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Source: *Theory and Society*, Aug., 1996, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Aug., 1996), pp. 501-543

Published by: Springer

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/657909>

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## From the 30s to the 60s: The folk music revival in the United States

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The folk movements, which we take for granted today, have their roots in the romance of the pastoral. This idealization of the bucolic can only exist when there is an urban elite or privileged class that is separated from the idealized peasantry by education, social position, and economic resources.

Ralph Rinzler

The United States experienced two waves of folk-song revival activity a little more than twenty years apart, between the late 1930s and the early 1960s. In each case, what could be called traditional American music was reinterpreted and transformed with the help of the sort of “urban elite or privileged class” mentioned by Ralph Rinzler above. Rinzler knew what he was talking about, besides being a folksinger and collector, he organized folk festivals at the Smithsonian Institution starting in the 1960s. In both instances, these revivals involved a form of politicization, forging left-wing political ideologies onto populist roots.<sup>1</sup> Activists reinvented traditional music as a political force by interpreting it as a depository of the “people” or the “folk,” and as providing an alternative to manufactured, mass-mediated forms of cultural expression.<sup>2</sup> Folk music, played with unamplified, “traditional” instruments such as the guitar and banjo, and expressing themes taken from real-life experience, was seen as authentic popular music, and opposed to the “unauthentic” popular music produced by Tin Pan Alley and other dispensers of mass culture. As Woody Guthrie, a key person in both revivals, put it when describing his sources of inspiration,

I get my words and tunes from the hungry folks and they get the credit for all I pause to scribble down . . . music is some kind of electricity that makes a radio out of a man and the dial is in his head and he just sings according to how he’s feeling. The best stuff you can sing about is what you saw and if you look hard enough you can see plenty to sing about.<sup>3</sup>

*Theory and Society* 25: 501–543, 1996.

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To be understood and evaluated properly, these cultural movements should be placed in the context of processes of social change occurring in American society at large. This is in part so because it is how many of the actors involved understood their own activities. Activists and advocates of folk music – those we call “movement intellectuals” – interpreted their own actions as part of an attempt to “discover” and “preserve” lost or disappearing forms of cultural expression, often by popularizing them.

Some activists interpreted this act of revival as a form of cultural politics, bringing to the forefront the “real” culture of America.<sup>4</sup> Just as preserving an animal species threatened with extinction might today be given political meaning, during both periods, acting to preserve a form of cultural expression or way of life was perceived by some as an inherently political act, not in need of the mediation of a political ideology or party. Woody Guthrie, for example, thought of the very content of folk music, as opposed to the musical form, as inherently political:

I think real folk stuff scares most of the boys around Washington. A folk song is about what's wrong and how to fix it, or it could be whose hungry and where their mouth is, and whose out of work and where the job is or whose broke and where the money is or whose carrying a gun and where the peace is – that's folk lore and folks made it up because they seen that the politicians couldn't find nothing to fix or nobody to feed or give a job of work.<sup>5</sup>

Others' interest lay more in preserving the musical rather than lyrical qualities, actively taking up “threatened” musical instruments and styles. While some wanted to preserve the music for its own sake, others held a more instrumental view, arguing that with the right organizational and ideological mediation music could serve the important political functions of enlightenment or recruitment. In the 1930s–40s this type of mediation was provided by the Communist Party (CPUSA) and its associated cultural groups, and in the 1960s by what came to call itself the New Left. In both cases, the tension between the “preservationist” and “politicizing” schools of thought was a perpetual source of conflict within the revival. This was also the case with the paradoxical means by which “folk” music could reach the broader folk, that is, the very commercial avenues that disseminated “mass” culture – radio, record companies, and, later, television.

However important the fact that many activists themselves understood their actions through the prism of a theory of history (however articulated), this is only one reason for placing these cultural movements in a

context of wider social change. Another is the more general sociological claim that all actions should be understood in relation to their social context. Within the framework of what is called the cognitive approach to interpreting social change, we argue here for the importance of placing social and cultural movements, like the American folk music revival, in their historical contexts in order to understand fully both their emergence and their significance.<sup>6</sup> The central point here is that the two waves of folk revival took shape in ways that reveal similarity, with a difference. There is sufficient similarity in the form and content of these revivals that one can properly speak of two waves rather than two separate movements, yet the contexts within which these waves took shape made for significant differences, also in form and content. In the 1930s American folk music was, in an important sense, invented by an urban intellectual elite of the type mentioned in the epigraph above. This invention was shaped within a context constituted by political and social movements responding to problems of modernization accentuated by the Great Depression. While the types of actors and music provide a degree of continuity, the situation in the 1960s was quite different. The United States was entering what perhaps can now be called the early stages of a post-modern or at least post-industrial period, characterized by economic and political expansion and student and youth movements centered in an expanding middle class. While the universities and an educated urban elite were important to both waves, the character of higher education upon which this elite rested its legitimacy had changed significantly from the 1930s, and so too the music and its meaning. Illuminating these differences and similarities by placing them within a theoretical framework is our aim in this article.

We compare the different historical contexts in which these waves of folk revival took shape on the basis of a model inspired by the “production of culture” (POC) and the previously mentioned cognitive approach.<sup>7</sup> This, we feel, and hope to demonstrate, is an integration appropriate to the subject matter: the intersection of social movements and the culture industry.

The production of culture perspective analyzes forms of cultural expression as products of organized “worlds” or “fields.” Rather than discussing artistic works or other symbolic goods as the product of an isolated creator, or alternatively, as mirroring “society,” this perspective explains them in terms of their location in a social and organizational context. Integrated into an art world or market for symbolic goods, the

object (a cultural good) is explained in relation to a social organization of production, distribution, and recognition.

While the POC approach is generally utilized to explain the “production” rather than the “reception” of cultural forms, its application can provide a basis for a sociological analysis of the meaning and significance of the cultural phenomena at hand, such as its success or failure in being recognized as “art,” or its hierarchical status within culture (“highbrow,” “lowbrow,” or even “folk”). Paul DiMaggio has applied the approach in examining American elites’ construction of “high” culture boundaries around opera, classical music, theater, and dance in the late nineteenth century, using the POC approach to create a more dynamic conception of Bourdieu’s otherwise static theorizing on cultural capital. Like Bourdieu, DiMaggio argues that processes of classification and meaning cannot be separated from the institutional context of production.<sup>8</sup>

The usefulness of the POC approach for our purposes is in analyzing the institutional context in which activists attempted to transform the meaning and status of folk music. As in the case of high culture, what may seem to many people as the natural category of “folk culture” is actually the result of an ideological struggle of exclusion and inclusion, as well as its shaping by an institutional context. The perspective’s value, however, lies in more than simply emphasizing the institutional aspects of a political and cultural movement: much of the explanatory power of POC is in its focus on the more or less *unintentional* effects of often rather mundane institutional arrangements. The qualification “more or less” is added because, while it would be naive to think that commercial companies in the recording industry, for example, operate without strategies, many such attempts to influence the production and consumption of cultural goods produce unexpected side-effects. The POC approach deals with the conscious aspects of the production of cultural goods, but also recognizes that the broader arrangements of cultural production – the structure of the academy, an art world or an industry – has an independent effect.

As a *musical* social movement, we argue, the fate of the folk revival depended not only upon the political climate or “opportunity structures,” but also upon the *relatively* apolitical nature of the recording industry and its associated media of dissemination. In addition to studying the effects of institutional contexts, the POC approach calls attention to the importance of support structures, networks, and gate-

keepers in the production of cultural goods. In discussing the two waves of folk revival here, we make use of these concepts in explaining differences in the two periods. In assessing and comparing the two waves of folk revival activity, we follow the path, opened by Philip Ennis in his study of the emergence of rock and roll, and look at the interaction of three interrelated “worlds.”<sup>9</sup> First, the *artistic*, which provides a way of analyzing the form and content of songs and the interactions of artists and others involved in the process of creation. Here the “tightness” of the network among artists and their promoters, as well as the different forces motivating them, helps explain important differences between the first and second wave of folk revival. Second, the *economic*, which focuses on the means of producing and distributing cultural products, the structure of the music industry and the commercial field as a whole and its effects on the form and content of music. Finally, *social movements*, which turn attention to the role played by cultural and political movements in influencing artistic forms and contents. This latter is the least developed in the theoretical framework provided by Ennis, and has not been developed at all by POC, which has tended to focus upon artistic rather than political movements. It is here that we intend to expand the explanatory strategy by introducing the cognitive approach, which focuses on the formation of social movements within historical contexts.

As developed by Eyerman and Jamison, the cognitive approach views social movements primarily as knowledge producers, as social forces opening spaces for the production of new forms of knowledge. By focusing on the cognitive dimension, one highlights the content and meaning of social-movement activity, rather than its form of organization. Three concepts are central to this perspective: context, process, and articulation. Social movements emerge in particular times and places; they are the products of specific socio-political conditions as well as deeper and more long-term historical and cultural traditions. But, while being shaped by these broader contextual conditions, social movements temporarily transcend the specific situations from which they emerge; they create new contexts, new public spaces for addressing the particular problems of the time. Thus, they are not to be reduced to the organizations or the institutions that they eventually become; what is central is their transience, their momentariness, their looseness. Social movements are processes in formation; they do not spring already formed from the stage of history. Rather, they can be conceived of as contingent and emergent spaces carved out of existent contexts; they are creative or experimental arenas for the practicing of

new forms of social and cognitive action. Finally, key actors in this process are those “movement intellectuals” who articulate the collective identity of the movement, those who through their expressive role give meaning and content to the movement’s more formal structures.

Our bridging of these two approaches is meant as an exercise in bringing together theory from the sociology of culture and social movement theory, while at the same time presenting an approach that bridges the institutional and the more specifically cultural. In the latter, we find an analogy with recent developments in social-movement theory that reflect a “cultural turn,” and those social theorists who are attempting to bridge action-oriented and structural approaches.<sup>10</sup>

In looking at the broader cultural changes in the arts, music, or science, it is often tempting to explain them in terms of the *Zeitgeist*, particularly where there are no clear agents in charge. On the other side, where one does find obvious agents, it is tempting to attribute changes to their actions alone, and to lose sight of the broader organizational environments in which they are contained. In the two cases we examine here, popular explanations inevitably focus on particular individuals – Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, and Phil Ochs, for example. This certainly makes for interesting biographical and social historical study. However, with the help of sociological analysis, it can be seen that in both cases we clearly have a social movement, executed by a relatively small, tight-knit group of people. What we do here is to present these movements in terms of the special nature of the cognitive space opened by social-movement actors, such as the singer-activist cum “movement intellectuals” mentioned above, without losing sight of the institutional context of the entertainment industry through which it was necessary to elevate local movements to a national level. It is here that POC becomes important and serves as a necessary complement by providing a more developed notion of context to the cognitive approach. More generally in terms of social-movement theory, it can be pointed out that POC offers a more nuanced and dynamic approach to the effects of context on social-movement formation than can be found in the dominant “resource-mobilization” theory, which, in addition, is hampered even in the latest reformulations referred to above by a rather narrow understanding of culture. By the same token, what the cognitive approach can be said to add to resource-mobilization and POC approaches respectively is the idea that social movements are not only formed in “context” but also help reform them. With this said, we can now turn to the folk music revival in the United States.

