape architect, Isamu Noguchi.[39] The sets in *Appalachian Spring* are sparsely decorated, with single wooden planks set at angles to each other, implying the walls, roof, and porch of a farmhouse (rather than building out a farmhouse, itself). With its pentatonic Shaker melodies, and simple tonal harmonies, Copland's music featured his own polished, modernist interpretation of American folk identity. The same can be said of Martha Graham's contemporary interpretation of movement, filled with sharp angles, flexed feet, and non-classical lines. The visual aesthetics of Belafonte's television special (which premiered that same year as the filmed *Appalachian Spring*), echoed these

[38] "Cell-block scene," *Jailhouse Rock*, DVD, directed by Richard Thorpe (1957; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010).
[39] "Appalachian Spring," *Martha Graham: In Performance*, DVD, (1957; West Long Branch, NJ: Kultur, 2002).

modernist interpretations of American folk identity: simple, angular lines and uncluttered sets, modern dance, and blue-collar costumes featuring khaki slacks and collared shirts with the top buttons undone.

In addition to the set, Belafonte's physical body also provides a striking visual effect. In the *Tonight With Belafonte* rendition of "Sylvie," the intimacy and vulnerability of Belafonte's quavering voice is intensified by his emotive body: his clenched fists, contorted posture, eyes squeezed shut – if he cannot convince the audience he *is* actually a prisoner, he convinces the audience that he can feel what the prisoner feels. While the negative critiques of Belafonte deemed this type of outward feeling "artificial," it was perceived by fans as sincere and intimate. In "The Belafonte Story," Harry is quoted saying: "'All I want to do'…'is to get out there and emote.'" The magazine's authors gushed that

> when you combine the two – believing and acting – you get a kind of sincerity, a passion, and enthusiasm for song that the hip-rollers and arm-wavers can't approach. Take Harry's hands, for example. They're on the ends of his arms, like every other man's, but Harry uses them. He pulls with them, clutches, pleads, gives, embraces, holds, squeezes, rips, waves, yanks and makes a mean-looking ball of fist. Or take Harry's body. It moves with the meaning of the words as well as the beat of the music – and therein lies the difference.[40]

Much has been made of this body and these hands. Belafonte's 1959 *Time Magazine* cover *and* the cover of his 1956 hit album, *Calypso* feature him standing at the studio microphone in three-quarter profile, with his fingers "fanned in a kind of ineffable

[40] *The Belafonte Story*, 5.

wonder," as *Time* writes.[41] Belafonte recognized and capitalized on his powers of visual emotion in music performance. He writes: "My live act worked as well as it did, I knew, because I *acted* it. When I tore into a song like 'John Henry' onstage, I was an actor as much as a singer – an actor who happened to sing – using my whole body to convey the song's power. How could a record capture that?"[42]

Belafonte's usages of visual mass media like print and television were almost as important as his musical recordings to his influence on the changing face, sound, and ideals of folk music. Rather than the grizzled Okie image Woody Guthrie put forth, the rural African American image John Lomax used to publicize Lead Belly, or even Burl Ives' folksy, cow-pone, tale-spinning wise old farmer/cowboy, Harry Belafonte was glamorous. His look – with fitted, trendy pants and solid shirts unbuttoned past his chest – was part of his appeal according to *Billboard Magazine* in which an early reviewer of *Calypso* from June 6, 1956, writes "A striking color photo of the remarkably handsome Belafonte gives the package a big plus display-wise."[43]

The media reiterated these audio-visual-emotional aspects of his physical performance. The press hyped his physical beauty, the power of his body, and his ability to so accurately and intensely express the emotions of his songs. His folk was a multi-media folk, meant to be heard, seen, and felt.[44]

---

[41] "Lead Man Holler," *Time*.
[42] Belafonte and Schnayerson, *My Story*, 101.
[43] "Review Spotlight on…Popular Albums: *Calypso* –Harry Belafonte," *Billboard Magazine*, (June 2, 1956), 22.
[44] *The Belafonte Story*, 6.

Conclusions

Geoffrey Bush of *The Boston Herald* writes that "The first thing you realize about Harry Belafonte's performance at Donnelly Memorial Theater is how false it is," yet quickly goes on to call Belafonte "the voice of the 20th century, loud, theatrical, electronic, and immediate."[45] And it's true. Belafonte harnessed the power of mass media like print, commercial recording, television, and more to spread, reiterate, and reinforce his folk image, drawing comparisons between himself and the American dream, highlighting aspects of his background that either draw upon traditional folk ideals like the pastoral (like his time in Jamaica), and the antimodern (like the sets in his television special). As for the other traditional folk ideal, isolation, it is hard to argue that Belafonte, the man, was isolated from contemporary society and mass culture. Yet, when he performs, you only see him, often isolated by a single spotlight or framed by tight camera angle or television screen, and you hear him through that microphone, intimately, as if he is whispering in your ear. His was a new folk paradigm, rooted in a wink to traditional understandings of the folk, but brought to life and brought to the masses through the trappings of modernity like technology and mass production, and a contemporary sense of collective American identity.

[45] Geoffrey Bush, "Intense Harry Belafonte In Songs of the Nation," *The Boston Herald,* (December 1, 1962).

Chapter 4. Frontierland Animated: "Johnny Appleseed," "Paul Bunyan," and Walt Disney's Audio-Visual Construction of Commercial American Folk Culture

During their first decades of production, Walt Disney Studios released many now-iconic films which were dedicated to folk culture. Full-length theatrical releases like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) brought European folk tales to the masses through Disney's ultramodern animation style peppered with catchy songs. In the late 1940s and through the 1950s, Disney shifted its focus from European folk tales to a more definitively American folk project. Instead of princesses and chirping creatures typical to a film like *Snow White*, Disney's *American* folk heroes were figures like Davy Crockett, Johnny Appleseed, and Paul Bunyan.

Walt Disney engaged with his folk materials in different ways than did Harry Belafonte and the Weavers. Due to the Studio's primary medium of animation, Disney was not able to connect its American folk materials with real life performers as did the Weavers and Harry Belafonte. The Weavers, Belafonte, and even performers who emerged later in the 1960s like Bob Dylan all forcefully drew connections to the political Left and strove to elevate the common man and the worker. Disney's tack was much more conservative as his political agenda fed into and out of Cold War anxieties and the expansion of American might. While the Weavers and Harry Belafonte undoubtedly participated in the heteronomous, commercial field as described in previous chapters, Walt Disney not only participated in modern media and heteronomous ventures with his

animated films; he conquered them with sweeping force. With products like the televised *Davy Crockett* serials, the hit recording "The Ballad of Davy Crockett," and the "Johnny Appleseed" and "Paul Bunyan" animated short films, Disney pushed the boundaries of his studio's commercial reach with all of the surrounding products and experiences consumers could buy and buy into while at the same time proclaiming to depict "American folk culture."

In this chapter, I examine this distinctly "Disney" construction of American folk culture and values by considering its manifestations across several Disney media products between 1948 and 1958. Unlike the performers and institutions discussed in previous chapters who defined American folk culture mostly through the lenses of politics or traditionalism, in his films, televised programming, recordings, merchandise, and theme park, Walt Disney located the American folk in a more concrete historical moment. Disney's folk was steeped in nostalgic archetypes of the nineteenth century American pioneer as exemplified by the Studio's filmic representations of folk figures like Davy Crockett, Johnny Appleseed, and Paul Bunyan – not to mention representations of the American frontier, itself.

The first portion of this chapter is dedicated defining Walt Disney's pioneer-based construction of American folk culture and locating it within the greater mass-mediated folk phenomenon of the 1930s through 1950s. Disney utilized many of its media channels – television, recording, film, merchandizing, and the Disneyland theme park – in disseminating and selling the image of the American pioneer folk hero. Unlike

folk figures of previous chapters like Lead Belly, the Weavers, and Harry Belafonte, Disney's folk project was projected through even more types of media (partially due to emerging technology in the 1940s and 1950s, partially due to Disney's drive to diversify his empire), and thus bombarded audiences and consumers from all sides. His continued enthusiasm for folk stories in shorts like "Johnny Appleseed" and "Paul Bunyan" also reflects a dedication to indoctrinating American children with these values, as well as the commercial appeal of such themes at the time. Furthermore, the visual, aural, and social manifestations of Disney's folk archetype looked and sounded quite different than the modern everyman persona put forth by Belafonte or the Leftist, traditionalist-worshipping image exuded by the Weavers.

I support my arguments with excerpts from Disney's media materials, specifically elements of the "Johnny Appleseed" animated short featured in the 1948 full-length feature, *Melody Time*, the five-part live-action *Davy Crockett* serial broadcast from 1954-1955 on the ABC *Disneyland* television program, and the 1958 theatrical animated short, "Paul Bunyan." I analyze portions of these films, closely examining the visual, aural, and thematic elements that support and propagate Walt Disney's definition of American folk identity while at the same time fully participating in popular music and ultramodern media. Because the Walt Disney name encompassed so much more than just film, this analysis will touch upon an array of supporting media products and experiences, most notably the Frontierland portion of the Disneyland theme park,

segments of the *Disneyland* television program, and a vast array of merchandise (records, storybooks, apparel, etc.) that accompanied them.

Using the Davy Crockett phenomenon as a point of reference, I delve more deeply into an examination of the voice actors' performances, scripts, musical arrangements, and images in "Johnny Appleseed" and "Paul Bunyan" in order to demonstrate how Walt Disney and his team animated, composed and performed new material that sounded and looked like "folk." I first turn my attention to how the filmmakers capitalize on the medium of animation itself in order to situate Johnny and Paul in Disney's American folk canon. They achieve this through storybook imagery which situates Disney's folk material as "canonized" and "educational," leftward (or "Westward") moving visuals which reflect Disney's uniquely American sense of imperialism, and animated manifestations of both the passage of time and progress which mingled with what Paul Wells deems the "hyper-realist" style of animation that had become Disney's aesthetic hallmark.[1] As music plays an integral role in most Disney experiences, I then investigate how these shorts simultaneously construct, refer to, and reinforce musical associations with Disney's frontier-based folk identity and folk sounds through devices such as harmonic and melodic simplicity, group singing with "untrained" male voices, instrumentation, and lyrical themes, all while maintaining a close relationship to accessible, mainstream popular sights and sounds of the era.

[1] Paul Wells, *Understanding Animation* (London: Routledge, 1996), 25.

Walt Disney's Multi-Mediated, Commercialized, American Folk

Branching Out Into Multi-Mass Media

By the 1950s, Walt Disney Studios had established themselves as a company with full-length, animated films as the cornerstone of their creative and commercial output. Many of these features were based upon European folklore or children's stories spotlighting nature or animal life. Stories with roots in folklore like *Snow White* (1937) and *Cinderella* (1950), in current children's books like *Bambi* (1942) and *Dumbo* (1941), and in relatively recent European literature like *Pinocchio* (1940) and *Peter Pan* (1953) were presented as timeless tales from a canon of stories that all people could share – public domain, perhaps – even if the stories could actually be traced back to specific and sometimes contemporary sources.

Walt Disney had managed to surround his films with a constructed aura of common knowledge, and in some cases, memory, that referred to folk ideals like the pastoral (the natural surroundings and anthropomorphized critters in *Bambi, Snow White*, etc.) and the antimodern (in reference both to the past and the present as the stories hearken back to "Once upon a time…"). This relationship to the pastoral and the past was not only nostalgic according to David Whitley. In Disney's films, the "pastoral, in a contemporary context, may direct our collective imaginations towards what is in danger of being lost, but which also forms part of our full humanity."[2]

[2] David Whitley, *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 10.

Ever the artistic dreamer and ambitious business executive, Walt Disney endeavored to expand the Company's reach from animated theatrical releases into the worlds of television, print publication, record production, and the Disneyland theme park.[3] In controlling the different media channels, Disney was able to use each product to promote the others. Television programs were used to promote his theme park; records and books were used to promote his films; the park was used to promote his films, television programs, *and* merchandise, etc. This self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing web of commodities proved commercially lucrative and culturally powerful. Such cross-promotion and multi-mediation would become common practice with Disney's output: they would release a suite of products related to a given film, character, fairy tale, theme park ride, etc., thus bombarding their consumers and audiences from every direction, reinforcing their messages and saturating several markets with the Disney sights, sounds, and brand name.

Perhaps the most effective of Disney's cross-promotional marketing strategies was the company's first foray into broadcast television. *Disneyland: The Disneyland Story*, first aired on October 17, 1954 on the American Broadcast Company (ABC) network to great critical acclaim and unprecedented audiences. Disney biographer,

[3] Tim Hollis and Greg Ehrbar describe how Roy O. Disney was one of the greatest proponents in the Walt Disney Company for founding their own record label, Disneyland Records (later Walt Disney Records). With the success of the "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" and the various songs and skits made famous by The Mickey Mouse Club, by the mid-1950s, "Roy Disney was fully convinced that the Disney company should enter the record business" as he knew that not only were the tunes were potentially profitable, but also the rights to the songs, the autonomy of their production, and ownership of any audio masters. Tim Hollis and Greg Ehrbar, *Mouse Tracks: The Story of Walt Disney Records* (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi Press, 2006), 20.

Neal Gabler, noted that "over the course of the [first] season *Disneyland* consistently attracted over 50 percent of the audience in its time slot, and its audience kept growing, its ratings climbing, until even its repeats outdrew every program on television save the Lucille Ball situation comedy *I Love Lucy*."[4] Alone, the television show would have been considered a tremendous commercial success. However, the show's essential format as a program-length commercial for the soon-to-be-opened Disneyland theme park, stirred up such excitement and curiosity for the park that it, too, opened to a massive number of visitors on its first day.[5]

In addition to describing the layout and basic themes of Disneyland, *The Disneyland Story* reflected Walt Disney's construction of American values,[6] all evident from the opening title cards. The program begins with the word "Disneyland" printed in white font over a black background, with white, animated stars twinkling. A comet of light circles the title, explodes into the familiar figure of Tinker Bell, the diminutive but feisty fairy sidekick from Disney's 1953 theatrical feature, *Peter Pan*. Tink pulls out her wand, and taps it to change the titles as a male voice announces: "Walt Disney's Disneyland." As the title sparkles among Tinker Bell's falling fairy dust, the familiar

---

[4] Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 511.

