

## "Our Singing Country": John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past

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IN THE EARLY 1930s, JOHN A. LOMAX LOST HIS BANK JOB TO THE depression and his wife to illness. Needing to make a fresh start, Lomax returned to the vocation he truly loved, collecting American folk songs. In 1933 he persuaded the Macmillan publishing company to contract for a book of songs, lined up charitable foundations to support a collecting expedition, and enlisted the Library of Congress's Archive of American Folk Song to provide recording equipment and to be the official repository of the materials he gathered. Then, with his seventeen-year-old son Alan to assist him and a 350-pound Presto recording machine built into the back seat of his car, Lomax set off to spend a summer collecting America's music.<sup>1</sup> The 1933 trip was only the first in a series of expeditions the Lomaxes made in the thirties and early forties, when they travelled tens of thousands of miles and made thousands of recordings.<sup>2</sup>

One of the first people the Lomaxes recorded in 1933 was an African- American singer and guitarist named Huddie Ledbetter or "Leadbelly." The Lomaxes "discovered" Leadbelly while searching southern prisons for Negro work songs. Roughly forty-four years old at the time, Leadbelly was in Louisiana's Angola Prison for murder. He astonished the Lomaxes with the variety of songs he knew and the verve and virtuosity with which he played his twelve-string guitar. When Leadbelly was released in 1934,<sup>3</sup> the Lomaxes took him with them on their recording expeditions and, early in 1935, brought him to New York City. There they launched a barrage of publicity promoting him as the living embodiment of America's folk-song tradition. In addition to recording scores of Leadbelly's songs for the Library of Congress archive, the Lomaxes booked appearances for him at concerts and benefit performances, arranged commercial recording sessions for him, and even recreated the story of their "discovery" of him in a *March of Time* newsreel.<sup>4</sup>

Although Leadbelly achieved only limited commercial success before his death in 1949, ultimately the Lomaxes established his place in America's popular music history. Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie, another singer whose career the Lomaxes helped shape, are considered folk forefathers of rock, pop, and blues. In 1988, CBS Records made a video entitled *A Vision Shared: A Tribute to Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly*, based on an album on which rock musicians from Bruce Springsteen to Bob Dylan to Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys covered Guthrie's and Leadbelly's songs. The video's narrator, folk-rock singer Robbie Robertson, describes Guthrie

and Leadbelly as "America's most important folk musicians." In the video, rock star Little Richard calls Leadbelly "one of the foundations of music."<sup>5</sup>

Most of the pop-music world today seems to agree with Little Richard's assessment. In the past decade, Leadbelly has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (1988), the Blues Hall of Fame (1986), and the Nashville Songwriters Association International's Hall of Fame (1980).<sup>6</sup> His songs "Goodnight Irene," "Rock Island Line," and "The Midnight Special," considered traditional standards today, are covered by punk rock bands and country music crooners alike.<sup>7</sup>

As Leadbelly's and Guthrie's reputations have continued to grow, so have the Lomaxes'. Today they are considered among the premier American folk collectors of the twentieth century. In 1990, PBS broadcasted a new folk-music series narrated by Alan Lomax entitled "American Patchwork." *Newsweek* headlined its review of the show "Tuning in to Mr. Folklore" and referred to Lomax as "the dean of American folklorists."<sup>8</sup> At the White House in 1986, President Reagan presented Lomax and eleven other "titans of the arts" with National Medals of the Arts.<sup>9</sup>

The Lomaxes' contribution to American culture has been recognized, but it has not been understood. Within the folklore profession, the Lomaxes have long been held up as seminal figures, but they have received almost no analytical treatment. Historians have essentially ignored the Lomaxes. Gene Bluestein's *The Voice of the Folk: Folklore and American Literary Theory* (1972) includes a chapter that offers insights into the relationship between the Lomaxes' collecting and the ballad-collecting tradition that preceded it, but there have been no full-length studies of the Lomaxes' work published.<sup>10</sup>

The Lomaxes, for the most part, have been treated as preservationists who reclaimed an endangered folk-song heritage. But they were creators as much as caretakers of a tradition. As with most canons, the canon of American folk music that the Lomaxes defined says as much about their tastes and values as about the "reality" they documented. The Lomaxes' vision of America's musical heritage was shaped by their involvement in the politics and culture of the 1930s. In the depression, when many Americans were looking for sources of strength in their culture, the Lomaxes pointed to a particular brand of old-fashioned, rural folk music that they felt exemplified the country's creativity and vitality. Fearing that this traditional music was being overwhelmed by commercialism, they determined to record it in as pure a form as possible and to awaken new audiences to its power and charm.

The Lomaxes' goal, therefore, was both to preserve and popularize folk music. This two-sided mission created powerful contradictions in their work—contradictions that were compounded by their lack of self-consciousness about their role as intermediaries between folk and popular culture. The Lomaxes had a specific conception of America's folk music and ignored any songs that did not fit that conception. And, as their relationship with Leadbelly indicates, when they found the type of folk music they liked, the Lomaxes determined to gain an audience for it, even if doing so involved rounding off the music's rough edges and creating a false public persona for the singer. The Lomaxes claimed to be impartial folklorists who documented an existing tradition, but they had a personal vision that has powerfully influenced how Americans remember their musical heritage.

Exploring the elements of this vision can give historians insights into 1930s America. Although John Lomax transcribed cowboy songs even as a boy in the 1880s, the Lomaxes' conception of America's song heritage was forged primarily in the thirties. Their work sheds light on Americans' efforts at that time to discover a vibrant, indigenous culture. Since the thirties, the Lomaxes' view of American music has, if anything, become more established in American culture. Leadbelly's and Guthrie's names have greater currency today than they did fifty years ago. The Lomaxes' work therefore illuminates the process of canon formation, the ways in which certain cultural figures gain predominance in the public memory in lieu of others. Examining the Lomaxes' career can help historians understand why certain songs, certain styles, certain "looks" strike us as "American," or "authentic," or "folk."