## The historical background

The development of the folk revival in the United States took a radically different path than in the European context, where romantic cultural movements of the late nineteenth-century were more likely to be supported or coopted by governments into becoming nationalist movements. While the formulation of any “folk” past is bound to be a social construction, in the United States the unique ethnic and racial mix meant that this construction would have less clear building blocks than in a relatively more homogenous country, such as Sweden.<sup>11</sup>

Whereas folk revival in Europe has typically been associated with romantic conservatism and even national socialism, in the United States interest in folk culture has more often been associated with the left. This was not the situation from the beginning however, and it was only by the efforts of social movements that this identification developed. For instance, the politics of John Lomax, one of the most influential folklore collectors and promoters of the early decades of the century,<sup>12</sup> and father of left-leaning Alan Lomax, were rather conservative, while the arrangers of the first folk festivals and other “folk” presentations in the 1920s and 1930s trended to be either conservative or oriented towards traditional culture in a rather non-political way.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike the left, however, these various conservative or rightward-leaning actors failed to coalesce and to draw upon an organizational framework in the building of a political song movement. Also on the left, however, organizational support proved decisive. Music had been utilized in leftist contexts prior to the 1930s, the best-known example being the International Workers of the World’s (IWW) “little red book” of protest songs<sup>14</sup>; but only occasionally, and without clear intention, was this what was by now conventionally called folk music. Rather, political songs – and this tactic was used by both the right and the left – tended to draw from either well-known popular songs or hymns, changing the lyrics to suit the situation.

The movement toward using “traditional” or folk music for political purposes thus had little precedent in America, and the ultimate use was unsurprisingly slow in developing. When it did occur it was within the widespread search for national identity that resulted from the rather unique cultural and political conditions of the Great Depression. The locus of this interest in politicizing folk music was within small circles of movement intellectuals, largely centered in the cities of the north-eastern United States.



### Politicizing culture

America, especially the northeastern quarter, was a multicultural, immigrant society in the early part of the twentieth century, where the idea of a traditional American culture was, if not absurd, certainly romantic. Immediately prior to the Depression concern with national identity had been heightened by the expansion of the mass media linking the far corners of the continent and by the great demographic changes of the early century – notably southern and eastern European migration, and the beginnings of the Great Migration of African-Americans from the South. A main result of all this, especially in the context of the successful revolution in the Soviet Union, was a series of xenophobic “Americanization” policies and, in contrast to an earlier internationalism, the rise of political isolationism – America’s unique form of nationalism.

A side effect of the Depression, which brought many literary intellectuals home from Europe, was the heightening of a striving for national identity, and within several years this search was institutionalized. Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal dispatched photographers, writers, musicians, and folklore fieldworkers, such as John and Alan Lomax, to document the culture of the “common people,” in programs such as the Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Association (WPA), and the collection projects sponsored by the Library of Congress. The, rather ironic, aim of this modest form of state intervention into the arts was to preserve a portrait of a society whose current conditions, it was hoped, would soon disappear. An unintentional side-effect was the creation of an archive, if not a canon, of folk music that future generations and movements would draw upon.

Collectively, the artistic movements that grew out of this attempt to represent the general effects of the economic depression has been called the “documentary motive” of the 1930s. In addition to the work of collectors and musicologists such as John Lomax and Charles Seeger, whose politics ranged across the political spectrum, key players in this process of reconstruction and identity formation belonged to a broad-based, left-wing culture, which came to be dominated by, but by no means confined to, the American Communist Party.<sup>15</sup>

Commenting on the American Left during the Depression, John Patrick Diggins notes, “There was much hopeful talk in the left-wing press of ‘revolution,’ but those who actually went to the masses found

only misery and confusion . . . (presenting) a haunting picture of people with blank faces and broken spirits, of human bodies bent like starving question marks.”<sup>16</sup> Diggins is here referring to images as found in the photographic essays of Doreatha Lange, Walker Evans, and James Agee, or in sociological studies such as the Lynd’s *Middletown Revisited*. Thus, though presented with a “ready” audience for their ideological positions, the organized left was forced to experiment with strategies through which to get their message across. The motive in leftist participation in documenting culture was to transform rather than merely depict. In focusing on music, literature, and a variety of other cultural expressions, the pictures of “misery and confusion” they represented were to be turned into an emotionally powerful source of social change and, one might add, social policy.

In the early 1930s one of the central cultural issues for the American left in general and for the Communist movement in particular – both nationally and internationally – was the idea of an authentic proletarian culture. In Moscow in 1930, the Second International Congress of Proletarian Writers adopted “proletarian culture” as the official Soviet aesthetic, reflecting a policy of class warfare “with the arts used as weapons in that war.”<sup>17</sup> In 1934, after having successfully completed the first five-year plan and reorganizing the arts under one centralized organization, the Soviet Communist Party imposed the aesthetic of socialist realism on its international affiliates and, at the same time shifted from “class warfare” to a “popular-front” policy, which allowed more leeway in interpreting the notion of “proletarian” culture in spite of the new aesthetic. All this was to have significant consequences in the United States.

Like the members of the Frankfurt School, but without their place of retreat in high culture, the American left held all cultural products suspect, since the culture industry lay in the hands of capitalists: from the publishing houses or recording companies that produced such products, to the newspapers, radios stations, and stores that helped distribute and sell them. Given this general situation, a central issue was the possibility of reproducing a non-capitalist culture for the proletariat. To this end, clubs and study circles were organized by the CPUSA in the larger cities of the country. New York, the center of American cultural production in general, was also the center of the attempt to establish the basis for what can be called a proletarian public sphere, CPUSA headquarters was located in New York, as was the party’s newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, and related magazines and journals like the *New*

*Masses*, which was to be the main forum for debates about the role of music.

### **Constructing a leftist musical tradition**

There were no clear musical traditions to draw upon in 1930 that followed the current party line of developing a vibrant culture for the proletariat,<sup>18</sup> and developments within this area were delayed in comparison to other cultural experimentation by the left. In the end, however, it was the left's work with music that outlasted all other such projects, even the institutional framework of the radical left itself. Those most active in debating the role of music were often not Communists themselves, but the central debates about, and the majority of the performances of, folk music took place within CPUSA-associated forums.

Within the CPUSA, the only real musical tradition in 1930 was to be found in the foreign-language choruses of various immigrant groups, and these were, for obvious reasons of language, insufficient for building a unified strategy. In the effort to build a more systematic approach to music, the CPUSA established in 1931 the Worker's Music League (WML), which was divided into local branches, the most significant being the New York-based Composers Collective. The Collective was formed in 1932 as a "left-wing musician's workshop having the functions of producing and performing new and old revolutionary compositions, and formulating specific guidelines for the creation of proletarian music." Its members – most of whom were not card-carrying Communists – included the composer Aaron Copland, and the prominent Harvard musicologist Charles Seeger, who served as spokesman for the group through his columns in CP publications under the pseudonym of Carl Sands.<sup>19</sup>

As Sands, Seeger expressed the group's approach to music in statements such as "Music is propaganda – always propaganda – and of the most powerful sort," and "The Special Task of the Worker's Music League is the development of music as a weapon in the class struggle." As can be seen, these were directly in line with current Soviet policies. The development of effective weapons was slow in coming, however, as the Collective's European-based models for developing political songs were ineffective, in part because of their distance from the American public to whom they were directed. Within the Collective, folk music

was generally regarded as inferior, and in collected songbooks from the early 1930s there was only token representation of folk songs.

### **A political folk**

By 1935 the hard-lines, political and musical, of the Collective softened, following the transition to the Popular Front and the emphasis on socialist realism. As Richard Reuss notes, “artists in all fields of the American Communist movement began to call attention to the aesthetic qualities and social implications of the various forms of grassroots people’s expression.” As was the case with literature,<sup>20</sup> the grounds for measuring an artwork’s authenticity shifted from the “proletarian” or class origins of a writer or composer to how it reflected “the folk” more generally.

The more liberal policies of the Popular Front era witnessed the “Americanization” of the left, and throughout the late 1930s attention to, and debate about the role of, indigenous folk culture increased steadily in the CP press and leftist intellectual circles.<sup>21</sup> The question of what “folk” music comprises is a notoriously difficult question, and has often been defined negatively in terms of what it is not, notably “art” music or “popular” music, whose boundaries are themselves difficult to identify clearly. Without going into detail about how such boundaries are socially constructed, let it suffice to say that construction of “folk” music in this situation was an inevitably arbitrary process.

The anti-commercial orientation of leftist culture was retained into the Popular Front era, and because of this commercial recordings of blues and country were largely excluded from consideration as a source of “folk” music. Ironically, these same recordings were to serve as key sources for the second wave of folk revival that was to develop several decades later. Besides the anti-commercial orientation, these recordings, and particularly the blues, were oriented toward specialized markets and not readily available to New York City-dwellers.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, these recordings generally went out of print rather quickly, and large comprehensive collections could only be found in the hands of the rare collector.

A more important source of folk material were the published collections of songs compiled by folklorists such as the Lomaxes.<sup>23</sup> Aside from the special case of Leadbelly, however, it was rare that the artists

who initially performed this material for the folklorists were actively brought into the movement. Indeed, the rarity of the “authentic” folk performer – such as Huddie Leadbetter (Lead Belly) or the Kentucky labor-activist Aunt Molly Jackson – suggests that they served more as a token of folk expression than as sources of inspiration or artists to be admired. In preparation for our contrast, it can be said that much of the dynamism of the 1960s revival was to be provided by the participation of “authentic” folk musicians. Rural vocal stylings were apparently too much for many in leftist circles, who preferred the interpretations of urban stylists, which lay closer to contemporary popular song.

While not all the songs performed were explicitly political, the body of American folksong had to be picked selectively to reflect the proper political position, which in leftist circles was perpetually a matter of controversy. Lead Belly, for instance, appears to have been coached by Lomax as to what songs he should play, encouraged to play songs such as his “Bourgeois Blues,” untypical among blues for both its explicit political nature and its use of the term “bourgeois.”<sup>24</sup> The problems between the broad nature of folk artists’ repertoires and the more romantic notions held by those in leftist circles is well illustrated in the following account by Earl Robinson, one of the central urban folk interpreters of the latter 1930s, describing Lead Belly’s 1936 performance before a progressive summer-camp audience:

After an evening of “Frankie and Albert,” “DeKalb Blues,” “Ella Speed,” songs of bad women and gun-toting Negro gamblers, etcetera, with just an occasional jail song where the protest could barely be understood through his dialect, the camp was in an uproar. Arguments going on whether to censor him, or me, or both.