[5] Many authors describe the successful opening of Disneyland, in addition to the success of the *Disneyland* television program. In addition to the above cited biography by Neal Gabler (2006), see Karal Ann Marling's article, "Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream" *American Art* 5, No. 1/2 (Winter – Spring, 1991): 168-207; Michael Steiner's article "Frontierland as Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Architectural Packaging of the Mythic West' *The Magazine of Western History* 48, no. 1 (Spring, 1998): 2-17; and many of the interviews and articles included in the Kathy Merlock Jackson's edited collection, *Walt Disney: Conversations*, (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi Press, 2006), to name just a few.

[6] *Disneyland: The Walt Disney Story*. July 13, 1955 (repeat broadcast of the October 17th, 1954 premiere) on ABC network. Digital video, accessed at the Paley Center for Media, New York City.

crooning, voice of *Pinocchio*'s Jiminy Cricket sings "When You Wish Upon A Star." Even in its first thirty seconds, *The Disneyland Story* demonstrates a level of intertextuality that spans different tales (*Peter Pan*, *Pinocchio*, the *Disneyland* television program, itself), different decades, and different media. *The Disneyland Story*'s introduction even references already-famous characters that Disney had annexed again from European literature and made so popular and "common," that they came across both public domain *and* as originating from Disney's imagination. Unlike the Weavers who made such efforts to maintain a connection to Lead Belly who they portrayed as "Goodnight, Irene's" creator, Disney's intertextuality dissolved the actual authors of many of their sources: Tinker Bell and Peter Pan were no longer creations of J.M. Barrie, they were Disney characters drawn from the audience's common knowledge.

The announcer then provides a description of what the audiences will experience as they tune in week to week which parallels what they would experience when they eventually visit Disneyland. The program – and the park, itself – was divided into four "lands," each appealing to a different realm of the American imagination:

> Frontierland: tall tales and true from the legendary past.
> Tomorrowland: promise of things to come.
> Adventureland: the wonder-world of nature's own realm.
> Fantasyland: the happiest kingdom of them all.[7]

[7] Each of Disneyland's "lands" is situated temporally or geographically in relation to the world of Main Street, U.S.A. Fantasyland – the land of make-believe, Disney princesses and Cinderella's iconic castle – is from the past and in the distance in the sense that fairy tales take place "Once upon on a time, in a land far, far away…" This is the land of European folk tales that Disney canonized for American children. Adventureland – steeped in rich, tropical foliage and related to Disney's nature films and television programs – is the exotic vacation safari from 1950s American suburban or urban life. Like Harry Belafonte and his album *Calypso* and the Weavers' countless forays into "world music," Adventureland appealed to 1950s America's sense of the exotic "Other." Temporally, Adventureland could be from any time, but is

All of these "lands" were tied together by Main Street, U.S.A., a place which Walt (who also appears in the program) describes as the "hub" of the park. Main Street, U.S.A. and the surrounding regions map out what Walt valued in different facets of American culture.

After a short appearance by Walt Disney speaking from what appears to be his office at his studio, the camera dives into a "one quarter inch to-the-foot scale model of Disneyland" which sits in Walt's office. The camera pans through the people-less park, on top of ambient sounds of happy crowds and dogs barking, which imitate the sounds of a bustling, small-town public space. The announcer shares the monumental importance of this space:

> The heartline of America: an old-fashioned Main Street, Hometown, U.S.A., just after the turn of the century. America was growing fast. Towns and villages were turning into cities. Soon the gas-light would be replaced by electricity. But that was still in the future. At this time, little Main Street was still the most important spot in the nation, combining the color of frontier days with the oncoming excitement of the new, twentieth century.[8]

Just as Disney chose to create feature length films based upon tales from a "past-time" – tales that both were written and took place in a real (*Peter Pan*'s Edwardian England) or imagined ("Once upon a time…") past – he chose an antimodern environment, the turn-of-the-century Main Street, U.S.A, as the heart of his beloved park and his

---

perceived – in comparison to the given, industrialized "present" – to be more "primitive" and untainted by human influence and technological progress. The name "Tomorrowland" says it all: this is the land of the future, saturated with Space Race imagery like rockets and nuclear power. Tomorrowland was the pinnacle of 1950s futurism and a demonstration of technological power during the Cold War. Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

construction of American identity. Disney's America focused on small-town communities, and not bustling, bulging-at-the-seams, industrialized, metropolises: the general store, not the department store.

The value Disney places on Main Street, U.S.A. reflects why he chose to showcase folk heroes like Appleseed, Crockett, and Bunyan. The "ideal" America depicted in this part of the park was certainly not an image of the earliest or most idyllic America, or even the America inhabited by his folk heroes. However, Disney's America was distinct from the present, and situated on the cusp of a society-changing, technological milestone: the advent and widespread adoption of electricity. Moreover, the citizens of Main Street, U.S.A. were generationally closer to the time when heroes like Appleseed, Crockett, and Bunyan lived (or could have lived). Disney took us back to a time where people *could have remembered* these long-gone folk figures.

In Main Street, U.S.A. – as with Disneyland's other "lands" – Disney was able to construct a more vivid, more potent American ideal (much like how Harry Belafonte acted out a more potent folk version of himself in live performance). Main Street, U.S.A. could even be viewed as a wearing the costume of American "heritage." As ethnographer Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes, "heritage organizations ensure that places and practices in danger of disappearing because they are no longer occupied or functioning or valued will survive. It does this by adding the value of pastness, exhibition, difference, and where possible, indigeneity."[9] Disney's version of American

[9] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Theorizing Heritage," *Ethnomusicology* 39, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 370.

heritage centered on the distillation of an American way of life based upon late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century America, specifically a small town, just prior to industrialization and electricity. Like the many other interpretations of the American folk discussed in previous chapters, Walt's America was steeped in nostalgia for a past that exists only in comparison to "the now" and was brought to life (for a price) through thoroughly modern media like theme parks, record production, television, and animation.

Out of all of Disneyland's regions, Frontierland best embodies Disney's construction of American folk culture. The spirit of the American West – filled with the possibility for discovery, and conquering the unknown swath of the American landscape – imbues Frontierland. This is the romanticized land of the pioneers, the cowboys, the Indians, the rich green forests, the mighty rivers, the sprawling prairies, and the majestic mountains. As Walt Disney, himself, describes in *The Disneyland Story*:

> behind the gates of Frontierland is the inspirational America of the past century. The songs, tales, and legends of the big men who built the land. Some of them were completely legendary, like Paul Bunyan, the wood chopper, with his blue ox, Babe. Then again, we find that true stories about real people can be fabulous, too. Now in our TV series from Frontierland, we are going to tell about these real people who became legend. Like Davy Crockett, the first coon-skin congressman. Now, Davy's life was so fantastic that it was hard to tell where fact left off and fancy began. Now, here's Norman Foster, director of the unit, who is going to shoot the story of Davy Crockett on Davy's on home grounds, the great Smokey Mountains of Tennessee…[10]

[10] *Disneyland: The Disneyland Story*, 1954.

While Walt narrates, the audience sees a wall-sized map of America, which shows physical characteristics like mountains, and political characteristics like the national borders between the United States and Canada to the north, and Mexico to the south. State borders are not included, giving the impression that America is an indivisible unit, a wide swath of varied landscape stretching between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans as opposed to the micro-locations valued in the folk collections of previous decades. Illustrated renderings of various folk heroes are peppered amongst the mountains and lakes in their places of origin: Paul Bunyan and Babe frolic up in the Dakota region; Davy Crockett puts up a fight in the South; Johnny Appleseed rambles near the Great Lakes in the area that would correspond to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Unlike the princes and princesses of the "Once upon a time…" fairy tales, these American folk heroes were from actual regions that still exist, thus connecting them to Americans living in the present. As with all definitions of the folk and American national identity discussed in this dissertation, Walt Disney's construction of the American essence as based upon the frontier was relative to the hero's personal experience, and came from a place of personal nostalgia for an idea of the past. Moreover, *Disneyland*'s use of map imagery and its correlating folk heroes supports Richard Francaviglia's claim that Frontierland is an "allegorical map" which assigns meaning to geography by linking it to actual or imagined narratives. [11]

[11] According to Francaviglia, Frontierland "represents Disney's version of what the West was like in the time period that ended just before his birth. This golden time that Disney immortalized ended in the 1890s, the same decade during which Frederick Jackson Turner wrote his provocative frontier thesis." Here, Francaviglia refers to Turner's milestone work on the frontier, "The Significance of the Frontier in

Unlike very "real" performers like Lead Belly and Harry Belafonte, Disney's folk heroes were more mythical in nature, and more temporally removed from the audience. *Disneyland*'s use of map imagery reflects Disney's effort to bring these mythical American folk heroes closer to 1950s America's living memory. The Weavers went to great lengths to uphold their firsthand knowledge of their folk hero, Lead Belly, while to audiences, Belafonte, himself, was the living embodiment of the American folk. Disney's American folk archetype was from a historical past, long outside of living memory. Unlike the Weavers or Belafonte, Disney needed to construct his folk heroes from the ground up, connecting them to contemporary Americans through their "shared" landscape, letting animated figures and actors stand in for the myths.

In the *Disneyland* demonstration of Frontierland values, Disney immediately draws connections between the frontier, his definition of the frontier hero, and the fine, but perhaps unimportant line between fact and fiction. He heralds the "big men who built the land" and the "real people who became legend," assigning value to a particular type of American hero. The Frontierland hero is not the inventor, philosopher, or "founding father" in a political sense. Rather, he is a man of action.[12] He created America, itself: the geography and the landscape, pioneers and possibilities. Furthermore, he is assumed to have been an actual man who lived. John Henry, Davy Crockett, Johnny Appleseed are all folk characters based upon real men. Paul Bunyan

---

American History," an essay presented in 1983 at the meeting of the American Historical Association. Richard Francaviglia, "Walt Disney's Frontierland as an Allegorical Map of the American West," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Summer, 1999): 163.

[12] The gender indicated by "man of action" specifically excludes women. Disney's folk heroes were all men, and act in a specific pioneer-based construction of American folk masculinity.

was the mythical embodiment of a North American archetype, reinforced so many times and with such detail that he almost seems real.

Disney also assigns value to "tall tales and true" in the premiere television broadcast, implying the inspiration imparted by imaginary characters and stories can be just as influential on his conception of the American essence as that of real-life heroes. In passing the segment over to Norman Foster, the unit director for the upcoming *Davy Crockett* serial, Disney teaches the audience that telling, re-telling, and actually *constructing* the stories of pioneer heroes with actors, the technological mediation of cameras, sound equipment, televisions, and even corporate bureaucracy is a worthwhile way to participate in his take on the national American folk culture.

The *Davy Crockett* serial aired over the course of a year on *Disneyland* as five distinct stories depicting Davy's many adventures. In the series, Davy (Fess Parker) and his loyal sidekick, George E. Russel (Buddy Ebsen) are two pioneers from Tennessee in the early nineteenth century. Disney's Crockett was based on the real-life historical figure and realized as a live-action serial (as opposed to animated shorts or films). Throughout the episodes, Davy and George undertake a series of frontier-themed adventures based on experiences or topics from Davy Crockett's actual life such as volunteering to fight in the War of 1812, placing a claim on and settling frontier land, racing a muscle-bound, yet unintelligent crew of riverboat men, brokering peace between the white settlers and various Native American tribes, and most famously,

Crockett's heroic stand at the Alamo.[13] The live-action approach to the story coupled with the Crockett's real-life place in American history books contributed to the serial's folksy credibility.

Crockett and Russel have a strong sense of right and wrong, as well as the *Wanderlust* present in so many folk figures that have come before and since. Crockett also possesses a distinctly American sense of patriotism when he serves as a United States congressman, touring the country while wearing his signature buckskins and coonskin cap. In his first speech as a congressman, Crockett disarms his new colleagues with his "aw-shucks" sense of humor, while at the same time managing to boast with such complete confidence:

> Mr. Speaker, and gentlemen. The feller around called the Master-at-Arms tells me a new congressman's supposed to make a self-introducin' speech. Well, here she goes. I'm David Crockett, fresh from the backwoods. I'm half horse, half alligator, and a little touched to a snappin' turtle [laughter from the audience]. I got the fastest horse, the prettiest sister, the surest rifle, and the ugliest dog in Tennessee [raucous laughter from the audience]. My father can lick any man in Kentucky, and I can lick my father [laughter]. I can hug a b'ar too close for comfort and eat any man alive opposed to Andy Jackson [laughter]. Now, some congressmen take pride in sayin' a lot about nothin', like I'm doin' right now. Others don't do nothin' for their pay but just listen, day in and day out. I wish I may be shot if I don't do more than listen. And the next time I get up before you, I'll have somethin' to say worth sayin' [applause from the audience].[14]

---

[13] Although the "Davy Crockett" serial depicts Crockett's last stand at the Alamo, it does not actually show his death. Rather, it cuts away while he is courageously fighting while being outnumbered by Santa Ana's forces. *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*, DVD, directed by Norman Foster (1955; Burbank, CA: Disney DVD, 1995).

[14] Ibid.