In building the folk music canon, the Lomaxes sought traditional folk music in the "eddies of human society,"<sup>11</sup> self-contained homogeneous communities cut off from the corrupting influences of popular culture. Mainstream communities, the Lomaxes feared, had lost touch with their folk roots. As historian Joe Klein writes, "Instead of listening to Grandma sing 'Barbara Allen' on the back porch, the kids—and often Grandma too—were listening to Bing Crosby on the radio."<sup>12</sup> The Lomaxes hoped to find the old styles "dammed up"<sup>13</sup> in America's more isolated areas. They collected from remote cotton plantations, cowboy ranches, lumber camps, and, with particular success, southern segregated prisons. They recorded in eleven penitentiaries to document "the Negro who had the least contact with jazz, the radio, and with the white man. . . The convicts heard only the idiom of their own race."<sup>14</sup>

Relying on these sources, the Lomaxes postulated a uniquely American body of folk song. In documenting an American folk-song tradition, the Lomaxes challenged the powerful canon established by Francis Child in the late nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Born in Boston, Child was fascinated with tracing the survival of English and Scottish ballads in America. He painstakingly compared British folk songs to their American versions, noted discrepancies, and worked to identify the British antecedents of as many American songs as possible.<sup>16</sup> He inspired a succession of collectors and educators who tried to document the Britishness of southern Appalachian mountaineers. "Over and over again," historian David Whisnant relates, "the word went forth . . . that mountain culture was 'Elizabethan.'" A 1910 newsletter from the Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky reported that "the language of Shakespeare is spoken" in the mountains.<sup>17</sup>

Implicit in Child's canon was the inferiority of American folk music. To him and his followers, the best American songs derived from Britain, and any variations Americans had made in them were impurities. Child's canon had such power that for the first few decades of the twentieth century, American folk-song scholarship consisted largely of collecting texts and explaining their relationship to the body of British songs that Child had established.<sup>18</sup> The Child canon ruled out investigation of an indigenous American folk-song tradition.

In this context, the Lomaxes' attention to native songs was partly a move for national self-respect. They challenged Child's anti-Americanism by paying attention to song sources that he had ignored; Child did not visit prisons or lumberyards. Equally powerful was the new attitude the Lomaxes brought to the songs they recorded: they refused to apologize for the supposed inadequacy of America's folk songs. In *Our Singing Country* (1941), they wrote that America's

artists "have created and preserved for America a heritage of folksongs and folk music equal to any in the world."<sup>19</sup> They applauded the changes that Americans had made to British songs. The American singer, Alan Lomax wrote, "has tended to purify his ballad heritage of its aristocratic and medieval overtones . . . to adapt the songs to American experience."<sup>20</sup>

The Lomaxes' nationalistic assertion of the distinctiveness of American folk music grew out of the cultural crisis of the 1930s. The depression caused many Americans to reevaluate what forces in society were good, powerful, and sustaining. Plainly, America's economic might was not among them. Instead, many people focused on America's human and cultural strength, the sources of grit that were seeing them through the time of trial. As historian Warren I. Susman says, the 1930s were shaped by an "effort to find, characterize, and adapt to an American Way of Life as distinguished from the material achievements (and the failures) of an American industrial civilization." Susman sees in the thirties a "complex effort to seek and to define America as a culture. . . ." <sup>21</sup> In this climate, the Lomaxes' discovery of an American music with an American *past* had great appeal. It proved that America really did have a culture, roots and all.

There were many varieties of nationalism in the 1930s, though, and the Lomaxes' particular brand was shaped by their relationship to the left-wing politics of the period. Alan Lomax, in particular, linked his and his father's work to a political vision. He stressed the dignity of the common individual and insisted that for society to escape the corruption and moral bankruptcy of the depression era it must accord respect to blacks as well as whites, to the poor as well as the rich. John, more conservative than his son, was less interested in attaching political import to their collecting, so the Lomaxes' work does not usually elaborate a specific political agenda. Nonetheless, their collections show an underlying respect for pluralist democracy and depict an America whose strength lies in the diversity of its people and traditions.

In many respects, the Lomaxes' outlook corresponded well to the Communist party's Popular Front policy that emerged in 1935. In trying to unite the world for the fight against fascism, the Popular Front, rather than preaching mass revolution, emphasized the need for Americans to embrace cultural diversity and to bond together in community. Folk songs appealed as a way to further this goal, and they enjoyed Party approval. Historian Robbie Lieberman writes that "folk song more than any other cultural form, expressed and reaffirmed the Popular Front spirit. It was simple and direct; it invited mass participation; it expressed the concerns of the common person."<sup>22</sup>

The Lomaxes' work was in tune with the left wing's agenda, therefore, but their outlook was hardly radical by 1930s standards. Comparing their work with that of contemporary folk-song collectors illustrates that the Lomaxes' ideas were relatively moderate for the time. Certainly the Lomaxes' collections in the thirties were more politicized than Carl Sandburg's pioneering *American Songbag* anthology of 1927. Sandburg attempted to capture in one volume the whole diversity of America's song traditions, ranging from the Great Lakes to the Mexican Southwest to the deep South. To a great extent he shared the Lomaxes' populist impulse: "A wide human procession marches through these pages," he wrote.<sup>23</sup> And indeed Sandburg brought out the music of lumberjacks and sailors, bandits and black convicts, hoboes and cowboys. But he paid little attention to the often stark political and economic realities that underlay these songs. Even considering that Sandburg's is a pre-depression work, it seems to go out of its way to put a happy

cast on the country it depicts. Sandburg entitled one section "Picnic and Hayrack Follies, Close Harmony and Darn Fool Ditties," and another ("a little series of exquisite musical fragments, light as gossamer mist") he called "Lovely People."<sup>24</sup> He was satisfied to enjoy the sounds of folk music without pondering their origins.