By the next morning some perspective on Huddie’s background had been added, and when he sang his “Bourgeois Blues” and a song he had composed about the Scottsboro boys, the air was considerably changed.<sup>25</sup>

Once folk music became accepted as an appropriate means of expression, the two central ways in which live folk music was spread during the latter 1930s were the worker’s chorus tradition,<sup>26</sup> whose main effect was to accustom those on the left to folksong, and more importantly, through what Richard Reuss terms “the Alan Lomax school” of folk singing. The cohesiveness of the New York based circle gave added strength to an otherwise rather small folk-music movement, and it also afforded key individuals the role of gatekeeper: deciding over what is fit to be called “folk” music. Alan Lomax, more or less single-handedly, performed this task in the first wave of folk revival.

## Movement intellectuals

As a teenager, Alan Lomax had accompanied his father, John, on recording forays to the fields and plantations of the rural south. Together, they published one of the landmark collections of American folk music, *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934), based on the more than 3,000 recordings they had made for the Library of Congress.<sup>27</sup> As Benjamin Filene notes, “the Lomaxes sought traditional folk music in the “eddie” of human society,” self-contained homogeneous communities cut off from the corrupting influences of popular culture.” These eddies included the prison farms of the south, such as Angola in Louisiana where they “discovered” the gifted Huddie Leadbetter (Lead Belly),<sup>28</sup> who subsequently became one of the most well-known figures in leftist folk-music circles until his death in 1949.

By the late 1930s, the younger, bohemian Lomax was loosely affiliated with the New York branch of the CPUSA and had added a consciously political dimension to his passion for folk music.<sup>29</sup> He had already become politically active during his years at Harvard in the early 1930s, which no doubt served to heighten his awareness of the political aspects of the folk music he encountered on the trips with his father. In 1937, Lomax became the director of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress and consequently became the most influential “scholar or performer of the 1930s (in shaping) the popular outlook on folksong, particularly in leftist circles, which influenced an entire generation of urban folksingers long after the Old Left had collapsed.”<sup>30</sup>

When new folksingers arrived on the New York scene in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Lomax helped them get bookings, arranged for recording sessions, provided them with material from his collections, featured them on the two radio shows he hosted on the CBS network, and, perhaps most importantly, “provide(d) the singers with both a larger cultural framework and a socio-political rationale for their musical activity.” Those he assisted included Leadbelly, Josh White, Burl Ives, the Golden Gate Quartet, and perhaps the two most influential performer-activists of the next decades, Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger.

Pete Seeger’s father, Charles, the Harvard musicologist we discussed earlier, evolved from being dismissive of the folk song to one of the genre’s most important supporters. His youngest son came of age as

this transformation was occurring and was greatly influenced by it. In 1938, Pete Seeger dropped out of Harvard and arrived in New York City, where a common passion for folk music and left-wing politics quickly drew him together with Alan Lomax. Two years later, Woody Guthrie joined this circle directly off the road from the far west.

Looking like a character out of John Steinbeck's recently published *Grapes of Wrath*, Guthrie was an authentic Oakie straight out of the dust bowl. Before arriving in New York in 1940, Guthrie had worked on country-music radio in Los Angeles, performing the standard mix of music and comedy found on the medium at the time. Playing the good-hearted, naive, country hick was a way to make a living for a singer-song writer, but this sort of packaged country music was not the folk music that either Guthrie or the other revivalists had in mind when they thought about traditional American music. To urban-based movement intellectuals, he appeared to be a living representative of what folk music should be: rural, straight-forward, homey and, most of all, political.

Alan Lomax cites the March 30, 1940 "Grapes of Wrath" benefit concert for victims of the Dust Bowl as the moment when the folk revival began in full force; performers congregated here included Leadbelly, Burl Ives, the Golden Gate Quartet, Alan Lomax, his sister Bess Lomax, Pete Seeger, and Woody Guthrie.<sup>31</sup> The latter two artists met each other for the first time on this date, and soon after began touring together, performing across the country for various labor groups. In February 1941, they formed with three others – including Bess Lomax – the Almanac singers, which became the most important political folk-song group of this first wave of folk revival. The early 1940s witnessed a renewed interest in the proletariat, and unlike the early 1930s, the songs of early labor activists like the IWW's Joe Hill were resurrected and emulated by the Almanac Singers.

The initial performances for paying audiences by the Almanac Singers were held at their Almanac House on Union Square in New York City, which, aside from being their own modest living quarters, served as an important gathering place for musicians and others interested in folk music. The group gradually grew in size, to the point where there were several groups called the Almanac Singers playing for audiences at the same time. This fact reflects the collective orientation of the group, whose intention was to reflect through song and their own lifestyle the presumed solidarity of the working class. Disdaining the music indus-

try's star system, the group composed songs collectively and intentionally kept wages uniformly low, restricting performances to leftist circles at a time when folk music was becoming increasingly popular with the public.

The prime medium of reaching this audience was face-to-face performances in the spaces provided by the labor movement itself. Their first concert tour, for which they travelled by car to support various union-organizing drives, was sponsored by the CPUSA and the recently formed Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The CIO was in a very dynamic state of growth, and politically radical in comparison to its rival, the American Federation of labor (AFL). Activists in the CPUSA party played a significant role in the leadership of many of the unions affiliated with the CIO, right up to the end of WWII.

In contrast to the AFL, the CIO's organizing focus was on entire industries rather than specialized crafts, making its potential membership not only wide, but also diverse. The CIO organized primarily semi-skilled workers, many of whom were first or second generation European immigrants. The political ideas that socialists and communists espoused probably did not appear as foreign to them, and, when put to music by groups like the Almanac Singers, it had the additional appeal of seeming authentically American. Thus, the folk form and the ideological content combined in a potentially powerful way for just this audience.

Besides the songs of courage and solidarity associated with union organizing, one of the themes of the Almanac Singer's repertoire was world peace. Their first tour coincided with the escalation of the war in Europe, at a time when the Popular Front line of the CP and that of American isolationists converged. With the song as their weapon, their message was "keep America out!". Their second album, *Meet John Doe*, was also explicitly anti-war, but by this time the sands were shifting and for this the group was criticized in the mainstream press.

Record companies had begun serving leftist musical circles in the mid-1930s, beginning with Timely Records (1935), followed by Stinson (1939), which became a central outlet for folk singers in the 1940s, and Keynote Records (1940), which recorded the Almanacs and Paul Robeson. The labels of the most lasting significance, however, were those owned by the left sympathizer Moses Asch, who recorded Burl Ives, Leadbelly, Guthrie, Seeger, and literally thousands of other folk



performances beginning in 1939 on his Asch, Disc, and later Folkways (1947) labels. Folkways, which was recently acquired by the Smithsonian Institution, was to play an important role in the 1950s as one of the few labels to keeping folk music available continually throughout the decade, and in providing much of the archival material upon which the 1960s revival was built.<sup>32</sup>

Folk music became popular beyond simply union circles and the audience for such labels, appearing on prominent mediums such as network radio and on major record labels such as Decca. Again, Alan Lomax stands in focus here, able to take advantage of his broad contacts in social and political circles. Particularly notable for the dissemination of folk music to the broader public were radio programs hosted by Lomas on CBS. On his “American school of the air” (1939–41), a daytime show directed at school children, and his evening show “Back Where I Come From” (1940), he featured live performances by Guthrie, Leadbelly, White, Seeger, and many others. Although the latter show was popular and supported by liberals within the CBS management, no sponsor could be found, presumably because of the presence of political material and its mixing of black and white performers. At the same time, many other shows appeared on the radio featuring more refined folk music than found on Lomax’s programs, such as Burl Ives’s nationally broadcast show “The Wayfaring Stranger.”

Lomas was also behind a series of folk recordings on major label Decca, on which he was able to secure the release of “Smokey Mountain Ballads,” a collection of folk material previously recorded for commercial purposes but directed toward the country market. In 1939, Victor released Woody Guthrie’s *Dust Bowl Ballads*. Folk music began to have a forum in more conventional concert settings, as well, such as a series of Town Hall concerts sponsored by Lomax. Another active supporter was CBS executive John Hammond, who, with the financial assistance of *New Masses*, sponsored the important *Spirituals to Swing* concerts at Carnegie Hall in 1938–9, which introduced many urbanites to the diversity and power of African-American musical traditions.<sup>33</sup>

It was not only the attempts by political organizations like the CPUSA to steer folk music that had a determining effect on its form and content. The opportunity structure created by the commercial market also played an important role. This was in contrast to the more state-steered and state-oriented European cultural politics. In addition, the particu-

larities of the American context during this period, the distinctive relationship between civil society and the state that evolved during the Depression, favored the role of certain types of movement intellectual over others, bringing to the forefront politically-inspired mediators between the public and private sectors like Alan Lomax and “authentic”-media personalities like Woody Guthrie, along with singer-songwriters like Pete Seeger. All this would soon change as the interventionism of the New Deal gave way to an assertive private sector in the post-war period and the influence of the Communist Party declined. But this is to get ahead of our story.

The new commercial marketability of folk music in the early 1940s created a rift in the folk-music world, as venues were created outside the tight leftist communities for “commercial” folk singers such as Burl Ives. The pro-labor and isolationist politics of the leftist folk singers presumably limited their appeal, but this would change abruptly with the invading German armies.<sup>34</sup>

### **Isolationists to warriors**

With the collapse of the Hitler-Stalin Non-Aggression Pact and the Soviet Union under siege, the CPUSA and its sympathizers, including the Almanac Singers, were transformed from pacifists into warriors almost overnight. The group’s repertoire changed accordingly, becoming as patriotic as any youth rushing off to war. In the new “common front” against fascism, the group performed songs such as “The Ruben James” (“... tell me what were their names, did you have friend killed on the good Ruben James”), about an American ship sunk by a German U-boat in the early days of the war. Once branded as traitors in the commercial press and banned from the radio, they were transformed from public enemy to friend of the people. An unintended consequence of this was the increased interest of the commercial mass media in their music, and with it an expanding opportunity to perform and record for non-leftist audiences, with even some of the groups members appearing at the White House.

The Almanac Singers disintegrated during the war, as the result of internal tensions, not directly connected to any conflict over politics or ideology, and Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie’s active (regular Army and merchant marine respectively) service. Directly at the war’s end, Seeger helped organize a new, left-wing folk-music group that would be

more an organization than a singing group in the style of the Almanac Singers. An unspoken aim of branching out from group to organization was to increase the range of political influence and thus the chances of survival.

As its name implies, People's Songs incorporated Popular Front criteria of authenticity, in which the democratic ideal of the "people" was given precedence over the Marxist notion of the proletariat. This, by definition, increased the range of available musical material, as well as the potential audience, but the intention of using "songs as weapons" in political struggle remained in place. One of the first acts of the new organization was to establish a monthly newsletter called *People's Songs Bulletin* and shortly thereafter *The People's Song Book*, both of which revealed the extended range of what was considered a political song, beyond the labor movement to more traditional music like the folk song and the spiritual.