Just as he does throughout the serials, Crockett wins friends and defeats his enemies with a combination of homespun, folksy speech, wit, his self-styled roots in nature and the frontier, and his confidence in his physical abilities. As Neal Gabler notes, this image of Davy Crockett, the American pioneer was essential to Walt Disney's American archetype. "Evolving in the post-war decade…this America drew on democratic traditions of modesty, self-effacement, naïveté, and determination, which was what Crockett personified."[15]

The American pioneer hero celebrated in the Frontierland segment of *The Disneyland Story* not only struck a nostalgic chord with American audiences, it also opened up many avenues for the company to flood the market with various forms of pioneer-related media and goods including "Crockett T-shirts, Crockett toy rifles, Crockett knives, Crockett books, Crockett jackets, Crockett bandanas, and dozens of other Crockett paraphernalia in a buying mania."[16] Davy's still-iconic coonskin cap became the must-have accessory for little boys everywhere. Most of all, *Davy Crockett*'s theme song, "The Ballad of Davy Crockett," was so popular it near-reached the top of the *Billboard* charts (both the version by television's Crockett, Fess Parker, and various recordings by other pop and country & western artists).

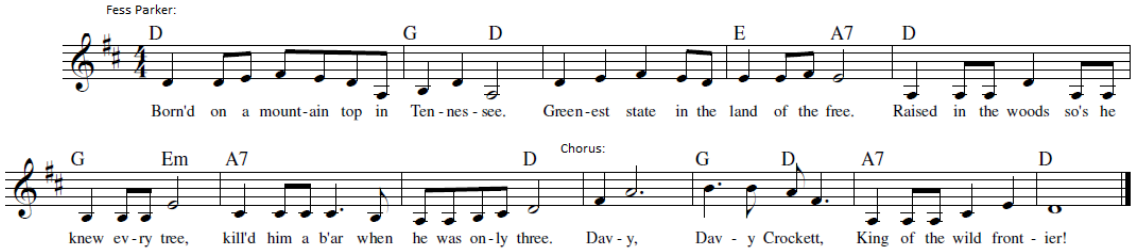
"The Ballad of Davy Crockett" recording was a watershed moment for Walt Disney's commercial ventures *and* the company's American folk project. On the commercial level, the song was the impetus for Disney to branch out and create its own

[15] Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 517.
[16] Ibid., 515.

record label, thus gaining a greater degree of control of the Studio's musical material and the correlating media products. In the early 1950s, the Walt Disney Music Company profited on the songs featured in their films by leasing out the publication rights to other record labels like Columbia or Capitol who would, in turn make their own master recordings of the songs by their own studio's artists. However, with the upcoming airing of the *Davy Crockett* miniseries on the *Disneyland* television series, executives like Walt's business-savvy brother, Roy O. Disney, and merchandising and music business up-and-comer, Jimmy Johnson saw the money-making potential of the series' theme song "The Ballad of Davy Crockett." Rather than lease out the songs to other record companies, Johnson and Disney guided the Company to begin to make their own master recordings, engaging record companies like Capitol to merely press the records and distribute, thus giving Disney more financial and artistic control of the products they released.

With words by Tom Blackburn and music by veteran Disney songsmith, George Bruns, "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" as released by Columbia Records & Disney's own Wonderland label in 1955 is a simple pop song with folk-like elements. The song consists of five eight-bar verses in D-major, using simple tonal harmonies (I, ii, IV, V). The melody and rhythms are equally as straightforward, casually moving up and down stepwise or in small leaps across mostly quarter notes and lilting, loping eighth note patterns (see Example 4.1, "The Ballad of Davy Crockett," first verse).

Example 4.1 "The Ballad of Davy Crockett," first verse. Transcribed by the author from "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" as recorded by Fess Parker. Fess Parker, "The Ballad of Davy Crockett," on *Rhythm on the Range, vol. 2*, compact disc, Timeless Music Company, 2008 (originally recorded by Fess Parker on Columbia 4-40449, 1955).



Lyrically, each verse delivers a chapter in Crockett's legend (the first verse his origin story, the second his exploits in the "Injun War," the third his time as a Congressman, the fourth his time as a pioneer, and the last, his call to fight at the Alamo) (see Example 4.2, "The Ballad of Davy Crockett," lyrics). The most enduring parts of the song are the last four measures of each verse, when the chorus joins in declaring what the hero had accomplished in the previous lines (i.e. "Davy, Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier" in the first verse or "Davy, Davy Crockett, seein' his duty clear!" in the verse about his time in Congress). Moreover, Fess Parker and the chorus sing all of these lyrics with the same homespun, folksy language and southern accents featured in the serials.

"The Ballad of Davy Crockett" serves as a defining moment in Disney's musical manifestations of the folk. Prior to "Davy Crockett," Disney's songwriters composed discrete popular songs for their folk heroes, often utilizing chromatic harmonies, harmonic modulations, and supporting arrangements reminiscent of the "atmospheric" orchestral arrangements so popular in late-1940s and early-1950s popular song (see

Example 4.2 "The Ballad of Davy Crockett," lyrics. Transcribed by the author from "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" as recorded by Fess Parker. Fess Parker, "The Ballad of Davy Crockett."

"The Ballad of Davy Crockett"

Born'd on a mountain top in Tennessee,
Greenest state in the land of the free.
Raised in the woods so's he knew ev'ry tree,
Kill'd him a b'ar when he was only three.
Davy, Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier!

Fought singlehanded through the Injun War,
'Till the Creeks was whipped and the peace was in store.
While he was handlin' this risky chore,
Made himself a legend for ever more.
Davy, Davy Crockett, the man who don't know fear!

He went off to Congress and served a spell,
Fixin' up the government and laws as well.
He took over Washington so I hear tell,
And patched up the crack in the Liberty Bell.
Davy, Davy Crockett, seein' his duty clear.

When he come home, his politickin' done,
While the western march had just begun.
So he packed his gear, and his trusty gun,
And led out, grinnin', to follow the sun.
Davy, Davy Crockett, a-leadin' the pioneer.

He heard of Houston and Austin and so
To the Texas plains he just had to go.
There freedom was a-fightin' another foe,
And they needed him at the Alamo.
Davy, Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier.

Chapter 2 for the description of Gordon Jenkins' orchestral arrangements in "Goodnight, Irene"). With "Davy Crockett," Disney's songwriting team of Blackburn and Bruns used simple, repetitive melodies and harmonies that made for easy singing, and had an incredibly catchy chorus that allowed for singing along in the moment. (The subtle lyrical differences between these catchy hooks are some of the only hints at the

songwriter's craft.) "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" relates to folk songs of the 1930s and 1940s that had a similar verse/chorus story-telling, lyrical structure, with no contrasting section within each verse, and no deviation from the verse-chorus unit throughout the song, (like Woody Guthrie's "The Ballad of Tom Joad" or The Almanac Singers' "Reuben James").

The record of "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" differs from the song's presentation in the televised serials. Sung by the all-male folk group the Wellingtons,[17] "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" serves more as a narrative device than a self-contained song in the television serials. In between each of *Crockett's* scenes which were filled with dialogue, gun fighting, and slapstick, the audience hears a portion of "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" each describing what Davy had just done, what he was about to do, a short lesson in American history, etc., and the refrain, "Davy, Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier" (see Example 4.3, lyrics from the beginning scenes of the *Davy Crockett* serials). While Davy journeys across the American frontier – both making peace and fighting battles all while communing with his natural surroundings – the song's trusty return in between scenes also serves to mark the passage of time, space, and narrative, thus serving as a through-line across all five episodes. In helping the audience follow along with the story and helping to speed up the narrative, "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" serves as a sort of aural "condensation." (The concept of condensation will

[17] Although they had a folksy sound and were marketed as a folk group, the Wellingtons were known for their commercial recordings, most famously the theme song of the 1960s television series, *Gilligan's Island*. Ehrbar and Hollis, *Mouse Tracks*, 74-75.

Example 4.3 Lyrics from the beginning scenes of the *Davy Crockett* serials. Includes both the lyrics sung (labeled "sung") and descriptions of the film's action in between the song's fragments (in parentheses).

"The Ballad of Davy Crockett"

Sung: Davy, Davy Crockett, the man who don't know fear.
Davy, Davy Crockett, king of the wild frontier.

Born on a mountain top in Tennessee,
Greenest state in the land of the free.
Raised in the woods so's he knew every tree,
Killed him a b'ar when he was only three.
Davy, Davy Crockett, the buckskin pioneer.

In 1813 the Creeks approached.
Addin' redskin arrows to the country's woes.
Now old Andy Jackson, as everybody knows,
Is the general they sent to fight the foes.

(While the American forces battle the Creek tribe, Davy leaves the American battalion against General Jackson's wishes, and goes home to his family.)

Sung: Off through the woods, he's a-marchin' along.
Makin' up yarns and a-singin' a song.

(As Davy and George E. Russel approach Davy's cabin, his children yell: "Hey Ma! Pa's back!" Davy reunites with his wife before again leaving home for war.)

Sung: Headin' back to war from the old home place,
But Red Stick was leadin' a merry chase.
Fightin' and burnin' at a devil's pace,
South through the swamps on the Florida trace.
Davy, Davy Crockett, trackin' the redskins down…

re-emerge in the music and storybook imagery of the animated film shorts described below). And again with the catchy refrain that returned throughout the serials, children at home could sing along.

By 1955, *Davy Crockett* and the pioneer hero had struck a chord with American consumers. While the images of the old-fashioned, pioneer hero and the great

American frontier were reinforced by Disneyland's Frontierland and television's *Davy Crockett*, it was ever a commercial and heteronomous endeavor. Disney used the pangs of nostalgia stirred up by such imagery, sounds, and experiences to convince Americans to literally and figuratively "buy into" their brand of American folk culture. Unlike with the Weavers and Harry Belafonte whose respective commercial ventures resulted in the sale of records, ad space, and concert ticket sales, Disney's large-scale, multi-media expressions of folk identity also called upon Americans to express their American-ness with a broader purchasing power: movie tickets, coonskin caps, records, books, theme park tickets, etc.

How can we talk about something as openly commercial as the Davy Crockett phenomenon as "authentically folk"? With the park, films, television programs, records, books, merchandize, etc., Walt Disney had created a "commodified authentic," a term Elizabeth Outka uses to describe a world where "new objects and places were packaged and sold as mini-representations of supposedly noncommercial values."[18] As many commercial folk artists had done prior and since, Walt Disney cloaked a heteronomous set of objects, references, and experiences as authentic, and in a sense autonomous in that they *seemed* worthwhile even if money were removed from the equation. Furthermore, Disney's commodified authentic as represented by "Davy Crockett," Frontierland, and the "Appleseed" and "Bunyan" shorts is desirable because it represents a past in the present, and assuages the anxieties of a modern society by

[18] Elizabeth Outka, *Consuming Traditions: Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), 4.

reinforcing a construction of a common American heritage: the best of both worlds.[19] By making the modern seem old and the old seem new, Disney manages to sell his folk products as "real" and "authentic."

Walt Disney's Authentic America(n)

Part of what Walt Disney's Frontierland hero tapped into was Manifest Destiny, a concept that has been taught in the American schools' history curriculum for generations. Manifest Destiny declared that it was the United States' inevitable fate – its *duty* – to spread American might and influence from the Atlantic all the way to the Pacific. The theory was overwhelmingly political and economical; but it was also spiritual and agricultural. In moving Westward, Americans would conquer the great, natural unknown, harnessing its power and reaping its bounty in settling and farming the land. Those heroes who carried out Manifest Destiny were – as Walt Disney described in his introduction to Frontierland – those "big men who build America." They were the homesteaders, the farmers, the lumbermen, and the cowboys.

As I describe in the sections that follow, Disney's frontier heroes like Johnny Appleseed and Paul Bunyan travel across the wilderness in order to connect with and even *repurpose* the American frontier from an unknown "Other" to a useful symbol of American might. By the 1950s, America had already been settled from the Atlantic to

[19] Outka argues that this type of commodified authentic brings "select parts of the past into an updated setting," thus taking new objects and instilling them with commercial value by "inscribing them with temporality." Ibid., 19.

the Pacific, but Disney still placed value on the urge to conquer and expand. (The next logical frontier to 1950s America was otherworldly: outer space.)

As cultural historian Beth Levy writes, the broad and diverse American population found a collective identity in two things they could share: assigning value to a particular historical narrative, and the land itself, both rooted in nostalgia.

> In the United States, where historical memory forms a more reliable basis for cohesion than race, American identity has always depended on the specious clarity of hindsight to blur the rough edges of ethnic and class tensions. Among representations of America, the landscapes of the American West are particularly susceptible to suffusion by nostalgia. The penetration of unspoiled nature, the supposed disappearance of Indian tribes, and the unrepeatability of western expansion – all these conjure a sense of loss no less palpable than the exhilaration of pioneering advances.[20]

Furthermore, these images of the American West or pastoral provided a sense of progress – of moving towards a goal – while downplaying urban industrialization. The pioneer brought us closer to nature and the homeland, while the factory and unspoken globalization brought us farther away from our homes and hearths each and every work day. Levy argues that the desire to connect with frontier culture of the 19th century was especially strong following the Great Depression, as Americans were more afraid of "the very present forces of weather, technology, and the real estate market," rather than the antique dangers the pioneers faced like "'lurking Indians' and buffalo ghosts of campfire tales."[21] Time and again, Disney's frontier heroes reflected this anxiety as man would

[20] Beth E. Levy, *Frontier Figures: American Music and the Mythology of the American West* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 8.
[21] Ibid., 156.

team up with nature to defeat the mighty machine, slow technological progress, and demonstrate disdain for ventures that valued commercial gain over more autonomous motivations.