Lawrence Gellert's fiery *Negro Songs of Protest* (1936) stands in radical contrast to Sandburg's collection. Published by the Communist party-sponsored American Music League, Gellert's work had great popularity in Left circles.<sup>25</sup> In the songs that Gellert collected, oppressed southern blacks express anger and sorrow at their plight and threaten revenge against their white oppressors. "Sistren an' Brethren" exhorts:

Sistren an' brethren, Stop Foolin' wid pray  
Sistren an' brethren, Stop Foolin' wid pray  
When black face is lifted, Lord turnin' way. . . .  
Yo' Head 'tain' no apple Fo' danglin' from a tree  
Yo' Head 'tain' no apple Fo' danglin' from a tree  
Yo' body no carcass for barbacin' on a spree  
Stand on yo' feet, Club gripped 'tween yo' hands  
Spill dere blood too, Show'em yo's is a man's.<sup>26</sup>

The Lomaxes' 1930s counterpart to Sandburg's and Gellert's works was their best-selling *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934).<sup>27</sup> *American Ballads* shows that the Lomaxes were much more concerned with African-American culture than Sandburg was in his collection. Marginal in *American Songbag*, African-American songs are the centerpiece of the Lomaxes' book. In their introduction to the work, the Lomaxes praise blacks for creating "the most distinctive of folk songs—the most interesting, the most appealing, and the greatest in quantity."<sup>28</sup> The Lomaxes explicitly acknowledge, moreover, that black folk songs derive much of their power from the hardships that African Americans have endured. They describe the songs as "rough and crude, sometimes direct and forceful, the total effect often thrillingly beautiful. . . . Yes, we agree that much of folk music grows out of suffering."<sup>29</sup>

Unlike Gellert's collection, though, *American Ballads* shows the Lomaxes to be largely uninterested in songs that posit ways for African Americans to change the system that has caused them so much suffering. The Lomaxes' singers grip no clubs 'tween their hands. More typical of *American Ballads* is "Cornfield Holler," which appears with the following introduction:

A lonely Negro man plowing out in some hot, silent river bottom, sings this way. . . . Any white person who is acquainted with the singing of untrained country Negroes in the South will tell you that "niggers are always hollerin' like that out in the fields."<sup>30</sup>

The Lomaxes' attitude toward the African-American singers they collected was a complicated mixture of romantic glorification and condescension. They respected black culture and lamented the injustice that helped to shape it, but they did not challenge the system of segregation that produced the injustice.

Perhaps the Lomaxes adopted a relatively moderate political perspective to secure the widest possible appeal for their work. Certainly they did believe their work had political significance, but they preferred to define its importance in broad, sweeping terms. In Alan Lomax's vision, folk songs defused strife among peoples:

The tremendous enthusiasm of all Americans, no matter what their prejudices, for Negro folk music, and the profound influences of this music on American culture—all this denies the effect of Jim Crow at this level of communication .<sup>31</sup>

Lomax was more interested in transcending racial barriers than in tearing them down. Folklore, he believed, could "provide ten thousand bridges across which men of all nations may stride to say, 'You are my brother.'"<sup>32</sup>

Even as they preached folk music's political vitality, the Lomaxes were forced to confront the fact that commercialism and urbanism threatened to overwhelm it. Leadbelly thrilled the Lomaxes because he seemed to be a living link to the traditions that were slipping away. He was a storehouse of old-time songs greater than they had thought possible to find in the twentieth century. John Lomax wrote, "From Lead Belly we secured about one hundred songs that seemed folksy, a far greater number than from any other person." Although Leadbelly did know some popular songs, the Lomaxes felt that "his eleven years of confinement had cut him off both from the phonograph and from the radio."<sup>33</sup>

Having found a living example of the noncommercial tradition they prized, the Lomaxes could not allow their discovery to remain in the Louisiana back country. The rest of America needed to know about their find. As Alan Lomax recalled, Leadbelly offered a chance to demonstrate "to a streamlined, city-oriented world that America had living folk music—swamp primitive, angry, freighted with great sorrow and joy."<sup>34</sup> Leadbelly, anxious to advance his postprison career, was willing to explore whatever commercial opportunities the Lomaxes had to offer. They took him to New York City to popularize his music and to awaken America to its folk roots.<sup>35</sup>

In promoting Leadbelly, the Lomaxes, in part, stressed his old-time homey purity. They described him as the voice of the people, a time capsule that had preserved America's song heritage. They did realize that Leadbelly had added his own personal style to the tunes he sang. At times they noted that his repertoire represented an amalgam of folk and popular styles,<sup>36</sup> and that he had "stamped the songs with his own strong personality."<sup>37</sup> In publicizing Leadbelly, though, the Lomaxes portrayed him as a populist spokesman—a mouthpiece who vented, unmediated, the hopes and fears of the masses.

At the same time that the Lomaxes promoted Leadbelly as the voice of the people, they focused on his convict past and depicted him as a savage, untamed animal. Their 1936 biography, *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Leadbelly*, and their press reports depicted a slow-witted, hulking man, motivated only by a drive for sex and violence. A posed photograph on the frontispiece of *Negro Folk Songs* shows Leadbelly in overalls rolled up to reveal bare feet, with a handkerchief tied around his neck. Sitting on canvas sacks, he is playing guitar, with his head tilted back, eyes wide, and mouth open to show a tooth missing.

In describing Leadbelly, John Lomax stressed his rapacity, saying that he "had served time in a Texas penitentiary for murder. . . . he had thrice been a fugitive from justice. . . . he was the type known as 'killer' and had a career of violence the record of which is a black epic of horrors."<sup>38</sup> Lomax introduced Leadbelly to reporters by explaining that he "was a 'natural,' who had no idea of money, law, or ethics and who was possessed of virtually no restraint."<sup>39</sup>

Much evidence contradicts this portrait of Leadbelly. Most people who met him commented on his gentleness. Pete Seeger remembers him as soft-voiced, meticulously dressed and "wonderful with children." Seeger found it "hard to believe the stories we read of his violent youth."<sup>40</sup> Producer Moses Asch recalled: "My first impression . . . was his overall aristocratic appearance and demeanor."<sup>41</sup>

Leadbelly had enough of an idea of money, moreover, to demand that John Lomax give him control over the revenues from his concerts and to break with him when Lomax refused. For the first eight months or so that he was with the Lomaxes, the Lomaxes used him as their chauffeur and house servant. He drove the car on their collecting expeditions and to and from concert engagements, and he did chores around the Lomax home in Wilton, Connecticut. The elder Lomax kept all of Leadbelly's concert earnings and in return gave him room, board, and an allowance. Leadbelly challenged this arrangement in March of 1935 and returned to Shreveport, Louisiana.<sup>42</sup>