In the process, their relation to, as well as the numbers of, their audience changed. While not entirely eliminated, the face-to-face interaction that marked the early days within the labor movement became only a sidelight to their main performing activities, which were now becoming more the traditional concert format. With the market opened up by their political shift, commercial opportunity broadened and the folk-music revival entered a new phase. Record contracts beckoned and radio appearances were easier to come by. By the end of the 1940s the People's Song group spawned the still political but decidedly more commercial Weavers.<sup>35</sup>

After the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 formally banned Communist Party members from leadership positions in American unions, the links between left-wing cultural organizations like People's Songs and the labor movement declined considerably. Labor, as C. Wright Mills warned in *The New Men of Power* (1948), was slowly moving into the American establishment, and in the process being transformed from movement to institution. The result was that the movement context, the forums and ready audience that the labor movement had provided and that had been so central in solidifying the folk revival, all but disappeared. The shift toward "people's songs" and to folk music, as opposed to labor songs, was in tune with the main drift of American society and the shifting grounds of radical politics. As the public spaces for performance opened up by the labor movement began to close, People's Songs widened its understanding of alternative music and created a new basis for spreading its message, the Hootenanny.

The Hootenanny was a form of community sing-along, which gathered people together to sing in relatively open, spontaneous fashion. In this, it was similar to a commercial-music event. What made the hootenanny distinct was the degree of expected participation from the audience and, of course, the political message behind the musical experience. This organizational innovation, which Robbie Lieberman suggests was based on the old religious camp meeting, opened up new possibilities for creating a public and, an unintended consequence, drew the folk song closer both to popular music and the commercial arena.

A direct outcome of this largely unseen process was the formation of the Weavers in 1949 and their recording of Lead Belly's "Good Night Irene" for Decca Records one year later. It reached the top of the pop charts and, along with their several other tunes that reached the charts, revealed the commercial potential of what was now called folk music by the industry. The Weavers' shining career was brought to a halt in 1952, however, through the various efforts of anti-Communist crusaders. While the activities of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee were the central forces behind the divisiveness that plagued the folk music community – because of the pressure on many to "name names" before the Committee – many of the problems created for the careers of folk musicians stemmed from self-appointed guardians of democracy in the private sector, such as the publishers of *Red Channels*, responsible for deciding the 151 names on the infamous Blacklist.

It was hardly necessary for the government to pursue *actively* and to attempt to hinder the careers of artists when this could be effectively achieved by private individuals and organizations, who could stop concert bookings or radio and television contracts, and thus, careers, by simply making a phone call warning of a possible boycott.<sup>36</sup> Although the McCarthy forces were severely dampened by the mid-1950s, the blacklist was still in effect, if unevenly, until the late 1960s, and many careers were destroyed or severely damaged.<sup>37</sup> The hostile environment of the early 1950s caused many to leave the small, but tight-knit folk community, including Alan Lomax, the central gatekeeper and ideological leader, who spent much of the decade in voluntary exile in England. Here the "tightness" of the core group in the folk revival, which had served it well in the 1930s as a source of moral cohesion, turned into its opposite. What had been a source of strength, now made the key members easy to identify and isolate, thus contributing to the movement's downturn.

Still, it is interesting to consider that had it not been for the explicit political sympathies of the Weavers and other folk singers or, another way of looking at it, the hysterical anti-communism of the Cold War, folk music would very likely have entered mainstream American culture in even greater force in the early 1950s, perhaps making the second wave of revival nearly a decade later redundant. Due to a complex of legal, organizational, and technological developments,<sup>38</sup> the post-war recording industry and radio had become increasingly able to cater to musics other than the Tin Pan Alley-produced music that had dominated both radio and the recording industry since the 1910s, as would soon be demonstrated by the emergence of rock and roll.

Institutionally, the central effect of the Blacklist was to remove from folk music the new forums it had gained and become rooted in following the collapse of the organized political left. Thus, in the 1950s, a folk-music underground could build in a relative organizational vacuum, being sustained by neither the commercial mass media and other conventional performance outlets, nor the organizational base and ideological glue of the Old Left. What emerged was a combination of new and old institutional forms that extended beyond the Old Left and toward the new.

### **The second wave**

Unlike the earlier movement wave, which reached a crescendo and then collapsed with the arrival of commercial success, the beginning of the second appeared with the commercial breakthrough of a trio of Hawaiians far removed from the institutions of the Old Left. Most accounts of the 1960s folk revival date its real starting point with the success of the Kingston Trios “Tom Dooley,” which between 1958 and 1959 sold nearly 4 million copies for Capitol Records.

The Kingston Trio is used to date the movement, not because they played a major, active role in its shaping, but because for the following seven years there was continued momentum of revival activity, until the movement eventually petered out in the mid-1960s, or at least maintained a much lowered profile. While retaining “faddish” qualities at times, the revival that was to take place in these years was not simply a fad, but was a complex mix of commercialism and political activism similar to that in the 1930s and 1940s, combined with a new, and sometimes broader, public appreciation of folk music for folk music’s

sake. Still, the core-group of activists remained relatively small, and it is out of this group that what became institutionalized folk music eventually emerged.

It is not possible to speak of a clean break between the first and second waves of movement activity, but for the majority of the 1950s the revival was rather weak and largely underground, emerging in force in the late 1950s with a radically changed structure.

The 1950s are often referred to as a conservative decade, but under the conformist surface many transformations were going on in American society. The flame of political partisanship was carried by a variety of intellectuals, and the decade also witnessed the development of a range of underground, culturally subversive movements, such as bebop and the beat movement, as well as the emergence of various genres in the alternative media (such as *Mad Magazine*) that thumbed their nose at conventional society while remaining outside the realm of conventional (including the organized left) politics. It is thus possible to speak here of an emerging “public” culture within the contours of the new mass society that intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt and C. Wright Mills had identified. This public culture was not exactly what Habermas had in mind in his descriptions of the transitions from court society a few centuries previous; it was not a public sphere in the sense of being a realm of cultural and political activity relatively autonomous from the influence of state and commercial intervention. While, as opposed to many European examples, state intervention in the form of subsidies and support was limited in the United States in the 1950s, commercial interest was clearly present. Rather than a public sphere, this alternative culture was “public” in the sense of being visible, a culture in the public format, open to being interpreted, digested, and contested by those it reached and engaged. Mass society may have produced mass culture, but it was a very public culture as well.

Related to this public culture and the composite of various movements that helped constitute it in opposition to the conventional, “mass” cultural offerings was an underground folk-song movement, which by the late 1950s had developed into a loose network of independent record companies, folk clubs, folk music/dance enthusiast organizations, newsletters and magazines, which extended beyond the organization boundaries of the now relatively weak, almost non-present, Old Left. While folk music reared its head in the mass media at several points during the 1950s, it was only when this new movement space was in

place that it could really take off. Within the space opened by the new social movements, the alternative public culture of the 1940s and early 1950s could develop into an alternative public sphere, more along the lines laid out in Habermas's theory.

The success of the Kingston Trio in the late 1950s pointed to a factor that was of relatively little importance in the 1930s and 1940s; college students. Aside from the conservative political climate arising from the cold war, perhaps the two greatest factors in shaping the field of culture in the 1950s were the new post-war prosperity and the concurrent expansion of higher education, both of which served to extend and redefine the nature of youth and leisure. The number of students enrolled in colleges and universities more than doubled in the years between the first and second folk revivals. This meant not only that more young people were entering institutions of higher education [which also provided more opportunities later to "drop out"], but also that a significant number of Americans between the ages of 18–21 were delaying marriage and family and settling down in life. There was suddenly a great deal more young people, a new generation, looking for something to do and for ideas about how to make sense of this new-found freedom. By the end of the 1950s, the nation began to witness the arrival of the new generation of college-educated, middle-class youths in rebellion against the ways of their parents in the new affluence of post-war America.

The significance of these developments for folk music was the creation of new venues for its performance and appreciation, a new audience, based particularly in the Ivy League and at other elite, liberal-arts colleges of the northeast and midwest. Part of folk music's appeal here would appear to be its qualities as an alternative form of expression suitable for white college students. While rock and roll was later to become a genre whose practice transcended class boundaries, in the 1950s most of the cultural rebels performing in this genre were, like Elvis Presley, working-class southerners, and it was not until the mid-1960s that the children of the middle class would widely take up this music as performers. Jazz, on the other hand, was becoming increasingly self-referential and abstract during the 1950s, rendering it less and less accessible as a form of expression. Folk music thus offered a preferable alternative for some, lending itself readily to participation, while retaining an intellectual vitality, leftist or otherwise.

Appreciation groups grew gradually at these schools, able to draw upon the institutional frameworks of the universities – meeting places, concert halls, etc. The more liberal colleges were one of the few venues still open to Pete Seeger, who was one of the few important players of the past decades still spreading the gospel after the blacklist resulted in the splintering and dispersement of the folk community. Alan Lomax was still in exile and reluctant to be associated with American politics, while Woody Guthrie, whose legend continued to grow unabated, was fast deteriorating from Huntington's disease and largely out of the picture.

By the late 1950s, as Joe Hickerson notes, “it got so that every northern college campus had a folk song trio, quartet or whatever. In 1957, one such trio [the Kingston Trio] got a big break with a night club stint in San Francisco and Capitol Records contrast.”<sup>39</sup> As important as they were for the provision of a new audience, venues, and performers, the universities remained relatively isolated from one another, both geographically and organizationally, lacking the overarching structure that the CP, for instance, had provided to various labor groups supporting folk music in the 1930s and 1940s. Despite all the important activity on the campuses, the locus of the new movement would again be in New York City, even though it was not alone in this. Once in place, the new structure that developed in New York by the late 1950s would provide orientation for the incipient second wave.

### **Continuity and change**

Throughout the 1940s, NYC remained the vital center of American cultural politics. With the exception of film making, the main media of cultural production were located there, from book and music publishing to network radio. New York City was also a locus of political radicalism, the headquarters and publishing facilities of the American socialist and communist parties were located there, as well as a host of small political and literary journals, from the *New Republic* and the *New Leader* to the *Partisan Review*. The island of Manhattan was both a hub and a magnet, drawing the politically and culturally interested to its buildings and streets.

By the late 1950s the situation had changed a little, but not much.<sup>40</sup> Many of the political parties and their related newspapers and journals had either disappeared or declined significantly in influence. However,



new, countercultural, outlets had arisen to take their place. The publishing houses remained central to New York's cultural industry and while television had in many senses replaced radio as the main means of national communication, it too had much of its activity located in New York. When Americans thought about theater, which was not that often, they still looked to New York, and in music production, New York City was the headquarters of some of major players, such as CBS and RCA. And then there was Greenwich Village.

Geographically, Manhattan's 14th Street, running east-west from the East to the North Rivers, marks a spatial dividing line between the first and second folk revivals. In the 1930s–40s, cultural politics was centered in the area surrounding Union Square, just north of 14th Street along Broadway. Here one could find communist party headquarters and the *Partisan Review*, among others. And the Square itself, a dingy plot of green ringed by iron benches and roaring traffic, served as a public gathering place where speakers and pamphleteers representing all variations of left politics from dark red to rosy pink could hawk their wares. The taverns, restaurants, rooming houses, and meeting halls that lined the neighboring streets were filled with newly arrived cultural refugees seeking simulation as well as shelter.