Besides the broader, more collective historical ideals of Manifest Destiny and the frontier, Walt Disney's folk products demonstrated a set of intrinsic values that both framed the hero as an everyman (thus linking him to you and I), but also framed him as rising above his ordinary existence to achieve the extraordinary. This extraordinary everyman was an average "guy next door" from humble beginnings who has a unique talent that sets him apart from his peers and allows him to achieve greatness. Disney's folk hero is propelled by *Wanderlust* – as were Woody Guthrie and John Lomax's cowboy subjects – but he rambles with a greater purpose, moving about almost as if on a pilgrimage. His goal is not a firm destination, but the work done along the way. Disney's exceedingly romanticized heroes are called to discover and lay humanity's touch upon the great American frontier.

Two smaller-scale products that both reflected and helped to define Disney's American folk values were two animated musical shorts, one released in the years prior to the *Davy Crockett* serial ("Johnny Appleseed" in 1948)[22] and the other in the years

[22] "Johnny Appleseed" was released in 1948 as a segment of the full-length, animated "theme package," *Melody Time. Melody Time* consists of a series of seven animated musical shorts connected by the dual themes of "animation" and "music." There was the ice-skating and sleigh-ride romance, "Once Upon a Wintertime"; "Bumble Boogie," the boogie-woogie rendition of Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee"; the tale of the brave little tugboat, "Little Toot," sung by the crystal-clear voices of pop hit-makers, The Andrews Sisters; the setting of Joyce Kilmer's poem "Trees"; "Blame it on the Samba," a mix of animation and live-action starring Donald Duck and the organist-vocalist, Ethel Smith; and the tale of the western cowpoke, Pecos Bill, featuring its signature song, "Blue Shadows on the Trail." The music of

following ("Paul Bunyan" in 1958).[23] These were two American folk tales – one based upon the life of an actual American, one based upon an American folk hero archetype – that were in existence long before Walt Disney's artistic team brought them to life on the big screen with pen, paint, and song. Because of the Disney feedback loop of cultural and commercial reinforcement, the Studio's "Appleseed" and "Bunyan" interpretations were portrayed as if they had emerged from within the canon rather than had been wedged into it. This was not the first time Disney made pre-existing stories seem like timeless, public domain folk items *and* Disney originals; Disney had accomplished this in prior films like *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Pinocchio*, etc. Disney's animated versions of the characters became *the* characters: his Snow White was the version children came to identify as *the* Snow White. Likewise, he laid claim to Appleseed and Bunyan.

Frontierland Animated: Visual Manifestations of Disney's American Folk in "Johnny Appleseed" and "Paul Bunyan"

---

each short ranges from sweet, pop love song of "Once Upon a Wintertime," to the high energy, close harmony swing sound of the Andrews Sisters in "Little Toot"; from the boogie-woogie rendition of a well-known classical piece in "Bumble Boogie" to the folksy, American sounds of "Pecos Bill" and "Johnny Appleseed." Ehrbar and Hollis describe how World War II slowed the American economy, and hence, full-length film production at the Disney studio during the 1940s. Thus emerged the need for "theme packages of short cartoons…[which] yielded a substantial number of potential hit parade songs, performed by popular recording starts such as Dinah Shore, the Andrews Sisters, Andy Russell, Nelson Eddy, Roy Rogers, Dennis Day, and Benny Goodman. The songs were produced for records by each artist's contracted record label." Ehrbar and Hollis, *Mouse Tracks*, 7.

[23] In 1959, "Paul Bunyan" was nominated alongside "Sidney's Family Tree," and the winner, "Knighty Knight Bugs" for the Academy Award for Short Subjects, Cartoon. See "The 31st Academy Awards (1959) Nominees and Winners," http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/legacy/ceremony/31st-winners.html. (Last accessed on September 13, 2014).

Walt Disney's American folk hero archetype evolved from a scrawny, idealistic underdog embodied by Johnny Appleseed, through a confident, bear-wrestling statesman embodied by Davy Crockett to the brawny, barrel-chested frontiersman exemplified by Paul Bunyan. Likewise, the musical manifestations of Disney's American folk hero changed drastically between 1948 and 1958 – a change undoubtedly related to the success of the *Davy Crockett* franchise televised in 1955-1956 – evolving from a somewhat simple hero with a sweet, trained tenor voice singing popular songs to a more strongly masculine, deep-voiced holler with a more explicit nod to folk song.

Even with all of these changes, many animated devices bind together both "Johnny Appleseed" and "Paul Bunyan." However, the ten years that passed between each film's release (ten important years that encompassed the Davy Crockett phenomenon), certainly demonstrated a honing of Disney's folk message acquired through experience. Visual elements like storybook imagery and westward progress as portrayed on geographical maps capitalize on animation to link the two short films to the greater Disney film collection and depict the frontier-based folk values Disney would promote in his television programs and theme park.

Storybook Imagery

Both films use what had already been established as a very common visual device in many of the Studio's animated fairy and folk tales dating all the way back to *Snow White*. In animating the story at hand into the pages of a storybook, Disney links

both the story (the actions and journeys of the characters) and the film (the product audiences viewed) with the greater body of American folk tales by showing each story as deriving from a folk canon, embodied by a storybook.

The storybook device is in part designed to help Disney compress each film into the proper amount of time. As Paul Wells notes, the length of animated shorts call for the compression of "a high degree of narrational information into a limited period of time through processes of condensation." Many animated shorts employ forms of condensation like the "elliptical cut" which "works in the same way as live-action film-making in the sense that cuts are made between the depiction of events that signify the passage of (often undetermined lengths of time)…Numerous films include 'page-turning', apparently revealing the next image or event in the story."[24] Both "Appleseed" and "Bunyan" turn the pages of their folk storybooks to signify the passage of time, thus revealing the underlying pulse of the antimodern in these particular films: while the books of American Folk Lore imply a relationship to "history" and "timelessness," the medium allows for narrative techniques that are utterly modern.

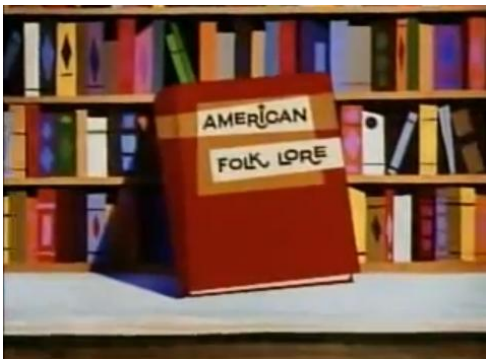
These storybooks serve a crucial function in framing each of these stories as folk tales. Within the respective films, each story is framed within the pages of a storybook (see Examples 4.4, "Johnny Appleseed" and "Paul Bunyan" storybooks). These books could almost be one and the same: both appear to be thick and leather bound. Both bear the almost laughably broad title "American Folk Lore." These books appear old

[24] Wells, *Understanding Animation*, 76.

and distinguished – the types of pieces one would display in a library – "definitive" collections or canons characterized by their size, durable materials, and fancy lettering. Both tomes credit no author, adding to the aura of the tales contained within as traditional and public domain, much like a folk song passed along through the oral tradition.

Example 4.4 "Johnny Appleseed" **(a)** and "Paul Bunyan" **(b)** storybooks. Screenshots taken from "Johnny Appleseed," *Disney's American Legends,* DVD, directed by Wilfred Jackson (1948; Burbank, CA: Disney DVD, 2002); and "Paul Bunyan," *Disney's American Legends,* DVD, directed by Wilfred Jackson (1958; Burbank, CA: Disney DVD, 2002).

a. 

b. 

"Appleseed" and "Bunyan's" respective storybooks also give the audience a preview of the other stories included in each volume. Each film's narrator prefaces their respective folk tale with a brief introduction heard over the storybook visuals. As the "Appleseed" live-action storybook appears on the screen, pop singer Buddy Clark states:

> On the pages of American Folk Lore, a legion of mighty men have left the symbols of their greatness. There was Paul Bunyan's axe. John Henry's hammer. Davy Crockett's rifle. And then – quite unexpectedly – one comes upon a tin pot hat, a bag of appleseed, and a holy book. And strangely enough, these are the symbols of one of the mightiest men of all: John Chapman, a real life pioneer. With the passing years, however, the reality has given way to legend. Until today, we know this

> remarkable man simply as Johnny Appleseed. This is his story, told by an old settler who knew Johnny well. Listen…[25]

Bunyan is introduced in a similar fashion:

> These were the books about America. Its history, its geography, and its heroes. But it takes a big book like this one to tell the story of American Folk Lore. The tall tales about men doing big things in a big country. Men like Cap'n Stormalong, Joe Magarac, John Henry, Pecos Bill, and, the fellow who towers above them all: Paul Bunyan.[26]

As the cover of each book of American Folk Lore serves to bind both Appleseed and Bunyan together with each other *and* other "print-worthy" pieces of Americana, so does the story that is revealed when each book is opened. This is achieved through the turning of the pages themselves (the condensation phenomenon described above), and the varied use of visual frames which also serve to bring the viewer closer to the story while serving as a constant reminder that the viewer is consuming a form of commercial media.

As Buddy Clark describes the "legion of mighty men" and the "symbols of their greatness" (language that notably foreshadows Walt Disney's monologue describing Frontierland in the 1954 *Disneyland* television series), the "Johnny Appleseed" book opens autonomously and flips to pages corresponding to each of the mighty men mentioned. For Paul Bunyan, the book flips to a page illustrating a thick tree with a wedge chopped out and a large axe across it, above a banner bearing the name "Paul Bunyan." When Clark references John Henry and Davy Crockett, the pages flip to an

---

[25] "Johnny Appleseed," *Disney's American Legends,* DVD, directed by Wilfred Jackson (1948; Burbank, CA: Disney DVD, 2002).
[26] "Paul Bunyan," *Disney's American Legends,* DVD, directed by Wilfred Jackson (1958; Burbank, CA: Disney DVD, 2002).

illustration of railroad tracks with a large hammer and another featuring a bearskin behind a rifle and a horn, both above banners bearing their respective hero's name. (The fact that Bunyan and Crockett were included in "Appleseed's" 1948 storybook, could imply that Disney had this "canon" of stories in mind all along, and planned to bring them to life in the coming years as he eventually did.) Likewise, when Clark arrives at Johnny Appleseed, the page features an apple tree with five red apples ready to be plucked from its boughs, an upside-down, tin cooking pot, a black bound book with a golden cross on the cover and red ribbon marking a page inside, and sack, presumably laden with apple seeds (see Example 4.5, "Heroes' pages" from the "Johnny Appleseed" storybook).

All of the symbols represented in this storybook are actually tools, and rather primitive ones with the exception of Johnny's book.[27] An axe, a hammer, a rifle, a pot and apple seeds: these heroes are defined by simple, rather unmediated objects that were extensions of their own bodies. They were self-made and self-contained men whose skills were easily transportable into new places and contexts.

Both the "Bunyan" and "Appleseed" shorts create a series of visual frames that both set up the films as new and modern commercial entities with producers, a level of theatricality, as well as corporate affiliations and support (i.e. the title cards and credits). They also represent the stories as timeless, canonized, almost candid pieces of

[27] Although Johnny's book is never explicitly referred to as such, the golden cross on the book's cover gives the impression that the book is, in fact, a Bible. This silent reference to Christianity was not inserted by Disney even though it was not essential to the story's narrative. Furthermore, it quietly implied that Christian beliefs were essential to the realization of Disney's American folk hero as such.

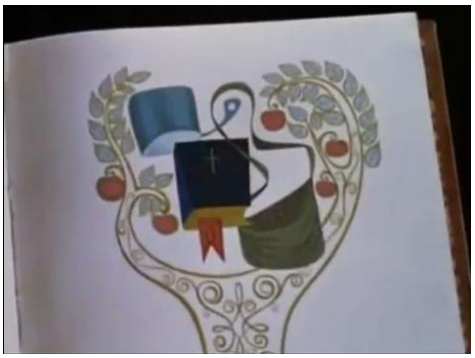
Example 4.5 "Heroes' pages" from the "Johnny Appleseed" storybook. Screenshot taken from "Johnny Appleseed," *Disney's American Legends.* **(a)** Paul Bunyan page, **(b)** John Henry page, **(c)** Davy Crockett page, **(d)** Johnny Appleseed page.

a.

b.

c.

d.



American folklore (i.e. the big books of American Folk Lore). On the broadest level, both films are bound by the screen itself, a physical boundary between the reality of the audience's world and the animated world simulated by the filmmakers. The screen is also a commercial boundary as money is required to both produce the films and attend them. Inside the screen, each film features several frames, each smaller than and encompassed by the last, each escorting the audience deeper and deeper into the story's narrative, closer to the heroes. In reminding the audience that they are consuming entertainment through media while at the same time inviting them to casually chat with the stories' narrators inside the books, utilizing the storybook frames

and the animated medium itself allowed the films' producers to keep the audience at arm's length while at the same time inviting them to suspend their disbelief and participate in the story.

The storybook frame also imitates an aura of folk authenticity. First, by portraying each story as immortalized in print, the storybook frame implies that someone somewhere saw value in preserving these tales for posterity. Second, each short locates its respective hero alongside other stories of folk legends like John Henry, Captain Stormalong, and Davy Crockett, thus creating categories and labels of what it means to be an American folk hero as well as implying an institutionalization of those values. Furthermore, the storybook frame reflects folk studies' longstanding value of "collections" – the act of hunting, gathering, and canonizing folk material and packaging it as public domain, much like the famous collections by Carl Sandburg and folk repurposings by classical composers Charles Ives and Aaron Copland.

The storybook frame also situates the folk tales within the greater Disney canon. After all, Disney had been animating many of their folk and fairy tales into storybooks in a similar fashion since *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and had used this device through the years in iconic films like *Pinocchio* and *Cinderella* (see Example 4.6, Disney storybooks from previous films). In using the storybook frame, Disney creates a motif that ties its films into a series and portrays them as Disney originals in spite of their varying content. They also link animated films – a medium not necessarily considered educational – to learning (for instance, "Bunyan's" storybook is animated into a library

fit with shelves packed with books and a globe), or to the familiar practice of being read a story. In going to the theaters to see these Disney films, audiences could believe they are not just passively receiving the entertainment; they could be participating in common experiences, and even being educated in their own history and collective identities. And with animation (as opposed to live action film or real-life storybooks), the audience can visually dive into the pages of the story, move over large spans of time through a few quick page flips, and actually see the characters come to life. Here, the book itself seems to directly impart these stories as opposed to having another person mediate that experience.