The Lomaxes' emphasis on Leadbelly's "otherness" seems to have been quite intentional. When the *New York Herald-Tribune* responded to the Lomaxes' publicity campaign with the headline, "Sweet Singer of the Swamplands Here to Do a Few Tunes Between Homicides," John Lomax reflected that "[Leadbelly's] criminal record was securing a hearing for a Negro musician," and that "the terms 'bad nigger' only added to his attraction."<sup>43</sup> Lomax himself acknowledged that to have Leadbelly sing at the Modern Language Association "while seated on the top center of the banquet table" before a professorial audience "smacked of sensationalism."<sup>44</sup> Long after Leadbelly had been freed, Lomax had him perform in his old convict clothes "for exhibition purposes . . . though he always hated to wear them."<sup>45</sup>

To depict Leadbelly both as a common man and as a dangerous outlaw may seem an unlikely publicity stroke, but in the thirties it had considerable appeal. The image of Leadbelly as popular spokesman attracted Popular Front activists eager to give their left-wing political agenda the flavor of the common people. These white radicals and intellectuals sustained the folk-music revival of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Folk-music scholar Henrietta Yurchenco, who was a public radio producer in the thirties, recalls that folk singers such as Leadbelly, Aunt Molly Jackson, and Woody Guthrie were "the answer to left-wing prayers. Through their songs, life among poor whites of Appalachia, oppressed southern blacks, and dust storm victims came alive far better than in all the articles in the *Daily Worker* or the *New Masses*."<sup>46</sup> Leadbelly became a regular performer at political meetings and events, and came to be seen, along with Woody Guthrie, as the consummate folk artist.<sup>47</sup> Writing for the *Daily Worker* in 1937, Richard Wright said of Leadbelly, "It seems that the entire folk culture of the American Negro has found its embodiment in him."<sup>48</sup>

By portraying Leadbelly as both common man and convict, the Lomaxes tapped into the thirties' attraction to what one might call "outsider populism." Figures of the loner, the outcast, and the impoverished fascinated both the Left and more mainstream audiences as embodiments of American values and strengths.<sup>49</sup> There is, of course, an oxymoronic aspect to "outsider populism": how can one build populism around those outside of "the people"? Appropriate to this tension, part of the appeal of the outsiders was that they reminded "mainstream" Americans

of themselves—or of the way they wanted to see themselves: independent, proud in the face of hardship, straightforward, beholden to no special interests.

The Lomaxes recognized that Leadbelly's very incompatibility with mainstream society could be his greatest asset in trying to gain mainstream popularity. This recognition led them to manipulate not only Leadbelly's image but also his music. The Lomaxes realized that Leadbelly's commercial strength depended on the perception that his songs were "pure folk." At the same time, they felt the popular audiences would not actually appreciate the folk style unadulterated. Faced with this double bind, the Lomaxes tried both to eliminate the more obvious commercial influences from Leadbelly's style and to dilute its harsher "folk" elements.

It would be misleading to imply that Leadbelly had a pure folk repertoire that the Lomaxes corrupted. The folk tradition has always depended on its adaptability, and Leadbelly himself tended to alter his songs. When performing, he often varied his lyrics to mention the city in which he was performing.<sup>50</sup> He adjusted his repertoire to the tastes of his audience, and he was renowned for his openness to all kinds of music, including Tin Pan Alley. In an interview he recalled, "I learned by listening to other singers once in a while off phonograph records. . . . I used to look at the sheet music and learn the words of a few popular songs."<sup>51</sup> Leadbelly was an old-fashioned "songster," the term the African-American community used to describe a musician able to sing any type of song.<sup>52</sup> He performed everything from work songs to dance tunes to blues to cowboy ballads to popular hits. Literary critic Daniel Hoffman observes, "As he was a folksinger, not a folklorist, all of these [were] equally admissible to his canon."<sup>53</sup>

To an extent, the Lomaxes found the fluidity of Leadbelly's repertoire exciting. The idea of adapting a tune to fit a specific purpose illustrated the vitality of the folk-song form. It also revealed the form's political potential. What was a protest song, after all, but a song targeted for a specific purpose?<sup>54</sup>

The Lomaxes did not insist, therefore, that Leadbelly's repertoire remain completely static, but they did try to shape the direction in which it evolved. They strove, for example, to prevent popular songs from appearing in his concerts. John Lomax wrote, "For his programs Lead Belly always wished to include 'That Silver-Haired Daddy of Mine' or jazz tunes such as 'I'm in Love with You, Baby'. . . . [H]e could never understand why we did not care for them. We held him to the singing of the music that first attracted us to him."<sup>55</sup>

A 1941 letter from Alan Lomax to Leadbelly indicates how directly the Lomaxes controlled his repertoire at times:

Enclosed you will find a copy of the words and music to *Ho, boys, caincha, line 'em* just the way I want you to sing it, and I wish you would get Peter [Seeger?] or somebody who reads music to teach it to you exactly as it is written here, because the children will be singing with you.<sup>56</sup>

Even as the Lomaxes worked to preserve Leadbelly's "authenticity," they encouraged him to make his singing more accessible to urban audiences. Alan Lomax recalled that white audiences found Leadbelly's southern dialect impenetrable until he "learned to compromise with Northern ways and 'bring his words out plain.'"<sup>57</sup> The Lomaxes may also have urged Leadbelly to insert spoken comments in the middle of his songs, a technique for which he is famous. Folklorist John



Minton cites a Library of Congress recording of "Scottsboro Boys," in which Alan Lomax "asks Leadbelly in mid-performance to expand on the song's theme." Minton speculates that "the interpolated narrative was already a part of Leadbelly's style, but it was obviously encouraged by the Lomaxes."<sup>58</sup> Spoken sections made a song easier for a neophyte to understand by outlining its plot, explaining obscure words and symbols, and providing transitions between verses.

A close look at two versions of one Leadbelly song, "Mister Tom Hughes' Town," illustrates how the effort to reach the general public changed the basic elements of Leadbelly's musical style. "Tom Hughes" was one of Leadbelly's signature pieces. It recounts his desire as a youth to flee home and enjoy the illicit pleasures of Fannin Street, the red-light district of Shreveport, Louisiana, where Tom Hughes was sheriff.<sup>59</sup> Leadbelly first recorded this song for the Lomaxes on July 1, 1934, while still in the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola.<sup>60</sup> Early in 1935, after he had been released and had traveled with the Lomaxes, he recorded it commercially for the American Record Company (ARC) in New York City.<sup>61</sup> The Lomaxes arranged the ARC sessions, Leadbelly's first with a commercial company, and they probably supervised them as well.<sup>62</sup> The ARC recording differs significantly from the one that the Lomaxes made for the Library of Congress (LC), but one cannot assume that Leadbelly himself had no say in the changes made to the song: he had an interest in popularizing his music and a willingness to alter his songs.<sup>63</sup> At the very least, though, the differences between the recordings illustrate how contact with the Lomaxes affected his view of what styles would appeal to a commercial audience.