The institutions that would build up the second folk revival moved across 14th street into Greenwich Village, a shift of a mere few blocks but carrying great symbolic significance. John Cohen, a banjo player who wandered into New York and helped form the New Lost City Ramblers, listed a number of significant factors: the growth and proliferation of coffeehouses, where people just “hung out”; the arrival of the Beat Generation and poetry readings; the small art galleries on Tenth Street, where serious paintings were shown (cooperative artist-run galleries counter to the uptown dominance); the Cedar Tavern, where many Abstract Expressionist painters congregated; the Limelight Cafe, which was the only gallery showing photographs in New York, at that time, the White Horse Tavern, where Dylan Thomas had hung out and a tradition of chess, poets, and beer remained; Washington Square on Sunday afternoons, where guitar pickers and folk singers gathered around the fountain; MacDougal Street at night, a magnet for people seeking an alternative to Uptown or the suburbs.

Washington Square is another of those dingy oases that pockmark New York's urban landscape. Larger than Union Square, it is graced with a triumphant archway leading onto a fountain, which forms its spiritual,

if not its geographical, center. It was around this fountain that spontaneous groups of “folk-singers” gathered every Sunday, weather permitting, to share their music from the mid-1950s onward. It was here also that a “riot” took place in 1961, when the city tried to deny these people their right to sing in public.<sup>41</sup>

The Village had its own political and cultural traditions, being the home of American cultural radicalism since the early part of the century, and its relations with the more orthodox, party politics of the left were tenuous at best. After America’s triumph in the Second World War, the rise of a new consumer-oriented mass society, the divisiveness of the Cold War, and the ravages of McCarthyism, the power of this “old” left to define the parameters of American radicalism had declined significantly, if not entirely disappeared. Union Square was by the mid-1950s just another of New York’s small parks. Things began to look very differently as one moved across 14th and down to Washington Square, some ten short city blocks away.

The move further downtown from Union Square reflected a shift in the social as well as ideological basis of cultural politics, from the working-class-oriented, union-organizing populism of the 1930s–40s, propagated by small groups of European immigrants and native non-conformists, to the middle-class radicalism of the 1960s. From this perspective, the 1950s can be seen as a sort of transitory period as these shifts were being prepared and the second folk revival, which began in the latter part of the decade as an articulation of these changes taking place.

The leftists of Union Square did not disappear entirely, and in the development of the new wave of folk music activity in the 1958–65 period, many of the important players of the 1930s and 1940s – Seeger and Guthrie particularly, the latter as a role model for Bob Dylan among others – would play an important role as performers and organizers. The old politics could, however, no longer dominate the discourse over folk music as had once been possible. In addition, a number of old leftists, including some prominent in the folk movement, had changed their political stance during the course of the 1950s. Many of those who had become familiar with folk music in the post-war years, and even more so those attracted during the second revival, would find the old left’s politics arcane, if they even noticed them at all.<sup>42</sup> While new institutions for folk music were building up outside the sphere of the old left, serving a new audience often interested in folk music for its

own sake, new political issues – notably the civil-rights movement, a singing social movement itself, moved politics away from its older concentration on labor.

An important mediator in keeping alive the linkage between music and politics in the transitory period and then into the 1960s was the New York-based magazine *Sing Out!*, edited by Irwin Silber. A member of the Communist Party even in the MacCarthyite 1950s, Silber, like Pete Seeger, saw a need to produce consciously a political folk music, rather than seeing politics as an inherent character of much of the folk music of “the people.” In the 1940s, Silber had helped compile the *People’s Songbook*, a collection of political songs from the 1930–40s written with a particular goal in mind, such as a strike or picket line, and thus not “authentic” folk music or always aesthetically pleasing.<sup>43</sup>

This concentration on the functional aspects of folk music created a bit of tension during both waves of activity, as it went against romantic notions of folk music held by many traditionalists. In defending the *People’s Songbook*, Silber writes,

we were well aware of the fact that not every song we put into print was a gem of poetry or a model of subtlety. Some of them were as crude as they could be. But even if a song was only good for one strike or one meeting or one moment that would agitate people and inspire them in a struggle, we felt it had served its purpose.... If a handful lasted beyond the immediate circumstances which produced them ... Joe Hill, The Hammer Song, Banks of Marble, Union Maid ... so much the better.

*Sing Out!* was first published in 1950, and throughout this decade was the most important forum for discussions of the development of folk music, political and otherwise. Although Silber’s politics remained those of the Old Left, the magazine was not an organ of a political party like the forums in which discussions of folk music took place in the 1930s, and was unique in the sense that it was wholly devoted to folk music. As it was the most important forum for discussing folk music, many contributors saw it necessary to publish their views here even if they were personally opposed to the politics of its editor. In addition, there were other forums developing in the print media, such as the *Little Sandy Review*, and even in the heart of the establishment, as Robert Shelton, music critic of the *New York Times* and later biographer of Bob Dylan, began to take an interest in the developing folk scene.

In 1962, the first issue of a new magazine called *Broadside* was printed. It was an effort of Pete Seeger and others who were dissatisfied with the politics and general direction *Sing Out!* was taking under Silber's direction. The magazine aimed at being "topical" rather than "political" in the party-politics understanding of the term. It would not, in other words, toe any party line. This had the effect of opening up the media-political arena to the younger singer songwriters. The first mimeographed issue printed for the first time anywhere the lyrics to Dylan's "Talking John Birch Blues." The magazine soon became a major voice of the topical song movement. In addition to providing a more permanent and wide-ranging platform for exchanging songs and ideas, *Broadside* also brought singers and songwriters closer together. It was while working as an editor that Phil Ochs first came in contact with Bob Dylan, for example.

While both generations of folk singers drew upon traditional material when adopting them to a contemporary situation, one major difference between the two periods of folk revival is akin to the difference between the collector and the writer. Like the Beats, the new folk singers sought to find their voice by writing their own material. And great sources of inspiration for this songwriting were the contemporary social and political events. Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie shared the idea that folk music was not only music of the people, and therefore popular; it was also inherently political because it spoke the truth about everyday events in plain language. Folk music in this sense was like a radical newspaper, it told you what you really needed to know in language you could understand. It was, as Phil Ochs, a central figure in the topical song movement, put it, "all the news that's fit to sing." Throughout the 1950s, Pete Seeger and The Weavers, along with a few others like Malvina Reynolds and Ernie Marris, had kept at least aspects of this tradition alive, but just barely, and at great personal cost.

Between 1963–65 the topical song movement and the singer-songwriter surfaced as a major force in the second wave of folk revival. Besides the heritage provided by Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, a great source of inspiration for the participants of this movement, from Bob Dylan to Tom Paxton, Len Chandler, and Phil Ochs, was the civil-rights movement. From the time it broke into national headlines, with the Montgomery bus boycott in 1954, until 1965, when concern with the escalating war in Vietnam took over the attention of white American radicals, the civil-rights movement focused American cultural radicalism in the way that the labor movement had done for earlier genera-

tions. The folk-oriented, singer-song writer was one of its expressions. When Bob Dylan arrived in Greenwich Village in 1961, he thought of himself as an incarnation of Woody Guthrie, singing what would now be called traditional folk music. By 1963, he was writing his own songs, mostly based on current events, and many of them were about African-Americans.

There were other sources that contributed to the second wave of folk revival than the explicitly political and other articulators, movement intellectuals, and the singer-songwriter. Another major trend in the folk revival was an increased appreciation for folk music for folk music's sake, lending a new kind of "purism" to the appreciation of the music. Here a new sort of non-commercial, producer-promoter, an alternative entrepreneur, emerged and proved essential to the movement's identity-formation.

A central Greenwich Village institution that demonstrates the new nature of the New York folk scene was Izzy Young's Folklore Center on MacDougal street, which, after it opened in 1957, became the central meeting place for folksingers and others interested in keeping up with the dynamic folk music scene. The first place of its kind, the small "store" boasted "the largest, most varied collection of books and pamphlets on folk music in America," as well as a wide collection of folk music on record and instruments.<sup>44</sup> Committed to publicizing all forms of folk music, including its more commercial variety because of a desire to spread the gospel, Young's activities included presenting, at minimal cost to the public, a series of concerts at his store and at a nearby church at minimal cost (these included the first New York concerts of many new and "rediscovered" artists, including Bob Dylan), having a regular column in *Sing Out!* ("Frets and Frails") which provided all the latest news on the folk scene, publishing a newsletter, and generally acting as a moral conscience against the dangers of commercialism. As movement intellectual, the alternative entrepreneur, like Izzy Young, mediated the tension between commercialism and purism that, in addition to political activism, gave the second wave of folk revival its dynamism.

Having been introduced to the world of folk music in 1945 through Margaret Mayo's relatively non-political American Square Dance Group, Young's education in folk music took place outside the cognitive framework of the radical left, perhaps leaving him more open to the variety of folk music than those formed during the 1930s and

1940s.<sup>45</sup> For instance, although opposed to the Communist politics of Irwin Silber, Young was nevertheless willing to sell his books in the interest of promoting folk music, following his simple, but revealing for the times, motto “I like folk music.”

A staunch supporter of the topical-songs movement of the early 1960s, and involved in supporting liberal political causes, Young was also active in the other major area of folk-music activity, helping to found in 1960 the *Friends of Old Time Music*, which arranged to bring traditional performers to New York. Also in this group were two “citybills,” John Cohen, of the influential old-time country group the New Lost City Ramblers, and Ralph Rinzler, who, aside from being a member of the bluegrass band the Greenbriar Boys, would become one of the central talent coordinators of the Newport Folk Festival, and start in the late 1960s the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

### **Traditional music for its own sake**

One of the most important differences between the first and second waves of movement activity was the manner in which folk music itself was regarded. Although during the first wave many of the key actors appreciated folk music in its “natural” form (as performed by “traditional” artists who grew up with the music), folk music tended to be viewed in terms of its political functions, as “a weapon” in the fight against fascism, big business, and so on. Few “traditional” artists were featured, but instead the key performers were urban-based interpreters who gave the music a political slant, even if not all the songs performed were explicitly political. In the process and the effort to reach as many people as possible, the lyrics were valued over the music itself, sung in a manner clearly audible to their urban audiences.

As just discussed, the focus on political lyrics was one of the defining features of the second wave, but another important feature was the “revival” of older or archaic musical styles, which appeared to revivalists to be in danger of dying out. Although something of this sort was also present in the first wave, in the second it took new forms and a different set of priorities. Actions of revival took several forms: bringing to the public older artists who could still perform in these styles; making available older recordings, such as those earlier made for the country and “race” markets in the 1920s and 1930s, and through the formation of new bands or units that attempted to replicate *exactly*

the old styles, such as the New Lost City Ramblers and the Greenbriar Boys.