Example 4.6 Storybook imagery from previous feature-length, animated Disney films. Screenshot **(a)** shows the storybook from the film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and screenshot **(b)** shows the storybook from *Pinocchio*. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, DVD, directed by David Hand, (1937; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studio, 2001), and *Pinocchio*, DVD, directed by Ben Sharpsteen and Hamilton S. Luske, (1940; Walt Disney Studio, 2009).

a. 

b. 

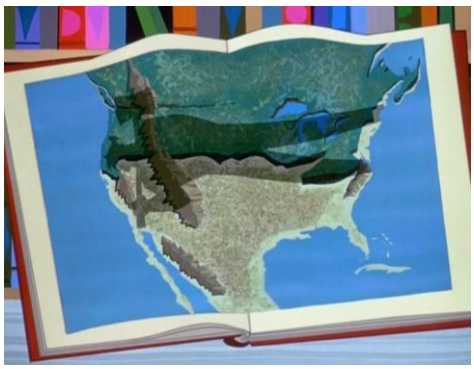
Once we delve into the tall tales themselves, the two shorts diverge in their interactions with the visual frame in ways that were only possible through animation. In "Johnny Appleseed," the action segues from the emcee's introduction to the folk tale's

narrative through the title page. Underneath a golden plaque reading "IN MEMORY OF JOHN CHAPMAN, PIONEER, B.1774 – D. 1845" and an "apple-blossom sky," the viewer sees a small, waterfront, industrial town. The action zooms into the page, first panning in towards clouds, before panning and zooming to the left into the industrial town. As the viewer pushes in to the picture, the margins of the page disappear, giving the impression that the viewer is actually gliding into the illustration, stepping into the world about to be brought to life. Once the viewer delves into the pages of the book, he never re-emerges; the frame never pans back to bring the margins of the page back into view. The story ends not with the words "The End," or with the book closing. Rather, the story ends with a view of the apple-blossom heavens at dusk, and fades to black.

Once inside Bunyan's book of American Folk Lore, the first page that comes into view is a large physical map of North America with Bunyan's enormous shadow passing over the landscape (see Example 4.7a, "Paul Bunyan" storybook, map page). The page turns, again bringing into view two pages: on the left, a green rectangle within a wide blue border, a single tree with Bunyan's symbol, his large axe across it; on the right, an animated man with his foot propped up on a tree stump (see Example 4.7b, Cal McNab storybook page). As the frame pans into the right-hand page, the man introduces himself as Cal McNab, a lumberjack who helped raise Paul Bunyan when he was a giant baby. The viewer stays within the visual frame of the story's world throughout Paul's childhood – which could be viewed as the first "chapter" of his life. Once he outgrows the little coastal town in which he was found and reared, the frame pans out, the page

Example 4.7 "Paul Bunyan" storybook pages. **(a)** "Paul Bunyan" map with his shadow looming over the American landscape; **(b)** Cal McNab page; **(c)** zoom out page; **(d)** Criss Crosshalt page; **(e)** Shot Gunderson page; and **(f)** the north country page. Screenshots taken from "Paul Bunyan," *Disney's American Legends*.

a.

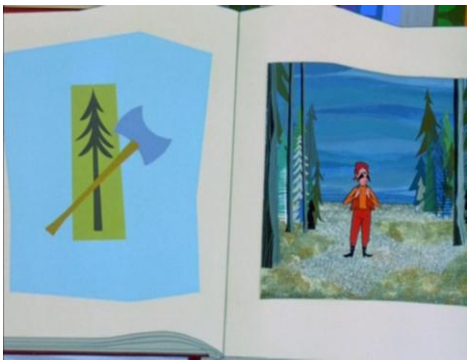


b.

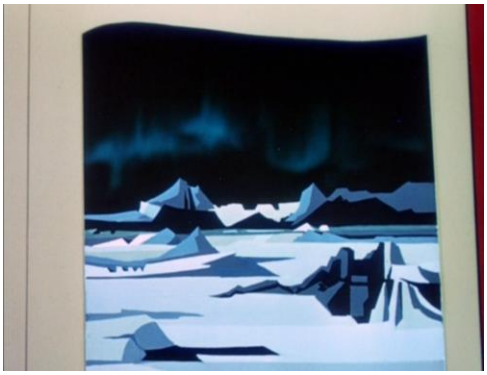
c.

d.

e.



f.



turns, and we are introduced to the Paul's next chapter – that which he lives with the lumberjacks and hits his stride helping the logging industry – and its respective narrator,

Criss Crosshalt (see Example 4.7c-d, zoom out and Criss Crosshalt). We similarly zoom into two more chapters – the next being Paul's race against technology and narrated by Shot Gunderson, self-professed "river foreman of the Oregon Trail," and the last being Paul's retirement into the north country with Babe, where their rough-housing results in the Aurora Borealis (see Example 4.7e-f). Like the Weavers did for Lead Belly, McNab, Crosshalt and Gunderson translate Paul Bunyan's story into a language the mainstream audience can understand, making their case for why their hero deserves to be – *needs to be* – institutionalized in printed collections, recording, animated film, etc.

"Moving to the Left": Manifest Destiny, Progress, and the Passage of Time

Another visual device both shorts utilize to enact Disney's construction of the American folk heroes is imagery evoking America's Westward Expansion, specifically animating their heroes into maps depicting movement towards the left coast. "Bunyan" and "Appleseed" both link their heroes to these maps – and hence, a certain understanding of what was already American and what had the potential to be appropriated or repurposed – in animating each hero as casting a large shadow across the nation. Bunyan casts his shadow at the beginning of the short from the right to the left, giving the viewer a preview of the journey that Paul and Babe will undertake from the east to west coast. Johnny, on the other hand, casts his shadow at the end of his journey, from the left to the right, giving the viewer a summary of the journey Johnny had just concluded. Both shadows imply that as time passes, progress moves westward.

By their sheer size, they also imply that our heroes are larger than life and indivisible from the nation.

Appleseed's legacy on the American landscape and progress is positioned somewhat against Bunyan's. Rather than driving back the forests to make space for the pioneers while converting trees into useful materials and valuable commodities, Johnny plants seeds from which trees, apples, and settlements grow. He simultaneously helps the land bear fruit, and changes the frontier by making it more inhabitable for mankind. Johnny's relationship to technology is less fraught with anxiety than Paul's, as he does not undergo great battle with the likes of a new seeder or thresher. Rather, Johnny demonstrates his rootedness in nature and religion in forsaking technology in his pilgrimage out west. Johnny demonstrates his unique and gentle heroism by setting out with little more than a sack of seeds, a pot, and a Bible. He conquers nature without brute force, wagons, or firearms. Rather, he conquers nature by inviting it along on his journey, befriending critters and varmints – who are large-eyed and expressive, anthropomorphized in typical Disney animated fashion – and helping the land maximize its usefulness and bounty along the way.

In pushing back the American forest, Paul Bunyan is portrayed as realizing its potential as building materials, fuel, and as a commodity. While some may view Bunyan's type of widespread and speedy clearing of trees a form of deforestation, and hence, a scourge on the American landscape, Disney renders Bunyan as an efficient hero who merely cleared space for Americans to realize their fate of reaching the West coast

while transferring the unknown swath of nature into resources, iconic landscapes and larger-than-life myths.

By the 1950s when Disney realized his Paul Bunyan in animation, the Bunyan tale had both been studied as folklore *and* used in commercial advertizing. One of the first scholarly studies of the Paul Bunyan folktale was undertaken in 1916 by K. Bernice Stewart and Homer A. Watt who called Bunyan "an exaggerated type of the lumberjack," noting noted the mythical status Bunyan had achieved through the constant telling and re-telling of the story by lumberjacks in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[28] Relating more closely to Disney's folk project, Bunyan's image and personality was also used liberally in advertisements for a wide array of commercial products ranging from "uncounted restaurant menus…tourist attractions…construction lumber to loaves of bread."[29] It makes sense that "deforestation" would be celebrated in this hero: as an example of folklore he was known for his prolific and efficient clearing of the forests. As a commercial icon, he was utilized to attract consumers to specific brands of lumber. His folksy reputation made him a powerful draw in the broader commercial sphere, just as he did for Disney.

Furthermore, Bunyan's tale echoes mankind's anxiety over technological evolution. When Paul and Babe took on the salesman's newfangled buzz saw and log-hauling locomotive in a contest of physical might vs. technological efficiency, they came

---

[28] K. Bernice Stewart & Homer A. Watt, "Legends of Paul Bunyan, Lumberjack," *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters*, XVIII, Part II (1916), 642.

[29] "Paul Bunyan: America's First Folk Hero," *The Wisconsin Historical Society* (web site). Last accessed October 13, 2014: http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Content.aspx?dsNav =Ny:True, Ro:0,N:4294963828-294963805&dsRecordDetails=R:CS504

up just a hair short. Bunyan and Babe retired to the isolation of the frozen Alaskan landscape, thus freezing and protecting and the "folk culture" they represented in a place far away from contemporary society. This classic tale of man vs. machine – recall another classic American folk hero, John Henry, whose legend depicted his death after racing a steam-powered machine in driving steel for the railroad[30] – demonstrates the benefits of new technologies (like faster processing of resources, conserving manpower, the economic possibilities of American invention), but also suggests the mild bittersweet nature of progress. As a society moves towards new methods and efficiencies (and their corresponding economic returns), many types of workers and processes face obsolescence if they do not change. Nevertheless, the new technologies are inevitably adopted, embraced, and someday themselves made obsolete.

The Musical Manifestation of Walt Disney's American Folk Heroes

Reinforced by Disneyland's Frontierland and the multi-media, commercial juggernaut that was the *Davy Crockett* phenomenon, Walt Disney animated the "past-time" world of a pre-technology, frontier-based American folk hero in both "Johnny Appleseed" and "Paul Bunyan." Disney's hero may have been situated in the past, but

[30] For a more thorough reading on John Henry, see Scott Reynolds Nelson's *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend* (London: Oxford University Press, 2006). Nelson drives the route alongside the train lines that Henry supposedly worked on, unpacking milestones of the myth (like the "White House" cited in the song's lyrics) along the way. According to Nelson, John Henry did not die in a one-man mission against a steam-powered drill. Rather, he could have died from illnesses related to breathing in the particles released into the air as he and the other prisoner-workers blasted into the side of a mountain to bore the railroad tunnel. Like the folk heroes described in this study, John Henry's tall tale was made even taller: he was portrayed as having singular, superhuman strength of body and will, locked in a battle of man vs. machine.

the drive to create and celebrate these folk archetypes through contemporary technologies and media like animation, television, and a theme park in 1950s America was a modern undertaking. This reinforcement of an idea of the past through contemporary media and frames of reference correlates to the other mid-century folk figures discussed in this dissertation. The Weavers used Lead Belly to evoke a nostalgia for a simpler time and place to enhance their commercial appeal. Harry Belafonte touted his roots in the less-industrialized island of Jamaica to bolster his celebrity status through thoroughly modern media like print, film, television, and the commercial recording industry. Disney skillfully exploited the trappings of his present (1950s America) in order to construct a past-time American folk image that was much more forcefully linked to commercial entertainment.

Disney and his team employ musical devices like the mixture of popular and folk song forms, and folksy lyrics and lyrical themes in order to connect these animated folk shorts to the greater Disney oeuvre of animated films. Although steeped in popular sounds and media, this aural image of folk music somehow "works" when bolstered by Disney's animation described above and the world he created in Disneyland. Moreover, examining the music of "Johnny Appleseed" and "Paul Bunyan" reveals how Disney's musical conception of American folk heroes evolved between 1948 and 1958. While "Appleseed's" musical landscape consisted of three concrete pop tunes that also permeated the film's underscoring, "Paul Bunyan" featured one primary song with fragments peppered across the narrative. "Bunyan" was undoubtedly inspired by the

success of *Davy Crockett*'s theme song, "The Ballad of Davy Crockett," which stretched across all five of the serials, serving as a type of aural condensation, moving the story along.

"Johnny Appleseed": A Popular Music Space with Folksy Decor

Musically, "Johnny Appleseed" unfolds much like typical Disney animated features such as *Snow White, Cinderella,* and *Pinocchio*. "Appleseed" centers on a series of individual Tin Pan Alley-style songs, their reprises, and the film's underscoring which often played upon the songs' thematic material, all of which is interspersed with spoken dialogue and narration by popular singer, Dennis Day. Unlike much of the musical material performed by folk artists discussed in this dissertation who performed more traditional – or, at least, traditional-sounding – folk tunes with the influence of popular stylizations and media, "Appleseed's" songs were original pop songs, often in the typical AABA or verse/chorus/refrain formats. The mainstream musical vocabulary of "Johnny Appleseed" reflects Disney's "pre-Crockett" folk music aesthetic, which sounded much more like "pop" than "folk."

The score to "Johnny Appleseed" includes three central songs, each of which blends pop forms with token folk themes. Following the aforementioned spoken introduction by Dennis Day who serves as an "out-of-story" narrator for this folk tale, he changes his voice to assume the character of the Settler who is our "in-story" narrator.

Dennis Day's introduction features less stylized English diction, as he speaks in complete sentences, and brings out all of the sounds of each word.