In an effort, perhaps, to cater to popular tastes, the ARC recording smooths out many of the jagged and jarring aspects of the original field recording. Most obviously, the ARC version prettifies the song's lyrics. It completely removes two suggestive verses:

I got a woman livin' on the Back side of jail  
[Makes a livin' boy by  
Workin'] up her tail

and

I tell you the truth  
I keep on [sides]  
That baby got somethin' lawd I sure would like.<sup>64</sup>

The commercial recording also radically changes the song's conclusion. In the LC recording, the narrator leaves for Shreveport, ignoring the pleas of his mother to stay home, and adopts a licentious lifestyle about which he is remorseless and even boastful. The ARC version revises the tale by giving the narrator a sense of contrition by the end of the song. It adds completely new lyrics in which Leadbelly falls on his knees and begs his mother to forgive him for his past behavior. Perhaps the Lomaxes did not feel that the commercial record audience would accept a dissolute figure who was not forced to repent.

The ARC makes several changes to help listeners understand the song's story line. Unlike the LC recording, the ARC includes a long spoken introduction in which Leadbelly outlines the song's premise, as well as several smaller spoken interludes in which he previews the next verse. The

ARC version also slows the song's speed. Leadbelly has more time to sing the words and they come out more clearly than on the LC rendition, in which he runs many of his words together. Slowing the song makes the ARC's "Tom Hughes" seem much less frantic and excited than the LC's version.

Leadbelly's voice is also more emotive in the LC recording. Both the ARC and the field versions feature long passages in which Leadbelly hums a melody in a moaning voice. On the LC recording he uses a sharper attack on the moans, giving them a piercing quality that the commercial version lacks. The guitar solo, too, lacks intensity on the ARC session when compared to the original recording. Leadbelly's final solo has a frenzied quality to it on the LC version. Repetition of a dissonant note serves as an insistent prod, pushing the solo forward. Leadbelly's ARC solo does not feature this technique and does not, therefore, have the same propulsive feel to it.

The ARC recording therefore reflects a series of decisions to mute the roughness and intricacy of Leadbelly's song style. The transformation appears even more dramatically in a later (1940) rendition of "I'm On My Last Go-Round," a song that uses different lyrics but the same tune as "Tom Hughes."<sup>65</sup> This recording session was Leadbelly's first with a major record company (RCA Victor),<sup>66</sup> and again the Lomaxes were involved.<sup>67</sup> In this version Leadbelly's singing has lost all of the bite that it had on the 1934 LC recording. The song is slower than the LC and ARC versions, and Leadbelly's usually rough voice sounds almost mellifluous. Most strikingly, light, delicate strummings have replaced his once fierce guitar work.

Whether the Lomaxes or Leadbelly (or some other influence) dictated the changes, Leadbelly's style became less hard-edged, likely in an effort to reach northern white listeners. As Leadbelly and the other singers in the folk-song revival tried to attract new audiences, they found themselves in a complicated trap. The movement's political goals demanded that they strive for as wide a hearing as possible, but as the singers adapted their music to reach popular audiences, purists denounced them for selling out their heritage. Folklorist Charles Haywood thought Leadbelly a "sad spectacle" by the end of his career, charging that he had changed his style to fit "night clubs and popular taste":

In the place of strong rhythms the guitar was toying with delicate arpeggi and delightful arabesques, filling in between verses with swaying body movements, marching up and down the stage, swinging the guitar over his head, instrument upside down, or behind his back. This was a sad and tragic sight, cheap vaudeville claptrap.<sup>68</sup>

Leadbelly attempted to adapt to the commercial market, and as a result, says Sven Eric Molin, "folklorists shake their heads over his recordings and distinguish between an 'earlier' and a 'later' Leadbelly, for . . . the singing techniques and the choice of materials changed, and Tin Pan Alley had its perceptible influence."<sup>69</sup>

The Lomaxes encouraged Leadbelly to adjust his style, but they, too, spoke wistfully of his more "pure" past. Alan Lomax wrote that "Lead Belly recorded his songs for a number of companies though never so beautifully as he had first sung them for us in Louisiana."<sup>70</sup> Lomax described Leadbelly's 1940 recordings as "not complete authenticity, but I believe the nearest thing to it that could be achieved away from the prison farms themselves."<sup>71</sup>

Leadbelly did not have the same yearning for the purity of the prison farms, but he does seem to have internalized the confusing standards that the Lomaxes and folk-song revivalists set for him. In a 1940 letter to Alan Lomax, Leadbelly wrote:

If your Papa come I would like for Him to Here me sing if He say i Have Change any witch i Don't think i have and never will But to Be [sure] to get his ideas about it i would feel good over what ever he say about it.<sup>72</sup>

The Lomaxes' dual roles as both collectors and popularizers brought about Leadbelly's predicament. They overleaped the traditional boundaries of folklore collecting. They did not just document the native traditions of the Other, but captured him, brought him back to their culture, and asked him to remake it in his image (or in their image of his image). The matter was further complicated because the Lomaxes not only held Leadbelly up as the exemplar of a foreign culture but also as an important vestige of America's *own* culture—the culture that was slipping away in the twentieth century. They depicted Leadbelly as both Other and Self, exaggerating both his marginality and his similarity to their ideal picture of America. In trying to emphasize Leadbelly's connection to a more pure American culture they stressed his vitality in comparison to contemporary America's frailty, and they emphasized his folk-wise simplicity in contrast to modern America's empty pretentiousness. To capitalize on Leadbelly's exotic Otherness, though, the Lomaxes inverted these same values—transforming vitality into animal rapacity and simplicity into dim-witted boorishness.

The contradictory roles the Lomaxes created for Leadbelly reflect the extent to which their personal political agenda led them to manipulate the folk cultures they claimed to be preserving. The Lomaxes acknowledged that personal beliefs motivated their work—that they wanted folk music to revitalize American culture—but they did not acknowledge the extent to which this agenda shaped their collecting and their scholarship. They portrayed themselves as chroniclers and promoters but not as shapers and creators of a folk-song tradition.