The bringing of traditional artists into the folk scene was one of the most interesting forms of cultural politics that distinguished the two periods. As John Cohen notes, “The idea of knowing traditional artists first-hand was not inherent in the earlier folk song movements. Collectors viewed the singers as “informants” and “source material” rather than as artists.” The new generation on the other hand, including Cohen and Rinzler, often idolized the folk artists, about whom they initially only knew from the older recordings that they used as a basis for setting out to “rediscover” artists representing older traditions.<sup>46</sup> Together with these recordings, which had otherwise been ignored during the first wave, the “rediscovered” or newly “discovered” artists served as living standards by which to base the “purity” of folk music, although their “purity” was itself a social construction of the revivalists.<sup>47</sup>

Such music generally had less commercial appeal than the more popularizing folksingers, and was able to find an outlet on a variety of smaller record companies that catered to various specialty audiences within the revival. Besides Folkways, these included the new companies Elektra, Vanguard, and Prestige, all based in the New York area and committed to promoting the new folk music. In this context, the real threat came not from ideological conflict or from “commercialism” per se, but from the larger record companies who, because of their economic power, could absorb the markets created around the folk revival and in the process affect the content of the music recorded.

The issue of commercialism, however, was a topic that shaped many of the important debates about folk music in this period. Having temporarily abandoned folk music after the crackdown in the early 1950s, the major recording companies turned once again to folk music in a major way with the success of the Kingston Trio and Harry Belafonte. Taking advantage of this fad, other groups, like The Limelighters, continued the musical – but not political – pattern set a decade earlier by the Weavers and other popularizers of folk music. Such music evoked folk qualities, but was standardized for a mass audience.

On the pop-music market of the late 1950s this newly reconstructed folk music apparently served to fill a gap created by the demise of rockabilly, which had, according to Robert Cantwell:

...swiftly declined in the face of massive commercialization, marketing, and sex scandals, and, most of all, the disappearance of the authentic performers: Presley was drafted into the army; Carl Perkins seriously injured in an auto accident; Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis disgraced by liaisons with young women who had not attained their majority; Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochran, and Gene Vincent killed. . . .<sup>48</sup>

No one assumed that rock and roll would last for so many years, and the larger companies likewise treated folk music as a fad. The audience of white, middle-class youths with some experience of higher education was expanding and their musical tastes were still rather undefined and thus, from the marketing point of view, an untapped potential.

### Organizing for revival

The revival of widespread public interest in folk music in the early 1960s grew out of traditions with roots in the 1930s and maintained through the 1950s by dedicated and far-sighted individuals like Pete Seeger, Alan Lomax, Irwin Silber, and Izzy Young. But these individuals could not have accomplished what they did without the organizations and institutions they themselves helped create. In addition to the ones already mentioned, like *Sing Out!* and the Folklore Center, the various clubs such as Gerde's and the others, a central institution in maintaining an interest in folk music was the outdoor music festival and the most important of these was the Newport Folk and Blues Festival. No forum displayed the tensions among commercialism, politics, and purism more clearly than the Newport Folk Festival.

The Newport Folk Festival was first conceived in the light of the success of the Kingston Trio, Harry Belafonte, and, less directly, the Weavers, that is, commercial interests dominated over the political and the authentic strands in the folk-song movement. The first festival was organized in 1959 by Albert Grossman and George Wein, both managers and musical producers, the latter with primary experience with jazz rather than folk music.<sup>49</sup> With commercial interest as its defining feature, the first two Newport festivals were organized around "stars," and on this principle both failed miserably. The reason for this failure, according to Bruce Jackson, a member of the board of directors of later Festivals, was "the two promoters had missed the point: stars weren't enough to attract big audiences in this phase of the revival. Audiences were beginning to demand significant participation by traditional performers."



The “errors” of Newport were first corrected in the 1961 University of Chicago folk festival and the following year at Newport itself. The 1962 Newport Folk Festival was reorganized under the direction of folksingers themselves, mixing traditional and the new urban folksingers. By 1963 Festival could mix “stars” with tradition and politics, as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Tom Paxton, and Phil Ochs, called “Woody’s Children” in the program notes, joined Pete Seeger and a host of folk and blues singers representing an older generation. Also present were the Freedom Singers, a group of Southern civil-rights activists from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The Festival mixed the old and the new, the contemporary and the traditional, but the significance of the civil-rights struggle was never far in the background. In one of his first major public appearances. Phil Ochs sang “The Ballad of Medger Evers” and “Talking Birmingham Jam,” two of his own compositions written in response to recent events in the South. Joan Baez sang a politically inspired version of the spiritual “Oh, Freedom.”

It was not simply a matter of finding the right mix of performers to turn the Newport Festival into a significant institution of folk music revival. It became significant and at the same time successful, measured in financial terms and in the size of the audience (18,000 was its largest single audience and \$70,000 was its largest after-taxes profit), in the context of a broad series of events that opened the 1960s: the growing symbolic and political power of the civil-rights movement, the declining promise of Kennedy’s new frontier, the Bay of Pigs, the Berlin Wall, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, all of which widened the possibilities of political and cultural dissent. Coupled with an expanding, young, white, college-educated middle-class in search of new identities, a new Newport Folk Festival was created and given a significance its original promoters probably never dreamed of.

In the context of a wider social movement, the Newport Folk Festival was transformed from a narrowly conceived, largely commercial venture into a significant event, where a mixture of entertainment and participation were given meaningful political and cultural content. The format of the Festival changed accordingly. It was Pete Seeger, and thus the old political traditions from the 1930s, who was the visible hand behind this transformation. The Festival was reorganized not only in terms of making performers its board of directors, but also on a non-profit basis. Mixing stars and lesser-known “traditional” performers allowed the former to draw crowds large enough to subsidize the latter.

After 1963, the highpoint of the politicized Festival, where the urban folk-singing stars dominated, a consciously directed shift in the favor of rural, traditional performers was set in motion.<sup>50</sup> In addition, workshops, which included everything from topical-song writing to dulcimer playing, were added to make the Festival, Jackson recounts, as much an educational as an entertainment event.” The balance between smaller workshops where the boundaries between performers and audience were much less apparent and the center stage concerts also shifted over the seven years of the Festival. “In 1964,” Jackson writes, “no more than three workshops went on simultaneously; the crowds were large and electrical amplification systems were necessary. In 1968, twenty-two workshops went on simultaneously and microphones were banned in order to keep the groups around the performers as small as possible.” For a time, then, the Newport Folk Festival was thus able to contain and successfully mediate all the tensions of the folk music revival.

## Conclusion

Woody Guthrie’s ashes were spread by the wind over the water from a Coney Island, New York pier a few days after he died on Oct. 3, 1967. His wife and children, including his 19-year-old son Arlo, were present as America’s greatest folksinger was laid to rest. One of the last things Woody heard before he died was Arlo’s recorded voice singing the draft-dodging tale of Alice’s restaurant. He must have sensed that the spirit had been passed on. Woody Guthrie died just as the second great wave of popular interest in American folk music was coming to an end. “Alice’s Restaurant” was in many ways one of its last echoes. The symbolism could not have been more poignant. At the center of the first folk revival, Woody Guthrie was a vital source of inspiration for the second.

The new generation of singer-songwriters who marked the second wave was largely composed of those with at least some contact with the new mass higher education and those “multi-versities” that were built to dispense it. They were neither members of a *déclassé* elite, as could be said of Charles and Pete Seeger and John and Alan Lomax, nor were they “authentic” folk singers, like Woody Guthrie. Nor could they be. By the 1960s, the conditions that had created the possibility for the first wave of the movement had been irretrievably altered. After the Second World War, with a postwar economic expansion and population explosion under way, America was a different place. Besides, the

first folk revival had already claimed “authenticity” as its own. For the most part, if there was any aspiration toward authenticity amongst the topical singer-songwriters (those in New York City in any case), it was to be as close a copy of the first generation, Guthrie and Seeger, as possible. “Purism” was the second wave’s answer to the “authenticity” of the first.<sup>51</sup>

Being part of an expanding generation of white, college-educated youths affected the form and content of the music that characterized the second wave. The most obvious aspect of this was the arena of performance and the audience who filled it. Gone were the union halls, the singing in working-class bars and beerhalls and at Party functions, all of which had characterized the first wave. These were replaced first by coffee shops and small clubs, either in Greenwich Village or those surrounding college campuses. The forays into the South in support of the civil-rights movement were for the most part short-lived and highly symbolic, not to say self-serving. The real mass audience arrived with the antiwar activity and was largely university centered.

It was also this audience that filled the auditoriums and concert halls for the more obviously commercial performances by the singer-songwriters of the second wave. This overlapping public provided the grounds for a new mass market in folk music. Peter, Paul, and Mary, who sang in front of many mass demonstrations in protest against the war in Vietnam or in support of civil rights, were, although they saw themselves as carrying on in the spirit of the Weavers, an entirely commercial creation. In the article from the *East Village Other* cited above, written just after “the first big concert in America against the war in Vietnam,” Izzy Young angrily notes that “everybody was a part of it except the people managed by Albert Grossman – Peter, Paul and Mary, and Bob Dylan. When the war in Vietnam became “popular,” three years later, Peter, Paul and Mary flew down to Washington, D.C. to take their place in front of the cameras.”

Commercial rationality was much more a factor in defining the second folk revival than the first. The possibilities were greater and the structure of the music industry was different. With a new mass market still in the process of formation and thus unspecified in terms of taste, the larger record companies could afford to take a liberal attitude and to include under their label, “all the revolutionaries,” as Columbia Records proudly announced in its contemporary advertising.

Commercial possibilities thus were more important in shaping the musical form and content of second folk revival than politics, which were so central to the first. As opposed to the old left, the new left was a loosely organized contingent of organizations and groups with little coordination between them. In fact, many if not most of the organizations were ad hoc committees formed for a specific strike or demonstration. No one group was thus in a position to exert ideological hegemony. Following from this, at least during the period under discussion, there was little political dogmatism to be found. With no powerful organization to impose it, there was no clear political line to defend and thus to sing about. Even the notion of the “people,” so central to the first folk revival, was relatively absent in the second. Who were the “people” addressed? Certainly not the working class or even the “common man.” “I am just a student, Sir, I only want to learn,” sang Phil Ochs.

During the second folk revival, the “people” had become “the silent majority,” the province of the conservative right. Neither in music nor in politics did the new left make many attempts to reach the “common man in the street.” The people had been massified, according to new left theory, and in the new one-dimensional mass society the grounds of political and social identity were always shifting. Besides, country music had already established itself as the musical genre of the rural, southern, western and white, common man. From a commercial point of view, there was little need to look for authenticity or the people; the market was sufficiently large and getting larger as more and more young people entered the institutions of higher education. Politically, this was not a serious problem either, as long as the aim was not revolution as it had been for the old left. It was sufficient, then, to address the masses of youngsters gathering together at institutions of higher education. If there was a revolution at foot, this was it.