We know Day has assumed the character of the Settler when adopts folksy colloquialisms. For instance, he proclaims:

> 'Cause of course, them clouds up thar, they ain't really clouds at all. No, sir. Why, shucks, there wouldn't be no apple blossom sky if it weren't for the fact that Johnny – But now, hold on here. Guess I better start back to the beginning, and that's when Johnny lived on a farm near Pittsburgh town. The year was eighteen-six or maybe there around. Now, just look at him, you'd say Johnny Appleseed never would make a pioneer. He was such a sawed-off, scrawny little fella. Course, that didn't faze Johnny none. Shucks, he had his apple trees and the mornin' sun, and the evenin' breeze.[31]

With descriptive language like "them clouds up thar" and exclamations like "why, shucks," the Settler's colloquial language choices set him apart from Dennis Day, "the actor and singer" who introduced the story with a monologue that sounds less extemporaneous, spontaneous, and hence, less "folk" than the Settler's speech. Rather, Dennis Day's perfectly-crafted introductory speech sounds scripted and pre-rehearsed in comparison to the Settler's speech, similar to how Harry Belafonte was scathingly criticized by many reviewers who found his performances to be unspontaneous, rehearsed (and hence, insincere).

Our hero, Johnny, enters the scene after these spoken introductions, carting his wheelbarrow from behind his cottage to his bountiful apple tree. As he wheels around and begins his work of harvesting his apples, Johnny whistles, and begins singing the

[31] "Johnny Appleseed," 1948.

short's first song, "The Lord Is Good to Me." With its form and orchestration, this ditty reflects a "popular" format, and marks the folksy nature of its hero through the use of pentatonic scales, repetitions, lyrical themes and some vocal nuances.[32]

Instead of the strophic form of many folksongs, songwriters Kim Gannon and Walter Kent employ an AABA form, which was common in pop and jazz songs from the era. This particular version is asymmetrical, with a 14-bar statement (A), a 12-bar repetition (A^{I}), an 8-bar contrast or bridge (B) and a 12-bar return (A^{II}) (see Example 4.8, "The Lord Is Good to Me" lyrics, A-section melody, and B-section melody with harmonic landmarks).[33] The A section in particular is folk-oriented: its pentatonic melody in A-flat major sounds simple in its lack of modulations and accidentals, and spacious in its broken triads circling around the tonic, only to firmly land on it in the last measure (on the word "me"). This wandering and open melody is reminiscent of countless folk songs from around the world that feature pentatonic melodies which can "neutralize" the drive towards the tonic, make for easy singing, and foster repetition and perpetuation of the song. Yet this A section is brought into the world of pop song and songwriting by the song's contrasting B-section which modulates to the subdominant (D-flat major), moving then down the circle of fifths from C7 all the way to the dominant, E-flat major,

[32] While in the context of *Melody Time* and the "Johnny Appleseed" short "The Lord is Good to Me" reflects a pop-song format, many non-scholarly sources claim the song is a Swedenborgian hymn that John Chapman used to sing as he travelled the frontier and went about his work.

[33] Despite the fact that this 46-bar variety of AABA is asymmetrical, it does not sound unbalanced or lopsided. The A section is longest due to a 2-measure "tag" at the end, where after his first exhortation of "He's been good to me," Johnny reprises a bit of his whistling from the song's introduction. A marked *ritardando* draws out the 8-bar contrast section, thus creating a virtual aural lengthening of the phrase without actually adding any measures to the page. Asymmetry is further staved off by an outro of Johnny's whistling at the end of the final A section, which blends into the film's underscoring and the Settler's next bit of narration.

Example 4.8 "The Lord Is Good to Me" **(a)** lyrics; **(b)** A-section melody; and **(c)** B-section melody with harmonic landmarks (transcribed by the author). "Johnny Appleseed," *Disney's American Legends*.

a. **"The Lord Is Good to Me"**

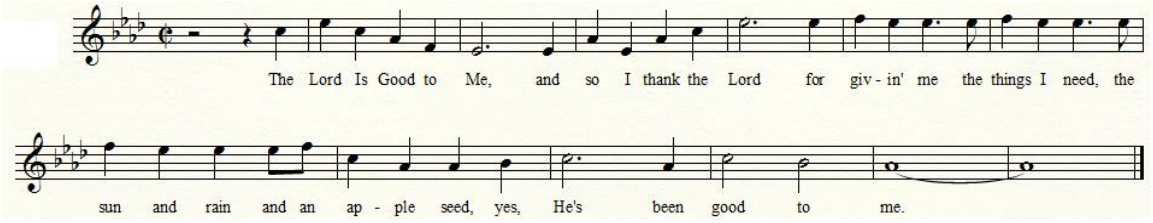
A1 The Lord is good to me,
And so I thank the Lord
For givin' me the things I need,
The sun and rain and an apple seed,
Yes, he's been good to me. (Whistling)

A2 I owe the Lord so much
For everything I see.
I'm certain if it weren't for Him
There'd be no apples on this limb.
He's been good to me.

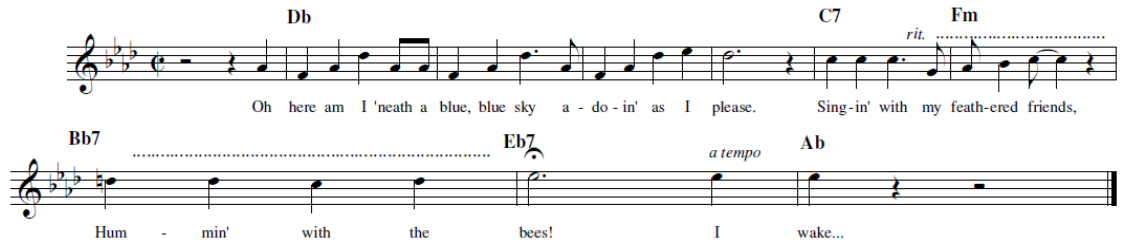
B Oh, here am I 'neath the blue, blue sky
A'doin' as I please.
Singin' with my feathered friends,
Hummin' with the bees.

A3 I wake up every day
As happy as can be.
Because I know that with His care
My apple trees, they will still be there.
Oh, the Lord is good to me.

b. A-section melody



c. B-section melody with harmonic landmarks



which is reinforced by a strong ritardando on the B-section's final phrase "…hummin' with the bees!". This strong harmonic motion leads directly to the A-flat major harmony that marks the A-section's return ("I wake up ev'ry day…"). While the initial iterations of the A-section circling comfortably among the A-Flat major pentatonic melody, the B-section and its strong harmonic drive towards the return is a signature of AABA song forms so prevalent in pop songs of the era.

The song's lyrics diverge from romantic themes typical of popular song, and instead praise the natural and the spiritual. In particular, faith is in the forefront as Johnny sings his grateful praises to the Lord who brings him everything he needs to live a good life. From the sun in the blue sky, to the rain, his apple trees, and the faith that these things will endure, Johnny sees everything in the world around him as a gift from his God (who is easily inferable as Christian by the cross on Johnny's book). These lyrics point to an ideology that rejects materialism in favor of nature.

The next musical selection titled "Pioneer Song" is a rolling siren song in 6/8 time that draws Johnny out of his idyllic, apple-pickin' lifestyle into that of the peripatetic, seed-sowing pilgrim. A gang of strong, hearty men with their chests puffed out, brandishing the tools for adventure and frontier masculinity like rifles, wagons, livestock, and even their women and children, come into view, and call out in what sounds more like a "holler" than Johnny's vibrato-filled tenor.

"Pioneer Song's" lyrics are a celebration of the frontier spirit and Manifest Destiny (see Example 4.9, "Pioneer Song" lyrics). The men sing about coming together

Example 4.9 "Pioneer Song" lyrics. "Johnny Appleseed," *Disney's American Legends.*

"Pioneer Song (Get on a wagon)"

A1	Get on a wagon rollin' West Seekin' a land that's new. Get on a wagon rollin' West There's plenty of room for you.
A2	Get on a wagon rollin' West Out to the great unknown. Get on a wagon rollin' West Or you'll be left alone.
B	We made a home before, We've started now again. We ain't afeared of man or beast, We're strong, hardy men. So,
A3/A1	Get on a wagon rollin' West, Seekin' a land that's new. Get on a wagon rollin' West, There's plenty of room for you.
A2	Get on a wagon rollin' West, Out to the great unknown. Get on a wagon rollin' West, Or you'll be left alone.
B	The rivers may be wide, The mountains may be tall. But nothin' stops the pioneer, We're trailblazers all. Oh,
A3	Get on a wagon rollin' West, Out to the great unkown. Get on a wagons rollin' West, Or you'll be left alone.
	Or you'll be left alone…(repeat line and fade)

and rolling West to a place that's both unknown and full of room. They also plant the seed – almost ominously – that if you don't get on the wagon train, you'll miss out ("Get on the wagon rollin' West or you'll be left alone"). Singing in tight intervals reminiscent

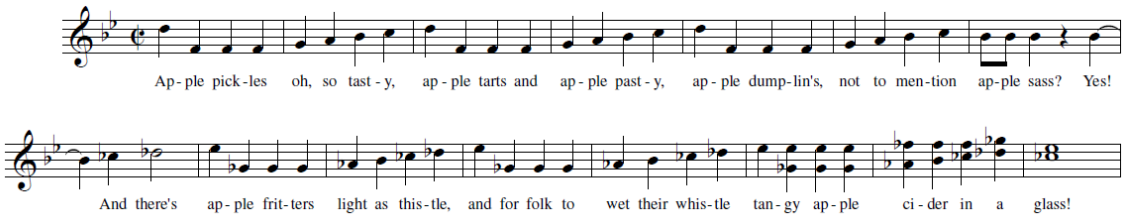
of the close harmonies of 1940s popular song, the women interject on the subject of "making a home" and "startin' out," while the men focus on all of the things they can conquer: things like man, beast, rivers, and mountains. While this is a song about conquering nature and having no fear, it is also a communal song that challenges Johnny's isolation. The pioneers are venturing out alone into the great unknown, far from civilization. Those who do not demonstrate their American moxie and hop on the wagons will be left behind and "alone" as the song goes. Isolation is now not the unexplored swath of frontier to his west, but the loneliness of those left behind; it is the isolation of those who do not fulfill America's collective destiny to expand Westward.

Thematically, "Pioneer Song" reflects the Davy Crockett brand of folk hero that Walt Disney later champions in his theme parks, the *Davy Crockett* serials, and "Paul Bunyan." The chorus of male voices featured in this song relates more to the group singing celebrated by the Weavers and the untrained timbres celebrated in many folk performers of previous decades, thus presenting a stark contrast to Johnny's light, head-voiced tenor featured in "The Lord is Good to Me." Formally, "Pioneer Song" (like the previous tune) demonstrates a modified AABA pop form, but this time, one chorus of the song is 32-bars long as was common with pop songs of the era. Where this piece departs from traditional 32-bar AABA forms is that the first chorus' return (that final "A" section) is elided with the next chorus' statement (its first "A" section). This clever formal trick keeps the listener from feeling a full sense of closure at the end of the first

32-bars, and keeps the momentum going into the next 32-bars, rolling along like the animated wagon train, and revealing the songwriter's craft.

"Johnny Appleseed's" next song, titled "Apple Song," is a list of all of the delicious things you can make with apples (and the ways you can make them), not to mention an attempt to convince Johnny of the many ways he can make an impact with his unique skill set. This list song is silly and playful with sing-song rhyming lyrics such as "Stew 'em, fry'em, boil 'em, bake 'em. Apple pie and apple cake 'em. Yep, you can cook 'em any way!" Unlike with any of the songs so far discussed in this dissertation, this song reels along, with a quick pace and circular melodies, which is not easily picked up in a sing along setting (like, say "The Ballad of Davy Crockett's" famous refrain). The first A statement begins with a B-flat major, eighth note pattern, starting on a D natural before dropping a major sixth, then rising stepwise back to the D natural before repeating (see Example 4.10, "Apple Song" melody). The melody then modulates up a half step to C-flat major, repeating the drop and stepwise rising melody starting on an E-flat for the repetition. The effect is of rising excitement and a whirling sensation that is intensified by accompanying visual feats presented on the screen (such as Johnny's Angel conjuring a table out of nowhere, morphing an apple into a jar of apple pickles, and making all the confections disappear neatly into his coonskin cap). The rhythmic, lyrical, and visual changes in "Apple Song" are quick, bombarding the viewer with words and imagery, clearly reflecting the hand of the songwriter.

Example 4.10 "Apple Song" melody (transcription by author). "Johnny Appleseed," *Disney's American Heroes*.



"Johnny Appleseed's" first two songs give a nod to folk song while the third is more clearly a pop composition. Yet the most conspicuous gesture towards American folk music is a song that Johnny does not even sing. Later in the story, Johnny happens upon a settlement. As the camera frame pans in, the sounds and sights of a square dance are brought into eye- and earshot. On top of a reeling fiddle, harmonica, and rolling banjo, a caller intones the steps with a nasal, rhythmic voice: "To the right of the ring, and the inside arch, and the outside under, ain't gonna rain without no thunder…"[34] With a bald head surrounded by a halo of busy, white hair and a single tooth peeking out of his mouth, the caller moves with lightning speed, chanting the dance instruction as he grasps his suspenders and stomps his foot along to the beat with such force that he kicks up a cloud of brown dust. The white settlers dance hand-in-hand with the Native Americans, while the trio of musicians saw away at their instruments – feet a-stomping – in front of a giant wagon overflowing with red apples. This "Apple Jubilee" and the pioneer settlement are the ultimate fruit of Johnny's labor and a symbol of Walt Disney's romanticization of American folk identity.

[34] Ibid.

All three of Johnny's songs demonstrate an enthusiasm for folk values as Disney defined them (i.e. simplicity, nature, Westward Expansion, and religious faith). Yet "The Lord is Good to Me," "Pioneer Song," and "Apple Song" are clearly constructed as pop or musical theater songs, and feature the scripted voice acting of popular recording artist and actor, Dennis Day, whose "spontaneous" delivery is as openly artificial as Harry Belafonte's stage presentations. Furthermore, all three songs have little-to-no folk origins and are brought to life on the screen by the Disney commercial animation and media machine.