In depicting themselves as unbiased preservers, the Lomaxes' use of the portable phonograph was their most powerful methodological statement. They felt that scholars lost a folk song's purity when they "collected" it by copying down its lyrics and notating its melody; no written document could represent a singer's subtle effects, and the process of transcription relied too much on the skill and judgment of the transcriber. The recording machine, they believed, removed the collector as a source of bias and captured all of a song's nuances. Instead of a scholar's representation of a song, the machine preserved a folk singer's entire performance, unadulterated.

John Lomax downplayed his role in recording songs and stressed that he was not a musical expert: "I am innocent of musical knowledge, entirely without musical training." He saw his ignorance as a distinct advantage, recalling that the head of the Library of Congress's music division had urged him, "Don't take any musicians along with you: what the Library wants is the machine's record of Negro singing, and not some musician's interpretation of it." At the end of his first summer of recording, Lomax concluded that he had successfully maintained his studied detachment from the recording process. He saw the 150 tunes he had come home with as "sound photographs of Negro songs, rendered in their own element, unrestrained, uninfluenced and undirected by anyone who had his own notions of how the songs should be rendered."<sup>74</sup>

In idealizing the recording machine, the Lomaxes tapped into what historian William Stott has called the "documentary motive" of the thirties.<sup>75</sup> As George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer explain, "There was a hunger for reliable information, a widespread suspicion that newspapers were manipulating the news . . . and a simple unavailability of public facts."<sup>76</sup> In this context, the record appealed as an incontrovertible source of truth. How could a recording machine lie?

The Lomaxes seem to have been largely unconcerned about the problems inherent in collecting another culture. They did not consider how their identity as outsiders might influence the ways in which black southerners responded to them. In their unself-consciousness, in fact, they left ample evidence of heavy-handed collecting techniques. They were not interested in documenting whatever native folk music they encountered; they had a specific canon in mind and they pursued it with diligence. At times, for instance, the Lomaxes' subjects did not understand what type of songs the Lomaxes wanted and sang the "wrong" kind. Leadbelly helped the Lomaxes in this regard; John Lomax found that when Leadbelly sang to the prisoners they "quickly understood what I was looking for."<sup>77</sup>

Often the Lomaxes requested specific tunes. In New Orleans in 1933, Alan Lomax suffered a series of disappointments in hunting for a song he had in mind. Finally, after "the hundredth time I asked the question: 'Do you know the song "Stagolee?'" he met success. When the Lomaxes could not record work songs in the fields they did not hesitate to recreate artificial "work" settings. John Lomax recounted how they "successfully staged groups, with axes . . . in hand, and secured on our records precisely the same musical effects of concerted blows with voice accompaniment."<sup>78</sup>

The Lomaxes would even resort to a show of force if they thought it would facilitate collecting. When they visited New Orleans's "dives and joints," for example, they entered "with a brace of city detectives to serve as a card of admittance and a guaranty that we were all right."<sup>79</sup> They made many of their prison recordings, likewise, in the presence of armed guards. They do not seem to have considered that the prisoners might censor their songs in fear of these authorities.

The Lomaxes, in fact, tended to treat prison officials as valuable allies. Alan Lomax related that one prisoner named Black Sampson refused to sing a levee camp song for them because his religion prohibited him from singing secular tunes. The Lomaxes resorted to the means of persuasion at their disposal: "The prison chaplain promised to make it all right with the Lord. 'I got my own 'ligion,' said Black Sampson. But the request of the warden was too much for his conscience."<sup>80</sup> In another incident, an obliging superintendent "sent a trusty with a shotgun into the dormitory" to find a prisoner to sing a tune that Alan Lomax wanted to record:

Presently the black guard came out, pushing a Negro man in stripes along at the point of his gun. The poor fellow, evidently afraid he was to be punished, was trembling and sweating in an extremity of fear.

[The superintendent asked,] "Do you know the song about the bad man who killed his wife?"

"Well, I don' rightly know. Ef you give me a day or two to study it up, I might be able to sing it."

"Hell, you're going to sing it now. Turn on your machine, young fellow."<sup>81</sup>

The Lomaxes did not reflect on whether going to such lengths to ferret out songs created a skewed portrait of America's folk music.

In addition to using some questionable methods in gathering sources, the Lomaxes have been criticized for violating academic standards in their published texts. In publishing songs, they combined lyrics from different renditions of tunes without making clear how the original versions had been altered. In the license they took with materials, D. K. Wilgus finds, the Lomaxes seemed "to be usurping the function of the folk artist."<sup>82</sup>

The Lomaxes do not appear to have been ignorant of academic norms, just unconcerned about them. With crusading goals for their music, they had no desire to keep an academic distance from their subjects. In their preface to *American Ballads*, the Lomaxes freely admitted that "we have brought together what seem the best stanzas, or even lines, from widely separate sources"; but they failed to specify the sources.<sup>83</sup> Such nonchalance may seem surprising in a work that purports to outline a musical canon, but it reflects that the Lomaxes were less interested in defining an existing canon than in shaping one of their own.

Middlemen like the Lomaxes who travel between folk and popular culture to introduce Americans to their heritage usually remain hidden in history. The Lomaxes illustrate the influence these people have over American culture. Forming a canon involves making choices about which elements to include and which to exclude. As the case of Lead-belly shows, singers and songs are transformed by the very act of being "collected" and inserted into a canon alongside other singers and songs. Moreover, the decisions about what to include in the canon help shape how Americans remember their musical past.

The Lomaxes recognized the importance of collecting, but they depicted it as a matter of gathering a "reality" that existed *a priori*, not as a personally motivated, historically specific act. They wanted *their* canon of American folk song to be seen as *the only possible* canon of American folk song. In fact, though, the Lomaxes' work was more historically rooted and idiosyncratic than timeless and objective. Their collecting was shaped by the cultural climate of the thirties, their standards of anthropological investigation, and their personal musical preferences.