While the first wave practically had to invent folk music, the second could draw on the reservoir of public culture that to a large extent resulted from this invention. The networks and institutional support provided by the old left and the personal authority of a figure like Alan Lomax made possible the imposition of rather strict criteria for determining in what exactly folk music consisted. Neither networks nor gatekeepers were so determinate to the second wave. With the folksong and folksinger already invented, the new generation could pick and choose from a rather wide range of options. In addition, by the time the new left and the topical-song movement achieved at least a semblance

of cohesion, folk music was already institutionally supported by “radical entrepreneurs” like Izzy Young and the more commercial recording industry. There were, thus, strong institutional bases for folk music outside of politics. Politics, in other words, was not the only game in town. But neither was commerce. The civil-rights movement and the new social movements that developed out of it opened for a short period a space, a public arena, in which the idea of folk music could be reinvented anew. Within this space the traditions constituted during the first wave of folk revival were experimented with and modified in light of the new social and historical context. America was not the same place in the 1960s as it had been in the 1930s and neither could its folk music be. The actors, the setting, and the songs were all different, yet still the same.

In attempting to account for both this continuity and change in the two waves of folk revival we have drawn from both the cognitive approach to the study of social movements, which calls attention to the creative role of social-movement actors in the production of knowledge, and the production of culture perspective, which highlights the effects of institutional arrangements in the production of cultural goods. From the former, we have focused on the changing character of “movement intellectuals,” those to whom Ralph Rinzler in the epigraph that begins this article gave special place; from the latter, we have noted how, among other things, the changing nature of the recording industry helped recast the folk music revival. We hope that the foregoing has demonstrated that in combining these approaches, as well as areas of research interest, we have uncovered aspects of the folk revival others may have missed.

### Acknowledgments

This article was greatly helped by the research support provided by the Swedish Research Council for the Social Sciences and the Humanities (HSFR). We would also like to thank Andrew Jamison and the *Theory and Society* reviewers for their insightful comments.

### Notes

1. Some folklorists and Americanists prefer to describe the folk revival as one rather long historical process, with emphasis on continuity rather than change, cf. Neil V.

- Rosenberg in his "Introduction" to *Transforming Tradition. Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Rosenberg, editor, 1993). Others, such as Robert Cantwell, whose "When We Were Good. Class and Culture in the Folk Revival" directly follows Rosenberg's in that volume of essays, stress the differences between the American folk revivals in the 1930s and the 1960s. In this article, we follow a path between these extremes. We recommend caution in using the idea of "traditional American music." The notion that such a thing exists is a matter of controversy among folklorists and musicologists. For a recent discussion of this controversy by someone who makes a strong case for interpreting "traditional music" as an ongoing process of recreation and reinvention, rather than a fixed cannon, see Gene Bluestein, *Poplore* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).
2. As opposed to European variants, American populism has often found left-wing political expression. Especially in rural regions of the midwest and southwest, populist movements have given voice to the needs of small farmers against their two main enemies in the large cities "back east," such as New York and Washington, where the seat of political and economic power lay. American populism has spoken for the "little guy," the "common man," against the organized "power elite," as C. Wright Mills expressed it. Why this took left-wing and not right-wing expression has to do with particulars of the American political culture. This fascinating topic, which would have to include a discussion of the uses of folk-art as well as music for political use, cannot be addressed in any detail here. The notion of authenticity plays a key role in folk revivals, as well as in right-wing conservative movements. On the different categories of actors in folk revivals as related to "authenticity," see Ellen Stekert's "Cents and Nonsense in the Urban Folksong Movement: 1930–1966" in *Transforming Tradition*. Stekert lists four categories: (1) traditional singers, rooted in an oral tradition, (2) imitators, urban-based copiers of this tradition, (3) utilizers, who do not try to copy, but rather make use of some aspects of the tradition, (4) the "new aesthetic," which merge various genres and sounds in an urban context, including "folk" among them (96–100).
  3. Quoted in Joe Klein, *Woody Guthrie, A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 173.
  4. Writers and poets in the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s interpreted the role of the intellectual in just this way: to preserve a way of life, that of the rural, southern Negro, through the printed text. For a historical analysis of the concept "intellectual," see Ron Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics: Intellectuals in Modern Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).
  5. Quoted in *Woody Guthrie*, 174.
  6. For a discussion of this approach, see Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), and for its application to music, Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, "Social Movements and cultural transformation: Popular music in the 1960s," *Media, Culture & Society* 17 (1995): 449–468.
  7. On the production of culture approach, see Richard Peterson, editor, *The Production of Culture* (London: Sage, 1976), and Diana Crane, *The Production of Culture* (London: Sage, 1992).
  8. DiMaggio writes, "although the transformation of [aesthetic] valuations into cultural boundaries among persons is an accomplishment of local interaction, the utility of such classifications is grounded in institutional systems that separate the products and practices to which they refer" Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change: The Extension of the High Culture Model to Theater, Opera, and the Dance, 1900–1940" in *Cultivating Differences*, Lamont and Fournier, edi-

- tors (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 21. See also Paul DiMaggio, "Market Structure, the Creative Process, and Popular Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 11, 436–452; Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural entrepreneurship in Nineteenth Century Boston" *Media, Culture & Society* 4: 33–50 and Part Two, 303–332. Also, Howard Becker, *Art Worlds*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
9. This is developed in Philip Ennis, *The Seventh Stream*, (Hannover: Wesleyan University Press, 1992).
  10. For the "cultural turn" in social-movement theory, see Doug McAdam, "Culture and Social Movements" in *New Social Movements*, Enrique Larana, et al. editors (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994) and Hank Johnston and Bert Klaundermans, editors, *Social Movements and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). For an example of social theory's cultural turn, see Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith, "The Discourse of American Civil Society," *Theory and Society* 22/2 (1993): 151–208.
  11. Peterson ("No Mule Sings It," ISME Yearbook, Vol. X, 1983, 64–70) notes four factors contributing to the weak position of folk music in the United States: (1) the diverse nature of immigration, and the fact that none of the immigrant (or native) cultural traditions become State orthodoxy, (2) the dilution of alien cultural elements through policies of Americanization, (3) a strong tradition of cross-ethnic borrowing, particularly in music, and (4) the future-orientation in American aesthetic sensibility.
  12. John Lomax, a Texan and graduate of Harvard University, initially became well known for his work in collecting cowboy songs in the first decade of the century, and eventually came to work for the Library of Congress during the 1930s. His field trips with his son Alan resulted in an impressive compilation of recordings and the "discovery" of folk legend Huddie Ledbetter ("Lead Belly").
  13. The earliest folk festivals in the United States were conceived in a tourist and recreational framework, like the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in 1928 and the first National Folk Festival in 1934. For a discussion, see Cheryl Anne Brauner, "A Study of the Newport Folk Festival and the Newport Folk Foundation," unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Folklore, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1983. A prominent conservative who was active in promoting traditional folklore was Henry Ford, who, among other things, sponsored fiddling contests to evoke the moral superiority of the "good ole days" over the modern present, which he ironically so helped to create.
  14. Interestingly, one of the reasons the IWW actively took up music was to compete with the bands of the Salvation Army, which competed for the hearts of the same workers the IWW tried to recruit in the Skid Row areas frequented by temporary workers. On this and others, see R. Serge Denisoff, *Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971).
  15. The concept "documentary motive" comes from William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973). Using Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Raymond Williams's extension of its meaning in terms of emergent, alternative, and dominant culture, Robbie Lieberman, *My Song is My Weapon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), makes a useful and necessary distinction between the CP and a wider left-wing culture. This is important, she argues, for understanding the relation between activists in the folk song revival and the Communist Party USA, i.e., that even if many of the activists in the musical movement were members or in some way affiliated with the Party, this does

- not necessarily mean that the two were one and the same or that the Party exerted ideological control over the music. Liberman's work on the People's Songs group is full of insights into the relation between culture and politics and we make much use of her argument and examples in this article. For a thorough discussion of the Lomaxes role as middle-men in reconstructing the notion of folk music in the context of both the 1930s and earlier folklorist traditions, see Benjamin Filene, "Our Singing Country: John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past," *American Quarterly* 43/4 (1991): 602–624.
16. The quote is from John Patrick Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (New York: Norton, 1992), 146.
  17. Donald Drew Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 302.
  18. The music of Joe Hill and the Wobblies, while serving as a model of how songs might be effective, were regarded as insufficiently reflecting the needs of the proletariat, because of the songs' basis in the lumpenproletariat to which the IWW catered, and because these songs tended to be based upon hymns, see Denisoff, *Great Day Coming*, 40.
  19. All of this and much of the following builds on Richard Reuss, "American Folklore and Left-Wing Politics: 1927–1957," (unpublished doctoral dissertation Indiana University, 1971) in which he writes, the majority were not "*bona fide* Communists but . . . had gravitated into the Movement's intellectual orbit as the result of the economic and social upheaval of the Depression. The Party, however, paid the rent on the room where the Collective met and maintained a voice within its discussions through one of the members who acted as a liaison in the beginning" (57).
  20. The quotation is from Reuss, 93. As a configuration defined within this alternative political cultural field, "the meaning of proletarian literature changed subtly between 1929 and 1935, from that of a literature by the proletariat, for the proletariat, to a literature written 'from a revolutionary perspective,'" see Arthur Ferrari, "Proletarian Literature: A Case of Convergence of Political and Literary Radicalism" in J. Starr, editor, *Cultural Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 179. Although their relative importance shifted, the criteria that were significant in defining authentic proletarian forms of cultural expression were: who produced and consumed them and what could be interpreted as their inherent or contrived political message. In the early 1930s, CPUSA had attempted to discover and encourage working-class writers through workshops connected to the John Reed clubs they sponsored. By the mid-1930s, emphasis shifted from class origins to political correctness.
  21. The initial nature of the debate concerned the ineffectiveness and elitism of groups like the Composers Collective. Initially, provocative suggestions that composers could learn something from the common folk gradually gave way to broader, but by no means uniform, acceptance of folk music within leftist intellectual circles. By the late 1930s it was common to find articles about folk music and reviews of folk records and books in CP periodicals.
  22. Blues were almost exclusively marketed to the African-American public, and were rarely heard on the radio before the late 1940s. Its absence was due to a combination of racist broadcast policies and the domination of radio programming by Tin Pan Alley publishers belonging to the royalty collection firm ASCAP (American Society of Composers and Publishers), which had a stranglehold on network programming until the 1939 formation of rival BMI. BMI (Broadcast Music Incorporated) was supported by radio stations, which resented the increased financial