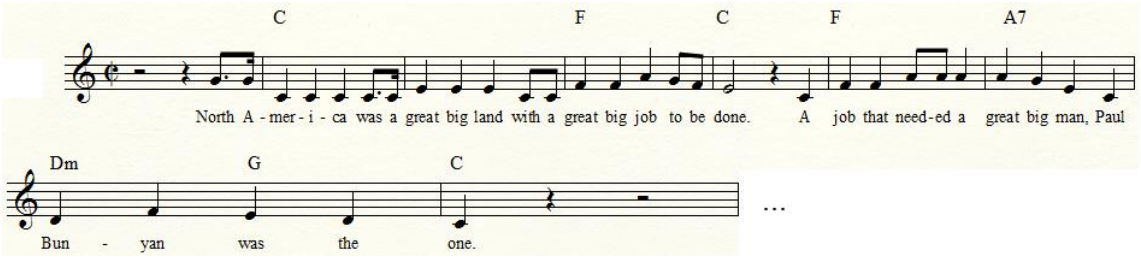
"Paul Bunyan": an Audio-Visual Folk Ballad

Like "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" as featured in the television serials, "Paul Bunyan" is set up like one long verse/chorus song, divided by narrative chapters. The verse/chorus units differ slightly in each repetition, but basically maintain the same musical structure. The verse can be identified by its C-major, eight-bar melody, ranging only from the tonic up to the submediant. This melody has a tight tessitura and is based upon tonal harmony with no tricky accidentals (see Example 4.11, "Paul Bunyan" verse). This melody is easy to sing, and it's first four measures even bear a striking resemblance to the Confederate song, "Dixie," specifically in its initial dominant to tonic beginning, somewhat stepwise rise, and focus on quarter note rhythms in the beginning of each measure, using eighth notes at the end to drive into the next bar. This easy register and

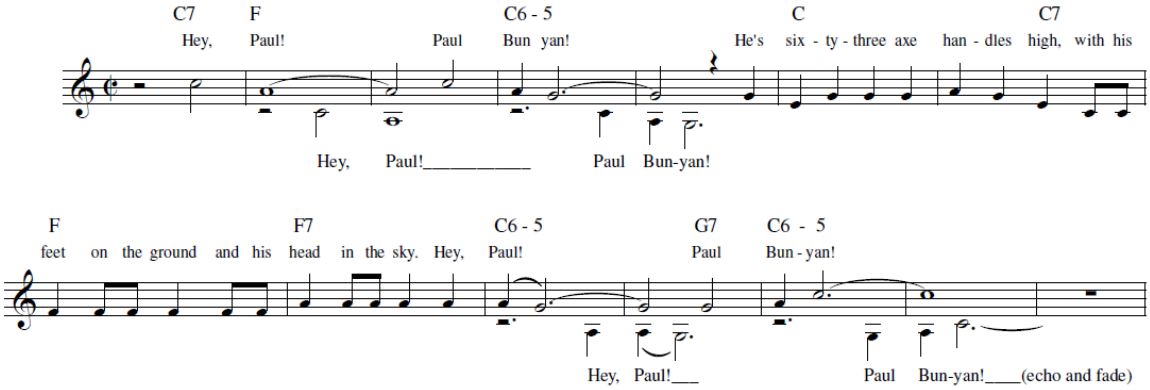
pseudo-familiar melody invites viewers to sing along, or at least hum along as the lyrics change throughout.

The chorus is similarly tonal in its melody, utilizing both the eighth-note themes of the verse (see Example 4.12, "Paul Bunyan" chorus, mm. 5-8) and a new, call-and-response melody based upon Paul's name: "Hey, Paul! (Hey, Paul!) Paul Bunyan! (Paul Bunyan!)" (Example 4.12, mm. 1-4). This chorus uses call and response to teach the listener (here, the viewer) the words and melody, and invites them to sing it back as an echo (a device commonly used in mid-century recording studios to depict wide open

Example 4.11 "Paul Bunyan" verse (transcription by the author). "Paul Bunyan," *Disney's American Heroes*.



Example 4.12 "Paul Bunyan" Chorus (transcription by the author). "Paul Bunyan," *Disney's American Heroes*.



spaces).[35] The characters in the film sing both the call and the response, teaching the audience how to participate when the melody returns. While the sing-along portion of the songs relates to the Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie-esque call and response techniques in their folk music, the general verse chorus structure still speaks to mainstream, Disney-watching audiences' identification with "folk song" as portrayed in "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" and the television serials. (For example, recall the similar refrain focusing on the hero's name: "Davy, Davy Crockett…")

The verse and chorus described above return in various forms throughout the film, making up just about the entirety of "Paul Bunyan's" musical material. When considered as a whole, the repetitions of the verse and chorus frame the action of the story, with the verses pushing the action forward, and the choruses reveling in the moment. While this device is crucial to many styles and genres of music – think pop song's verse/chorus format, or even musical theater's verse and refrain format – Bunyan demonstrates a technique of folksong storytelling we have seen before with folk performers portrayed as traditionalist (Lead Belly as portrayed by the Weavers) or performers in the commercial music field portrayed as folk (the Weavers as portrayed by the recording industry). As Lead Belly did more and more as his career progressed, "Paul Bunyan's" verses and choruses are interspersed with what can be interpreted as "spoken interludes," here the scripted scenes that split up the song's appearances in the

[35] As Eric Doyle writes, it was common practice of the time to apply reverb in cowboy songs as well as in music either in or influenced by the country and western genre. He argues that for listeners, reverberation constructs the illusion of wandering, unfettered, lonely cowboys' yodels resounding in the wide open spaces as they herd their cattle. Eric Doyle, *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording, 1900-1960* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005).

short. These interludes appear throughout the film, and are implemented in order to flesh out the narrative, equipping the viewers with back-story and context for the verses and choruses they will hear.

Unlike in the example of Ledbetter's "Goodnight, Irene" as discussed in Chapter 4, "Paul Bunyan's" spoken interludes are more free-form and do not necessarily adhere to the musical structure of the verse and chorus. Rather, "Bunyan's" spoken interludes relate more closely to the scenes acted out in between the musical bites of "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" in the television serials. With *Davy Crockett*'s success, Disney had found a folk formula that spoke to audiences; it makes perfect sense that the Studio would replicate that model in "Bunyan."

Davy Crockett was not "Bunyan's" only mainstream commercial reference. In the short, Disney also utilized the contemporary voices of the male singing group, the Mellomen, and their deep-voiced lead singer, Thurl Ravenscroft, who sang the role of Paul. The Mellomen, and most notably, Mr. Ravenscroft, were common staples of the Disney soundscape, lending their voices to many Disney features like *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) and *Alice in Wonderland* (1951).[36] Similar to how Dennis Day was the

[36] Tim Hollis and Greg Ehrbar describe how Thurl Ravenscroft's voice would have been familiar to American ears as it permeated many avenues of pop culture from the late 1930s until his death in 2005. In addition to his musical and voiceover work in the above mentioned Disney films, Ravenscroft's voice was heard on Disney LPs, Disney theme park rides (like the Haunted Mansion), as the singer of the now classic, "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch," and as the voice of Tony the Tiger in Kellogg's Frosted Flakes ads. For more background on Ravenscroft, see Hollis and Ehrbar, *Mouse Tracks*, 40-41; and the Thurl Ravenscroft page on the Disney fan website, D23, https://d23.com/thurl-ravenscroft/, (last accessed January 5, 2014).

featured voice in “Johnny Appleseed,” Ravenscroft and the Mellomen helped define Disney’s folk sound as distinctly male and already-familiar.

Conclusions

Like the Weavers, Harry Belafonte and even Lead Belly’s later recordings of “Goodnight, Irene,” Walt Disney exploited pseudo-folk elements alongside the pop music language in which audiences were so fluent to construct commercial objects that were folk enough to seem “sincere” and “authentic,” but were also pop enough as to not alienate the Studio’s middle-of-the-road audiences. Through animation and a blending of pop and folk references, Disney managed to make his versions of the Johnny Appleseed, Davy Crockett, and Paul Bunyan folk tales modern and commercial while at the same time reinforcing the Studio’s American folk project. Over time, Disney’s folk sights and sounds solidified into the image of the brawny, male pioneer supported by catchy, folk-inspired tunes featuring repetitive lyrics, choruses of “uncultivated” male voices, and narrative interludes which hearkened back to the spoken interludes utilized by Lead Belly. Like no folk performer or media company had done before, Disney harnessed the power of multi-mass-media to create an echo chamber of folk values that fed both the commercial supply and demand for his products.

Conclusions

The immense commercial success and mainstream acceptance of Harry Belafonte's, the Weavers', and Walt Disney Studios' respective constructions of American folk sights, sounds, and identities drew back the thick curtain that separated the autonomous and heteronomous sectors of the field of cultural production. Niche understandings of folk music as such could not be applied to these artists and their products, as their commercial success defied the autonomous mission of art-for-art's sake and non-commercialism.

These mass-mediated artists and their products were widely accepted as folk by mainstream America, thus shaping the mainstream's understanding of what "the folk" and "folk music" was. Moreover, these products helped shape what mainstream America imagined to be their shared national identity. In so effectively creating the echo chamber of folk products and ideals, artists like Belafonte, the Weavers, Walt Disney, and their respective media teams bombarded Americans with folk products they could buy and display like badges of personal American folk authenticity.

Understanding folk music as a part of a field of cultural production rather than a rigid set of repertoires, artist types, or political functions allows for consideration of these mass-mediated artists' relationships to constructions of the folk and their perceived functions as folk to a wide swath of the American population. Focusing more on artistic function and capital systems, the cultural field model opens up scholarly discourse on folk music to a greater body of musics and artists than were previously

understood as folk. Folk music need not strictly adhere to the ideal of the traditionalist performer, validation of songs through historical authentication, or some understanding of what a folk song must look and sound like. Definitions of the folk are fluid, even slippery, and should be constantly renegotiated and questioned in different contexts.

As demonstrated by this study, folk music scholarship can and *should* encompass both that which adheres to the autonomous field of folk music production and that which merely interacts with the autonomous field. Although commercially successful, the Weavers referred to the autonomous field through their repertoire choices, their "everyman" dress and performance personae, and their ever-celebrated relationship to Huddie Ledbetter, an artist portrayed as traditionalist. Harry Belafonte reached from the heteronomous into the autonomous field via his repertoire choices, emotional and theatrical performances, and by magnifying aspects of his personal history that made him seem that much more folk. With his Frontierland section of Disneyland, the *Davy Crockett* serials, the animated folk hero shorts and the vast array of supporting merchandize, Walt Disney commodified an audio-visual image of past-time America based upon one of the few things Americans did share: a construction of the American frontier and the pioneer spirit.

Examining folk music as a field of cultural production has allowed me to open up scholarship to a new repertoire of music and artists, treat folk authenticity as a constructed ideal (however problematic) that people nonetheless interacted with, and apply musical analysis to mass-mediated folk songs using criteria more appropriate to

the work at hand. In doing so, I build upon work of contemporary scholars like Richard Peterson and Elijah Wald who consider cultural context as well as mainstream applications and understandings of the music or artist at hand.[1] By applying musical analysis to my study, I expand upon Benjamin Filene's historical methods in problematizing various romantic constructions of folk and folk authenticity.[2] Filene, Wald and Peterson have taken great strides towards breaking down romantic notions of folk, pop, and country musics (respectively) and corresponding standards of authenticity, strides which I aim to build upon in my work.

In choosing the artists I did for this study, I was not arguing for their eventual inclusion in old or new canons of folk or popular music. Rather, I hoped to expose a neglected corner of American folk music history with a spectrum of capital systems and constructions of culture, which demonstrates the weaknesses of relying upon canonical approaches to music in general. As discussed in Chapter 1, canons are broadly exclusionary in nature, defining what "is" and "is not" to be included. Folk music canons tended to exclude that which ventured into the heteronomous field, as well as that which ventured even into the grey area in between the heteronomous and autonomous. Examining mass-mediated folk artists like Belafonte, the Weavers, and Walt Disney demonstrate the usefulness of the cultural field model, which in turn demonstrates these artists' place within or around folk music.

---

[1] Richard Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997) and Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock and Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[2] Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

The field of cultural production is *inclusive*, much like folk song. It is meant to involve as many people and songs as possible, giving them value through their function within the system rather than strictly through their form. I like to think Pete Seeger would agree that folk music is something that is defined by its meaning to people, as opposed to its inclusion in any collection.

Bibliography

Audio Recordings

The Almanac Singers. "Union Maid," "Billy Boy," "Dear Mr. President," and "Round and Round Hitler's Grave," *Songs for Political Action: Folk Music, Topical Songs and the American Left*, Compact Disc Box Set. Copyright 1996, Bear Family Records, BCD 15720-1 JL--BCD 17720-10 JL.

The Andrews Sisters. "I Can Dream, Can't I?" *20th Century Masters: The Best of the Andrews Sisters*, Compact Disc. Copyright 2000, Geffen Records.

Ballard, George W. "Red Wing: an Indian Intermezzo," Indestructible Cylinder. U.S. Everlasting Cylinder 1150, 1909. Digital audio file, last accessed on February 4, 2014 at http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/search.php?queryType=@attr%20=1016%20&query=red+wing&num=1&start=7&sortBy=&sortOrder=ia

Belafonte, Harry. *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall*, LP. Copyright, 1959, RCA Victor, LSO-6006.

Entremont, Philippe. "The Happy Farmer from Album für die Jugend, Op. 68," *National Public Radio Milestones of the Millennium: The Triumph of the Piano*, Compact Disc. Copyright 2000, Sony Classical.