All collectors leave their mark on that which they collect. But the Lomaxes stand out because they were strikingly successful in shaping a canon to their own tastes. They managed to tack between the public's desire for a vital, American cultural tradition rooted in the past and the need to dilute this tradition in order to reach a mass audience. They understood the appeal of recording traditional music in its "pure" form, but did not hold this ideal so rigidly as to prevent them from softening the music's harshest elements or from using the mass media to promote folk musicians. They appreciated Americans' attraction to the common man, and at the same time tapped into the contemporary fascination with the outsider. They preached that songs had redemptive power, but avoided linking them to an extremist political agenda. The Lomaxes' ability to negotiate these oppositions gave strength to their vision of America's past. They recognized that preserving folk culture involved entering into the popular culture that threatened to destroy it, and so they worked with single-minded zeal to popularize their vision of American music. With skill and

determination they constructed a musical tradition and shaped how Americans define "America," its heritage, and its culture.

## NOTES

1. D. K. Wilgus, *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1959), 175-76; Joe Klein, *Woody Guthrie: A Life* (New York, 1980), 143.
2. John A. Lomax, "'Sinful Songs' of the Southern Negro," *Musical Quarterly* 20 (Apr. 1934): 181; Paul Oliver, *The Story of the Blues* (Philadelphia, 1969), 122.
3. A popular story, spread widely by the Lomaxes in the thirties and forties, says that Leadbelly won his release by singing a stirring appeal to Louisiana's Governor O. K. Allen, who was moved to commute his sentence. Prison documents indicate that Leadbelly won his release for good behavior ("Louisiana State Penitentiary Files; Summarized by Rebecca B. Schroeder, Missouri State Sch.; Jefferson City, Mo.," in Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).
4. Herman Gebhard, "'March of Time' 1935: Leadbelly" *Living Blues* 30 (Nov.— Dec. 1976): 26.
5. *A Vision Shared: A Tribute to Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly*, video produced by the Ginger Group for CBS Music Video Enterprises, CBS Records Inc., 1988. The video was based on the album *A Vision Shared*, which was originally produced for the Smithsonian Institution.
6. Jay Levenson, "Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Dinner," *Down Beat* 55 (Apr. 1988): 11; Phil Moss, "Cray Named Year's Top Blues Wailer," *Variety*, 26 Nov. 1986, 136; "Nashville Songsters Hold Hall of Fame Fete, Induct Four," *Variety*, 22 Oct. 1980, 91.
7. For example, the Knitters, a band made up of former members of the punk band X, included "Rock Island Line" on their album *Poor Little Critter in the Road* (Robbie Lieberman, *"My Song Is My Weapon": People's Songs, American Communism, and the Politics of Culture, 1930-1950* [Urbana, 1989, 162]); Country music star Willie Nelson sang "Goodnight Irene" in the *A Vision Shared* video.
8. "The Voices of America: Tuning in to Mr. Folklore," *Newsweek*, 16 July 1990, 60.
9. "A Dozen Arts Figures Honored By President" *Variety*, 16 July 1986, 119.
10. Gene Bluestein, *The Voice of the Folk: Folklore and American Literary Theory* (Amherst, 1972). Clayton Lawrence, "John A. Lomax's *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads: A Critical Study*." Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech, 1974. It is a disappointing literary analysis of the songs in one of Lomax's important early books. James McNutt, "Beyond Regionalism: Texas Folklorists and the Emergence of a Post-Regional Consciousness." Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Texas, 1982. It has a section on John Lomax that deals with his place in the folklore profession. Richard Reuss, "American Folklore and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-57." Ph.D. diss., Indiana Univ., 1971. It considers many different folk-song figures and emphasizes Alan Lomax's importance, but he analyzes none of the figures extensively. Peter Bartis, "A History of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress, the First Fifty Years: A Dissertation in Folklore and Folklife." Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1982. It chronicles the Lomaxes' work at the Archive of Folk Song in the 1930s and early 1940s.
11. Untitled document [annual report?], in Archive of Folk Culture, Box: "John A. Lomax Collection, General Correspondence, 1933-1940"; Folder: "John A. Lomax, 1936."
12. Klein, *Woody Guthrie*, 149.

13. John A. and Alan Lomax, eds., *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Leadbelly, "King of the Twelve-String Guitar Players of the World," Long-Time Convict in the Penitentiaries of Texas and Louisiana* (New York, 1936), 35.
14. John A. and Alan Lomax, eds., *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (New York, 1934), xxx.
15. The Lomaxes were not the first to collect American songs. Child collected Anglo-American ballads in the 1880s and 1890s (Bluestein, *Voice of the Folk*, 92); in 1904 Howard Odum used cylinders in Mississippi to make the first field recordings (Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints* [Cambridge, 1984], 8); Olive Dame Campbell was systematically collecting ballads in the Appalachian mountains by 1908, and the famed British collector Cecil Sharp came to the mountains in 1916 (David Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* [Chapel Hill, 1983], 8); John Lomax himself had been transcribing cowboy songs since his childhood in Texas in the 1880s and had used a series of fellowships in the early 1900s to study the cowboys' music in some detail (John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter* [New York, 1947], 23, 40).
16. Bluestein, *Voice of the Folk*, 92.
17. Whisnant, *Native and Fine*, 57.
18. Bluestein, *Voice of the Folk*, 96.
19. Quoted in Bluestein, 106.
20. Alan Lomax, "America Sings the Saga of America: Our Life and Culture Are Mirrored in the Freshet of Ballads Sweeping Over the Land," *New York Times Magazine*, 26 Jan. 1947, 41.
21. Warren I. Susman, *Culture As History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1984), 156-57.
22. Lieberman, "My Song is My Weapon," 49.
23. Carl Sandburg, *The American Songbag* (New York, 1927), viii.
24. *Ibid.*, vii.
25. Lieberman, "My Song is My Weapon," 38; Richard A. Reuss, "The Roots of American Left-Wing Interest in Folksong," *Labor History* 12 (Spring 1971): 273-74.
26. Lawrence Gellert, *Negro Songs of Protest* (New York, 1936), 10-11.
27. Reuss, "The Roots of American Left-Wing Interest in Folksong," 274.
28. Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, xxxiv.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, 191.
31. In Bluestein, *Voice of the Folk*, 110-11.
32. Lomax, "America Sings the Saga of America," 42.
33. Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly*, xiii.
34. Alan Lomax, "Huddie Ledbetter," in *The Leadbelly Songbook: The Ballads, Blues and Folksongs of Huddie Ledbetter*, ed. Moses Asch and Alan Lomax (New York, 1962), 95.
35. Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly*, 30, 43, 47.
36. *Ibid.*, xii, xiii.
37. Alan Lomax, ed., *The Folk Songs of North America* (New York, 1960), 580.
38. Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly*, x.
39. "Lomax Arrives with Lead Belly, Negro Minstrel," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 3 Jan. 1935, 21.
40. Pete Seeger, "Leadbelly," in *Leadbelly: A Collection of World-Famous Songs by Huddie Ledbetter*, ed. John A. and Alan Lomax (New York, 1959), 7.