- demands of ASCAP, and publishers of blues, country, and other forms of music whose records were systematically excluded from network radio programming. Live country music was available on local programs and on nationally broadcast “barn dances,” often containing what folklorists in other situations would record as folk music, which was widely heard on the radio beginning in the mid-1920s on programs such as the Grand Ole Opry on Nashville’s high-powered WSM. However, the means by which the music was presented – between corny humor skits – and its overt commercialism – artists and groups were often individually sponsored by a product, such as a brand of flour – would no doubt turn off contemporary leftists.
23. The Lomaxes’ books include *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934), *Negro Songs as Sung By Leadbelly* (1935), and *Our Singing Country* (1937).
  24. Given the political conditions of the South, it is hardly surprising that the blues of the pre-war era were very rarely explicitly political, particularly regarding race relations. Rather, sentiments were expressed through techniques such as double entendre. Notably, black blues artists, such as Leadbelly, Josh White, and Big Bill Broonzy, included more explicitly political songs in their repertoires once they became popular with liberal, white northern audiences. Without questioning the validity of their sentiments, it would appear that their inclusion of such songs was the result of a mix of their being coached and their ability to read the audience.
  25. Taken from Reuss, “American Folklore,” 185.
  26. After the Americanization of this European tradition, such groups were the primary means of disseminating the music produced by the Composers Collective. After the mid-1930s the Worker’s Music League was replaced by the American Music League, these choral groups incorporated more folk-like material into their repertoires. These, however, declined in importance by the early 1940s. On this see, Reuss, “American Folklore,” 152–160.
  27. The Lomaxes’ – and other less noted folklorists of the times – use of aural recordings as a documentation technique served to establish a new criterion of folk authenticity within folk music studies. The prior technique of written transcription inevitably missed many subtleties of performance technique, particularly those found in African-American traditions, which contained African retentions such as “blue” notes, which appear to be “wrong” to those accustomed to European tonal structures. Earlier studies had largely ignored African-American music, operating on the false assumption that American folk music was simply derived from Anglo-Saxon traditions, and that American blacks were without culture. See Neil Rosenberg’s “Introduction” to his *Transforming Tradition*, 12–13, and Filene, “Our Singing Country,” 605.
  28. Following Leadbelly’s release from prison – which incidentally was a matter of standard procedure, rather than achieved with the help of the Lomaxes as is commonly thought, (see Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*, New York: Harper Collins.) The Lomaxes brought Leadbelly to New York, where costumed in bib overalls and sensationalized in the press as a convicted murderer, he performed authentic folk songs for gentile and left-wing urban audiences. John Lomax served briefly as his manager, until the two bitterly broke relations over issues of money and (John’s) management techniques. Leadbelly remained on good terms with Alan, who helped arrange concerts, recording sessions, and so on.
  29. Benjamin Filene places both the Lomaxes’ efforts with the particular brand of nationalism that evolved in the United States in the 1930s. Even if the elder Lomax

- was more “conservative” than his left-wing son, both, according to Filene, saw folk music through the same nationalist prism. Neil Rosenberg on the other hand, stresses the aesthetic criteria that the Lomaxes expanded, referring to Alan Lomax’s introduction to a Library of Congress “List of American Folk Songs on Commercial Record,” he writes “what was new about these criteria was that they added the textural elements of ‘performance’ and ‘style’ to the older textual criteria” (Rosenberg, *Transforming Tradition*, 12).
30. See, Reuss “American Folklore,” 161, the quotation that follows in the text is also from Reuss, 164–165.
  31. Steinbeck’s book and its 1940 film adaption probably did more to heighten Americans awareness of the plight of homeless transients in the Depression than any other forum. Almost overnight the public image of homeless transients was transformed from scorn to pity, prompting Congress to form a special committee to develop strategies of assistance. On this see, Scott Barretta, “How New is the ‘New’ Homelessness? A Comparative Study of Homelessness in the Depression and the 1980,” unpublished Master’s Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1990.
  32. The Smithsonian acquired the extensive Folkways catalog (over 2,000 LP records) in 1987 following the death of Asch, under the condition that they would keep every single title available, a unique policy in the record industry, which was religiously followed by Asch. Since their acquisition, the Smithsonian has rereleased much of the material in the Folkways archives on the Smithsonian-Folkways label. There is an interview with Moses Asch contained in Bluestein, *Poplore*.
  33. Hammond wrote articles for the *New Masses* on black music, first under a pseudonym and later under his own name.
  34. Their popularity, or lack thereof, was often a product of their own choosing. Guthrie, for example, was approached repeatedly in the early 1940s to work for a variety of conventional radio programs (he was at the time paid weekly for his appearances on Lomax’s shows), but refused because he realized it would mean he would be pressured to disassociate himself from his activities on the left, such as his column writing for the *Daily Worker*.
  35. The history of the People’s Song group has been traced by Robbie Lieberman, *My Song*, and our presentation is based on that account.
  36. For instance, in 1951, after *Red Channels* had already been published, the Weavers were signed to appear on a major television show, but their booking was cancelled three days before the program was to air at the instigation of *Red Channels’* publishers (Denisoff, *Great Day Coming*, 132).
  37. The most famous cases in the 1960s were Pete Seeger’s banning from the ABC television show Hootenanny in 1963 and from the Smothers Brothers show as late as 1967. John Cohen, who arranged concerts in the late 1950s and early 1960s, noted that in the early 1960s he would run tests to see if (non-political) traditional performers were tainted by association, if they appeared on programs with those already targeted by the right, see John Cohen in Ronald Cohen, editor, *Wasn’t that a time: Firsthand Accounts of the Folk Music Revival*, (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1995), 28.
  38. Legal changes include the BMI-ASCAP controversy discussed in an earlier end-note, and the doubling of the number of radio stations in the late 1940s. These in turn provided a greater possibility for record companies specializing in musics other than Tin Pan Alley pop to disseminate their product. The key technological changes were the development of cheap, high-quality, tape-recording equipment, which helped to democratize and decentralize the recording process, and the

- development of television, which inadvertently and dramatically changed the nature of radio programming by draining commercial sponsorship (see Ennis, *Seventh Stream*, and Russel and David Sanjek, *American Popular Music Business in the 20th Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
39. Quoted in Ronald Cohen, *Wasn't that a Time*, 23.
  40. It is easy to overemphasize the importance of New York in the folk revivals, especially the second wave. In his account of the emergence of rock and roll, Philip Ennis (*Seventh Stream*) gives some counterweight in his discussion of the Chicago alternative theater and folk scene in the mid-1950s.
  41. This "riot," as the New York press characterized it, was really a peaceful gathering to protest the denial of the right to free speech in a public place. As such, it preceded the more famous Berkeley "movement." The event was also significant in that it helped prepare the groundwork for the later, more political, folk-song movement. John Cohen's list above is from R. Cohen, *Wasn't That a Time*, 178.
  42. Israel Young, who was deeply involved in the New York folk scene from 1945 onward, recounts (through personal correspondence) that he remained largely unaware of the role of the old left on the folk scene in the first decade of his activism.
  43. Silber was also instrumental in the formation of the People's Artists, politically committed folksingers who performed songs from the *People's Songbook*, among others of course, at meetings and rallies in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Woody Guthrie was a major source of inspiration for this group, which included Pete Seeger and Woody Lee Hayes of the Weavers. Another major source of inspiration was Paul Robeson, who, Silber recounts, provided a model of the politically committed artist, without which "neither the People's Artist nor the People's Songbook would have been conceivable" (Silber in R. Cohen, *Wasn't that a Time*, also the source of the text's following paragraph). A fellow-traveler of the American Communist Party in the 1930s, Robeson, an African American who sang modernized versions of Negro spirituals and slave songs for white audiences in the United States and Europe, had performed along with Pete Seeger at the infamous Peakskill concert in 1949, where an angry right-wing crowd stoned the performers.
  44. Young purposefully avoided creating a commercial atmosphere, for instance, by never having a counter or cash register. As a result, many people felt comfortable to simply "hang out" without feeling any pressure to buy something.
  45. Describing his relation to the folk revival, Young writes, "I was a simple product of an earlier time . . . when there was an equality between the artist and the audience, when everyone knew each other, even when it came to politics" (reprint of Young's *Folk Music Guide 1959-60*, Stockholm, 1992). For Izzy Young, folk music was the authentic voice of the people, a political force in and of itself. The role of the more self-conscious activist, whether he be a performer like Pete Seeger, a professional folklorist like Lomax, or a publicist like himself, was to help make that voice heard.
  46. Concerning the influence of old 78 rpm recordings on the revival, such as those issued and arranged by Lomax earlier on Decca and Victor and the influential three-volume *Anthology of American Folk Music*, released on Folkways in 1952, John Cohen (in R. Cohen, *Wasn't that a Time*, 33, 31) notes: "One cannot underestimate the visionary importance of [these recordings]. . . . The significance of these recordings extended beyond folk festivals and eventually provided an invigorating infusion of "folk" into mainstream commercial music. They provided us [reivalists] with insights into the development of bluegrass as well as the rationale for the blues revival."
  47. For example, when Ralph Rinzler "discovered," in North Carolina, the blind gui-

tarist Doc Watson, who subsequently became one of the major artists on the folk scene, Watson was making a living playing in a rockabilly band. Another artist brought into the folk scene by Rinzler was bluegrass artist Bill Monroe, who invented the bluegrass genre while a commercial artist in the 1940s. On this see, Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). To establish such folk artists' "authenticity" to the revival required, as Rinzler recalled, considerable ideological work. "My strategy for attracting an urban audience for Ashley [another artist "rediscovered" by Rinzler] and Watson had two parts. The first was to legitimize them by demonstrating the historic links between the two of them and musicians already acknowledged to be our nation's prime recording artists in their field. The second was to validate the "folkness" of their roots through detailed biographic notes and articles. The strategy was successful and attracted the attention of journalists such as *New York Times* folk-music critic Robert Shelton, and others in similar positions (p. 3, liner notes to 1993 Smithsonian/Folkways CD (SF CD 40064), "Bill Monroe and Doc Watson: Live Duet Recordings 1963–1980). In order to validate Monroe, who had been actively, and prominently, performing professionally since the late 1930s, Rinzler used a cover story in *Sing Out!*.

48. Robert Cantwell in Rosenberg, *Transforming Tradition*, 43. To this "familiar litany" Ennis (*The Seventh Stream*, 270) adds the death of Richie Valens and cites a number of other critics and commentators who have others to add. In the immediate postwar period and throughout the early 1950s, hillbilly music was considered in the music trade as "folk" music. The music publishing firm Hill and Range (from hillbilly and the open-range) for example, had been set out in 1945 to "celebrate 'America's native folk music'" (Guralnick 1994: 215–16). As part of the BMI (Broadcast Music Incorporated) group, Hill and Range made a fortune publishing Elvis Presley's early "folk" music. The conflict between BMI and ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) in the 1950s for the rights and profits to be gathered from popular music is a key in Philip Ennis's analysis of the emergence of rock and roll, the "seventh stream" in American musical culture.
49. On this see, Bruce Jackson, "The Folksong Revival" in Rosenberg, *Transforming Tradition*. The discussion in the text's following paragraphs is based on his account.
50. Jackson, the only academic on a board of directors composed of performers, notes, "Year by year the directors increased the proportion of traditional performers. In 1963, there were around twice as many urban as traditional and ethnic performers; in 1967 and 1968, it was just the other way around," from Rosenberg, *Transforming Tradition*, 77.
51. New York was not the only center of interest for folk music in the 1960s. Nearby Boston and Philadelphia also had a lively folk scene, largely connected to the many colleges in these cities. In Boston, the center of the folk scene was Harvard Square in Cambridge. While New York could be considered the center of political folk music, Boston and Philadelphia were more "traditional" and ethnic in their musical orientation. Here one could find another notion of authenticity. On the Boston folk scene, see Eric von Schmidt and Jim Rooney, *Baby Let Me Follow You Down: The Illustrated Story of the Cambridge Folk Years*, (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1979); for other cities, see the first-hand accounts in R. Cohen, *Wasn't that a Time*.