CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS AN AMERICAN IDENTITY: THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

"As a result of studying folklore I decided that it doesn't exist." John Fahey.[1]

Defining Folk Music Through Collectors

Any discussion about the origin of folklore and folk song opinion in the United States invariably begins with Harvard scholar Francis James Child (1825-1896). Somewhat an unlikely candidate for American folk song authority, the English born Child devoted the majority of his life to assembling a complete collection of what he called "the genuine ballads of the people."[2] Specifically, Child wanted his collection to "include every obtainable version of every extant English or Scottish ballad, with the fullest possible discussion of related songs or stories in the 'popular' literature of all nations."[3] The multi-volume canon, the last of which was finished by his friend and colleague George Lyman Kittredge and issued posthumously in 1898, would go on to have a tremendous effect on American folk song collectors in the early part of the twentieth century. Historian Benjamin Filene claims that

> Child's slice of folk song came to be seen as the touchstone against which all folk songs were judged . . . . At the turn of the twentieth century, when American scholars began to become interested in the songs *Americans* sang, their frame of reference was almost completely determined by the canon Child had established.[4]

Child was known as a literary folklorist, one who treated folk song as popular

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[1] Tim Ferris, "Why Fahey Wants to Kill Everybody," Rolling Stone, 24 December 1970.

[2] Sigrid Rieuwerts, "'The Genuine Ballads of the People': F.J. Child and the Ballad Cause," Journal of American Folklore 114 (1998).

[3] George Lyman Kittredge, "Francis James Child," in The English and Scottish Popular Ballads Volume One ed. Francis James Child (New York: Dover, 1965), xxvii.

[4] Benjamin Filene, Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000),15.

poetry and analyzed songs as series of texts largely divorced from their tunes.[5] This is quite significant, given the impossibility of making musical judgments based on text-only examples. Musical aesthetic was not important to Child as such, but it was to those who would follow his influence. Therefore, it is interesting to note his emphasis on text and avoidance of analyzing melody. Even more surprising, was the fact that Child relied almost exclusively on printed manuscripts and texts for his collecting, and went so far as to distrust oral sources entirely. His reasons were the same as later collectors: that an industrialized society, in this case one that had access to printed manuscripts, could disrupt tradition. As told by Kittredge in a short biography on Child in the preface to The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, this made the art of ballad collecting an extremely difficult one and identified the need of collectors to recognize in *text* the difference between a traditional oral voice and one that has lost its authenticity under modern influences. Kittredge wrote of Child that "a forged or retouched piece could not deceive him for a moment; he detected the slightest jar in the genuine ballad tone."[6] Furthermore, in no way did the garlands or broadsides, songs penned by professional ballad-makers, figure into Child's canon.[7] These were the types of songs that could infiltrate a traditional repertoire and fool the folklorist. This is why Child was therefore reluctant to bother with oral sources, and according to the author Rosemary Levy Zumwalt, Child clearly "viewed collecting from oral sources as a salvage operation."[8]

In light of this, Child pursued manuscripts mercilessly, and made every attempt to include every variation that he could find of the ballads he collected, ending up with 1300 total.[9] In this way it can be interpreted that Child intended to ensure that his collection was left without any omissions, but it also makes the opinion held by Child suspect. What cannot be overlooked is that Child felt that the tradition of ballad singing had all but vanished, and that at best all that was left to do was to

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[5] Ibid., 12.

[6] Kittredge, xxx.

[7] Rieuwerts, 10.

[8] Rosemary Levy Zumwalt, American Folklore Scholarship: A Dialogue of Dissent (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1988), 48.

[9] Filene, 14.

assemble documented sources into a comprehensive collection. If Child truly had an ear, or more specifically an eye, for traditional and untainted ballad poetry, his collection would be by his own definitions more or less complete. But as Filene points out "Child was by no means an unbiased analyst, even within the narrow segment of folk song that he admitted into view." Child acknowledged that he made improvements to some ballads in earlier editions, and was not fond of "off color" material. He did not necessarily omit such material, but he also did not seek it out.[10] Most importantly, as has been stated, Child felt no need to investigate active singers of ballads; his assumption of the ballad as "a lost art" was central to his work.

The fact that Child was working under his own idealistic motives should not necessarily be viewed negatively. Admittedly, it is rare to find any scholar that does not operate under a very idiosyncratic set of guidelines, and what Child was attempting had no model preceding it. Child's collection serves as an invaluable source of folk-based text, but it remains quite different when compared to the type of collecting that followed.