41. Moses Asch, "Foreword," in Lomax, *Leadbelly: A Collection of World-Famous Songs by Huddie Ledbetter*, 5; see also Hector Lee, "Some Notes on Lead Belly," *Journal of American Folklore* 76 (Apr. 1963): 135-36.
42. Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly*, 41, 59-64. Soon, though, Leadbelly returned to New York, this time with his wife Martha serving as his manager. He continued to have musical dealings with the Lomaxes (Richard Wright, "Huddie Ledbetter, Famous Negro Folk Artist Sings the Songs of Scottsboro and His People," *Daily Worker*, 12 Aug. 1937, New York City edition, 7.)
43. Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly*, x, 49; Leadbelly did cause a minor stir in the press, but the Lomaxes were prone to exaggerate its extent. The *New York Times*, for example, did not mention Leadbelly at all between 1933 and 1941, his prime years.
44. Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly*, 45.
45. *Ibid.*, 36.
46. Henrietta Yurchenco, "The Beginning of an Urban Folk-Song Movement in New York: A Memoir," *Sonneck Society Bulletin* 13 (Summer 1987): 39-40. In 1940 Leadbelly appeared on Yurchenco's radio program, *Adventures in Music* on New York's WNYC, and he later got his own fifteen-minute show, *Folksongs in America* (Yurchenco, "The Beginning," 40).
47. Yurchenco, "The Beginning," 40; Alan Lomax, "Leadbelly's Songs," in Lomax, *Leadbelly: A Collection of World-Famous Songs by Huddie Ledbetter*, 5; William Barlow, "*Looking Up At Down*": *The Emergence of a Blues Culture* (Phil., 1989), 74-75.
48. Richard Wright, "Huddie Ledbetter," 7.
49. The photojournalism of *Life* and *Look* magazines and the photographs that Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange took for the federal government illustrate the tendency in the thirties to see dignity, strength, and forthrightness in the downtrodden man and woman.
50. Lee, "Some Notes," 138.
51. Don DeMichael, "Liner Notes" to *Leadbelly*, Columbia, CK30035.
52. David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues* (New York, 1982), 109.
53. Quoted in Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York, 1977), 202.
54. In the spirit of the Popular Front the Lomaxes encouraged Leadbelly to compose political songs. Some historians speculate that Alan Lomax helped compose "The Bourgeois Blues," Leadbelly's protest against segregated housing in Washington (Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis* [Urbana, 1977], 191; Frederic Ramsey, Jr., "Leadbelly: A Great Long Time," *Sing Out!* 15 [Mar. 1965]: 21; Ahmet Ertegun in *A Vision Shared* video.) Leadbelly wrote such political songs as "Jim Crow Blues," "Hitler Song," and "Scottsboro Boys" after being discovered by the Lomaxes (Asch and Lomax, *The Leadbelly Songbook*, 38, 91; Barlow, "*Looking Up At Down*," 75).
55. Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly*, 52.
56. Letter from Alan Lomax to Huddie Ledbetter (11 Apr. 1941), In Huddie Ledbetter correspondence folder, Archive of Folk Culture.
57. Alan Lomax, "Leadbelly's Songs," in Lomax, *Leadbelly: A Collection of World-Famous Songs by Huddie Ledbetter*, 5.
58. John Minton, "'Our Goodman' in Blackface and 'The Maid' at the Sookey Jump: Two Afro-American Variants of Child Ballads on Commercial Disc," *JEMF Quarterly* 18 (Spring-Summer, 1982): 36.



59. Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs As Sung by Lead Belly*, 168-69.
60. Library of Congress recording LC121A, in Archive of Folk Culture. It is impossible to date early Library of Congress recordings with certainty, but Robert M. W. Dixon and John Godrich believe that this recording was made on July 1, 1934 (Robert M. W. Dixon and John Godrich, eds., *Blues and Gospel Records, 1902-1943* 3d ed. (Chigwell, Essex, 1982), 432).
61. Reissued on *Leadbelly*, Columbia Records, CK30035, 1989.
62. Evans, *Big Road Blues*, 92-93; DeMichael, "Liner Notes."
63. The differences between the recording equipment the Lomaxes used in the field and that used in the studio could also account for some of the differences between the two versions.
64. Due to poor sound quality, some of the words on the LC recording are difficult to transcribe with certainty.
65. Reissued on *Leadbelly: Alabama Bound*, RCA 9600-2-R.
66. Billy Altman, liner notes to *Leadbelly: Alabama Bound*, RCA 9600-2-R.
67. *Victor Record Review* 3 (Mar. 1941), in Archive of Folk Culture.
68. Charles Haywood, "Reply," in Sven Eric Molin, *Journal of American Folklore* 71 (Jan. 1958): 70.
69. Molin, *Journal*, 71, 62.
70. Lomax, *The Folk Songs of North America*, 580.
71. *Victor Record Review* 3 (March 1941).
72. Letter from Huddie Ledbetter to Alan Lomax (13 Oct. 1940), in Huddie Ledbetter correspondence folder, Archive of Folk Culture. Leadbelly's handwriting makes parts of this letter difficult to transcribe with certainty.
73. John A. Lomax, " 'Sinful Songs,' " 181.
74. Ibid.
75. William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York, 1973), 67.
76. George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago, 1986), 125.
77. "Lomax Arrives with Leadbelly, Negro Minstrel."
78. Untitled document [annual report?], 3, in Archive of Folk Culture.
79. Alan Lomax " 'Sinful Songs' of the Southern Negro: Experiences Collecting Secular Folk-Music," *Southwest Review* 19 (1933-34): 115.
80. Alan Lomax, " 'Sinful Songs,' " 128.
81. Ibid., 130.
82. Wilgus, *Anglo-American Folksong*, 218.
83. Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, xxviii.