Folk Music of America, no. 25, Parts One and Two, April 23, 1940. Reel-to-reel tapes accessed at the Library Congress' American Folklife Center as a part of the Alan Lomax CBS Radio Series Collection. Part one call number: AFS 13,498, tape LWO 5111 F reel 428a. Part two call number: Sound: AFS 13,499 tape LWO 5111 F reel 428a.

Jenkins, Gordon and His Orchestra and The Weavers, "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena" / "Goodnight, Irene," Decca 27077, 78 rpm, copyright 1950, Decca Records.

The Jolly Boys. "Iron Bar" on *Beer Joint & Tailoring.* Copyright 1991, First Warning.

Lead Belly. "Irene / Take a Whiff On Me / You Cain' Lose Me, Cholly / Irene / Ella Speed / Irene" on *Field Recordings Vol. 5: Louisiana, Texas, Bahamas (1933-1940)* compact disc, DOCD- 5579, copyright 1997, Document Records. Originally recorded for the Library of Congress by John Lomax and Huddie Ledbetter, LOC 120-A1, 120-A6 & 120-A7.

Lead Belly. "Irene (124-A-2)" and "Irene (124-B-1)" on *Leadbelly: The Remaining ARC & Library of Congress Recordings, Vol.1 (1934-1935)*, compact disc, DOCD 5591,

copyright 1997, Document Records. Originally recorded for the Library of Congress by John Lomax and Huddie Ledbetter, LOC 124-A2, 124-B1.

Lead Belly. "Irene" (4:39) & "Irene" (2:09) on *Midnight Special: The Library of Congress Recordings. Volume 1*, compact disc, CD 1044 Rounder, copyright 1991, Rounder. Originally recorded for the Library of Congress by John Lomax and Huddie Ledbetter, LOC 44-A, 44-B1.

MGM Studio Orchestra. "Cyclone (Extended Version)," *The Wizard of Oz: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, WaterTower Music, 2014.

Parker, Fess. "The Ballad of Davy Crockett," on *Rhythm on the Range, vol. 2*, compact disc. Copyright 2008, Timeless Music Company. Originally recorded by Fess Parker on Columbia 4-40449, 1955.

Talent, Ziggy. "Please Say Goodnight to the Guy, Irene" digital audio, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJn6Xdg2i9U (accessed February 17, 2013). Originally recorded in 1950, RCA Victor 20-3925 – (47-3925).

Thompson, Hank. "Wake Up, Irene," digital audio, http://www.youtube.com/watch ?v=TV2f2-puhjw (accessed, July 1, 2013). Originally recorded in 1953, Capitol Records, F2646.

The Weavers. *The Weavers at Carnegie Hall*, LP. Copyright 1957, Vanguard, VRS-9010.

Video Recordings

"Appalachian Spring." *Martha Graham: In Performance*, DVD. West Long Branch, NJ: Kultur, 2002 (originally released in 1957).

Belafonte, Harry. "Sylvie," *Tonight With Belafonte*, CBS television special, originally aired on December 10, 1959); digital video content accessed at The Paley Center for Media, New York City.

Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier, DVD. Directed by Norman Foster. Burbank, CA: Disney DVD, 1995 (originally released in 1955).

Disneyland: The Walt Disney Story. July 13, 1955 (repeat broadcast of the October 17th, 1954 premiere) on ABC network. Digital video, accessed at the Paley Center for Media, New York City.

"Cell-block scene." *Jailhouse Rock*, DVD. Directed by Richard Thorpe. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010 (originally released in 1957).

"Johnny Appleseed." *Disney's American Legends*, DVD. Directed by Wilfred Jackson. Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc., 2002.

The March of TIME: Folk Legend Leadbelly Newsreel. Originally released on March 8, 1935. Time Magazine Online: http://content.time.com/time/video/player/0,32068,30862122001_1918195,00.html (last accessed March 7, 2014).

"Paul Bunyan." *Disney's American Legends*, DVD. Directed by Les Clark. Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc., 2002.

Pinocchio, DVD. Directed by Ben Sharpsteen and Hamilton S. Luske. Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studio, 2009 (originally released in 1940).

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, DVD. Directed by David Hand. Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studio, 2001 (originally released in 1937).

The Weavers. "Goodnight, Irene," Snader Telescriptions Corporation, 1951. Digital media, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_HCsW0xh1Mk (accessed May 1, 2013).

Books and Articles

"The 31st Academy Awards (1959) Nominees and Winners," http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/legacy/ceremony/31st-winners.html. (Last accessed on September 13, 2014).

Allen, William F., Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, eds. *Slave songs of the United States.* New York: Dover, 1995 (originally pub. 1867).

Atkinson, Brooks. "The Theatre: Belafonte: Singer's Engagement at the Palace Begins" *The New York Times* (December 16, 1959).

Auslander, Philip. *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006.

Beavers, Karen. "Lead Man Holler: Harry Belafonte and the Culture Industry." PhD diss.,

University of Southern California, 2008.

Belafonte, Harry & Shnayerson, Michael. *My Song: A Memoir*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.

Bendix, Regina. *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, by Walter Benjamin, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn, 217-251. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.

Billboard Magazine. Various Issues. 1950 (vol. 62): 1/14, 6/17, 7/1, 7/15, 7/22, 7/29, 8/26, 9/16, 11/11, 11/18, and 12/30; 1951 (vol. 63): 1/6, 1/13, 6/2, 7/14, and 7/21; 1956 (vol. 68): all issues; and 1957 (vol. 69): 1/17, 2/16, 3/30, 4/23. Cincinnati, OH.

Bollard, Bob, Liner Notes to *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall*, LP, RCA Victor, LSO-6006.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed." In *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, edited by Randal Johnson, 29-73. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Bronson, B.H. *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*. Princeton, NJ, 1959-1976.

---------- *The Ballad as Song*. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Press, 1969.

Bush, Geoffrey, "Intense Harry Belafonte In Songs of the Nation," *The Boston Herald,* (December 1, 1962).

Cantwell, Robert. *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Child, Francis James. *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. New York: Folklore Press, 1956.

Cohen, Ronald D. *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.

Cohen, Ronald D. and Dave Samuelson, booklet accompanying *Songs for Political Action: Folk Music, Topical Songs and the American Left* [CD Box Set]. Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 1996.

Coleman, Emily. "Organization Man Named Belafonte." *The New York Times Magazine,* (December 13, 1959).

"Conviction Of Seeger in Red Probe Reversed." *The New York Herald Tribune*, (May 19, 1962).

Coss, Bill. "The Weavers: these modern folk-singers speak up for modern jazz." *Metronome*, (October 1951).

Cray, Ed. *Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004.

Denisoff, R. Serge. *Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1971.

"Disneyland & Verve Labels To All Out Expansion Bid: Major Disk Status Aim of Disneyland." *Billboard*, (January 19, 1957), 12.

Doyle, Eric. *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording, 1900-1960*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005.

Dunaway, David. *How Can I Keep From Singing: Pete Seeger*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981.

Eldridge, Michael & Belafonte, Harry. "Remains of the Day-O." In *Transition*, No. 92 (2002), pp. 110-137.

Eyerman, Ron & Barretta, Scott. "From the 30s to the 60s: The folk music revival in the United States." In *Theory and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Aug. 1996), 501-543.

Eyerman, Ron and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 26-73.

Filene, Benjamin. *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Finch, Christopher. *The Art of Walt Disney: From Mickey Mouse to the Magic Kingdoms*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004.

Francaviglia, Richard. "Walt Disney's Frontierland as an Allegorical Map of the American West." In *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 30, no. 2 (Summer 1999), 155-182.

Gabler, Neal. *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

Gameaux, Josi, ed. *The Belafonte Story: An Almanac Picture Book, Volume Two* (slim book / bound fan magazine). New York: Almanac Publications, Inc., 1957.

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. "Belafonte's Balancing Act." In *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*, 154-179. New York: Random House, Inc., 1997.

Goldstein, Kenneth S. "A Future Folklorist in the Record Business." In *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, edited by Neil V. Rosenberg, 107-121. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Goldmark, Daniel. *Tunes for 'Toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005.

Greenhill, Pauline. "'Barrett's privateers': Performance and Participation in the Folk Revival." In *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg, 137-159. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Halberstam, David. *The Fifties*, (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1993).

Hays, Lee, *"Sing Out, Warning! Sing Out, Love!": The Writings of Lee Hays*. Ed. Robert S.

Koppelman. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003.

"HEADLINERS: Lead Man Holler," *Time*, March 2, 1959, last accessed September 16, 2010, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,892273,00.html

Herder, Johann Gottfried. "Correspondence on Ossian and the Songs of Ancient Peoples." In *German aesthetic and literary criticism. Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, Goethe*, edited by H.B. Nisbet, 153-161. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Hill, Donald R. *Calypso Calaloo: Early Carnival Music in Trinidad*. Gainesville, FL: The University Press of Florida, 1993.

Hollis, Greg and Ehrbar, Greg. *Mouse Tracks: The Story of Walt Disney Records*. Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2006.

Jackson, Kathy Merlock, ed. *Walt Disney: Conversations*. Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2006.

Jackson Lears, T.J. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Johnson, James Weldon. *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*. New York: Viking Press, 1940.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "Theorizing Heritage." In *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Autumn 1995), 367-380.

Klein, Joe. *Woody Guthrie: A Life*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1980.

Krehbiel, Henry E. *Afro-American Folksongs; a Study in Racial and National Music.* New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1962 (originally pub. 1913).

Levy, Beth E. *Frontier Figures: American Music and the Mythology of the American West*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012.

Lomax, John Avery. *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*. New York: Sturgis &

Walton: 1915.

----------*Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947.

Lomax, John Avery and Alan Lomax. *Negro Folk Songs as Sung By Lead Belly*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936.

---------- A*merican Ballads and Folk Songs*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994, (originally published New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934).

Marling, Karal Ann. "Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream." In *American Art*, Vol. 5, No. 1/2 (Winter – Spring 1991), 168-207.

McGill, Lisa Diana. "Constructing Black Selves: Caribbean-American Narratives and the Second Generation." PhD diss., Yale University, 2001.

Millard, Andre. *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Music Copyright Infringement Resource. "Walters v. Shari Music Publishing Corp. 126 U.S.P.Q. 268 (S.D.N.Y. 1960)." UCLA and Columbia Law Schools, http://cip.law.ucla.edu/cases/1960-1969/Pages/waltersshari.aspx (accessed June 15, 2012).

Nye, David E. *Technology Matters: Questions to Live With*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006.

Outka, Elizabeth. *Consuming Traditions: Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009.

"Paul Bunyan: America's First Folk Hero." Web site for *The Wisconsin Historical Society*. Last accessed October 13, 2014: http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Content.aspx?dsNav =Ny:True, Ro:0,N:4294963828-4294963805&dsRecordDetails=R:CS504

Peterson, Richard A. *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Place, Jeff. Liner notes to the Lead Belly compilation album "Where Did You Sleep Last Night: Lead Belly Legacy vol. 1", p. 9, (Compact disc), Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings, Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

"Program of Songs Given by Weavers." In *The New York Times*, December 22, 1951.

Reuss, Richard A. *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000.

Reynolds Nelson, Scott. *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend*. London: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Sandburg, Carl. *The American Songbag*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927.

Schafer, William J. & Riedel, Johannes. "Indian Intermezzi ('Play It One More Time, Chief!')." *The Journal of American Folklore* 86 (October – December 1973): 382-387.

Schumach, Murray. "Belafonte Sings in Forest Hills; Terry and McGhee Win Cheers," *The New York Times* (August 1, 1964).

Seeger, Pete. *Pete Seeger: in His Own Words*. Edited by Rob Rosenthal and Sam Rosenthal. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012.

Seldin, Joel. "3 Entertainers Indicted For Defying Red Probe." In *The New York Herald Tribune*, (March 27, 1957).

Sharp, Cecil. *English Folk Songs From the Southern Appalachians*. London; Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1932.

Shaw, Arnold. *Belafonte: An Unauthorized Biography*. Philadelphia: Chilton Company, 1960.

"Singer Draws Fire: Veterans Object to Seeger for Asserted Red Links." *The New York Times*, (April 12, 1956).

Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998.

Smith, Jeff. "Black Faces, White Voices: The Politics of Dubbing in Carmen Jones." In *The Velvet Light Trap*, No. 51, Spring 2003, pp. 29-42.

Steiner, Michael. "Frontierland as Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Architectural Packaging of the American West." In *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 48, no. 1 (spring 1998), pp. 2-17.

Stekert, Ellen J. "Cents and Nonsense in the Urban Folksong Movement: 1930-1966." Reprinted in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, edited by Neil V. Rosenberg, 84-106. Urbana, IL: the University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Stewart, K. Bernice & Homer A. Watt. "Legends of Paul Bunyan, Lumberjack." *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters*, XVIII, Part II (1916): 639-651. http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=article&did=WI.WT1916.KBStewart&id=WI.WT1916&isize=M

Taubman, Howard. "A Folk Singer's Style: Personality and Integrity Worth More Than Cultivated Voice to Belafonte." *The New York Times*, (February 7, 1954).

U.S. Dept. of State. "The United States, the Soviet Union, and the End of World War II." Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, Washington, D.C., 2005. http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/46345.htm (accessed February 3, 2014).

Wald, Elijah. *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

"The Weavers At Carnegie Hall." *The New York Herald Tribune,* May 16, 1959.

"The Weavers Sing At Carnegie Hall." *The New York Herald Tribune*, December 26, 1955.

Webb, Jen, Schirato, Tony, and Danaher, Geoff. *Understanding Bourdieu*. London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 2010.

Wells, Paul. *Understanding Animation*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Whitley, David. *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008.

Wilgus, D.K. *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1959.

Wilkinson, Alec. *The Protest Singer: An Intimate Portrait of Pete Seeger*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

Wolfe, Charles K. & Lornell, Kip. *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992.