The Appalachian region of North America became a wealth spring of folk song collecting in the early twentieth century. Focusing primarily on immigrants thought to have come from the same traditions that hosted Child's ballad canon, folk song collectors were preoccupied with uncovering instances of Child ballads that were still being sung in the mountain communities. "It became habitual to note parenthetically where such finds belonged in Child's canon of 305 ballads- as in 'Lord Thomas and Fair Annet' (Child, No. 73)."[11]

Of the many folklorists who were to follow in Child's path, fellow Englishman Cecil James Sharp (1859-1924) became one of the most influential. Sharp became interested in the music of the Appalachian Mountains after an invitation in 1916 for him and his assistant Maud Karpeles to collect folk songs in North Carolina. The request was made by Olive Dame Campbell, who had already collected nearly eighty songs from the area.[12] Sharp believed that folk song was a tradition still

[10] Ibid., 15.
[11] Ibid., 16.
[12] Ibid., 20.

practiced, and that the type of folk ballad known to England could be found in most parts of the world, so long as the tightening grip of industrialization had not taken hold.[13] Of course, not just any community could bear the fruit of the English ballad, only "one or other of those English communities that lie scattered in various parts of the world."[14] Sharp felt that this type of community was to be found in the Appalachian region, and along with Karpeles, spent forty six weeks in North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia between the years of 1916 and 1917 collecting these songs.[15] The most notable result of this research was English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, first printed in 1917 with co-author credit going to Campbell, later revised by Karpeles into a two volume set.

Not only was the very idea of a living tradition separate from Child's theory, but as a trained musician, Sharp shifted the emphasis of his collecting from text only to include melody. Sharp believed that the melodies themselves held merit: "Such airs . . . make really beautiful music and are fully capable of standing alone, divorced from their texts and of being played or sung as absolute music."[16] This profound change in attitude should not be overlooked. Melodic connotations alone put heavy parameters on the music Sharp would collect, but since he was collecting from and trusted oral sources, an entire mythology surrounding the transplanted English peasant influenced his judgment, and played a major role in defining the type of song he would collect and how he would collect it.

Even though Sharp dabbled with mechanical means of documenting melody, his principle technique was to transcribe the melodies by hand as they were being sung, while his assistant would take down the texts. Sharp realized early that the songs he sought could not only be found in the older generation, but the younger as well.[17] He expanded the definition of song type that was defined by Child to include

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[13] Cecil J. Sharp, English Folk Song: Some Conclusions, 4th ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1965), xiv.

[14] Cecil J. Sharp and Olive Dame Campbell, English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, 2d ed. ed. Maud Karpeles (London: Oxford University, 1952), xxi.

[15] Sharp, English Folk Songs: Some Conclusions, xii.

[16] Sharp, English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, xxix .

[17] Ibid., xxv.

general songs, hymns, nursery songs, jigs, and play-party songs.[18] Sharp designated what authenticated a folk song in part by contrasting it against popular songs.[19] He believed in the strict German origin of the definition of folk song, defining it as unwritten and living only in the minds of and memories of those who sing it,and deplored any inclusion of popular song.[20] Sharp felt that

> This is to destroy the value of a very useful expression, and to rob scientists of a word of great value. For the English language already possessed in the phrase 'popular song,' a description which covered the wider field. There was, therefore, no need to do violence to the restricted and strictly scientific meaning of 'folk song' by stretching it beyond its natural significance.[21]

Earlier in 1907, Sharp published the first major set of guidelines and definitions in English Folk Songs: Some Conclusions; this work would remain influential for nearly half a century, and provided Sharp with a treatise to work from.[22] Sharp learned how to get his singers to sing what he wanted. He asked for particular types of songs, and even went so far as singing some examples himself, being careful that they would not "misunderstand the requirements."[23] But if Sharp was strict about what he wanted sung, he was just as particular about who sang it. According to Filene, Sharp constructed a romantic vision of what he saw to be a transplanted English peasant culture alive and well in the Appalachian Mountains:

> The key to Sharp's attraction to the Appalachian mountaineers' culture was that they fit (or could be constructed to fit) his conception of old-time England. In his depictions of mountain people he encountered, Sharp reinforced myths about the Britishness of America's folk song heritage.[24]

Sharp felt that the English culture in the mountains was not so much transplanted as "in a time warp."[25] His reference to mountaineers as "primitive," "living in constant touch with nature," and the practitioners of folk as belonging to "the lower

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[18] Ibid., v-xi.

[19] Popular as used by Sharp differed from that used by Child. Sharp's definition was closer to the one held today.

[20] Sharp, English Folk Songs: Some Conclusions, 42.

[21] Sharp, English Folk Songs: Some Conclusions, 2.

[22] Frank Howes, "Sharp, Cecil James, " in New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, ed. Stanely Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2000), 219-220.

[23] Sharp, English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, xxvi.

[24] Filene, 23.

[25] Ibid., 23.

and unlettered classes," only furthered the myth of the type of person that could legitimately create folk song in Sharp's mind.[26] When combined with the belief that the mountaineer community dated back to an even earlier time than contemporary England, it pushed a fear of modernization even deeper in Sharp, and he often met with disappointment at the corruption of the evolving world and its effect on potential traditional singers.[27]

Sharp's concentrated efforts and strict criteria for folk song and singers was not unusual for the day. Filene states that "Sharp's vision of mountain culture may seem romanticized, but his views are very much in tune with the conception of mountain culture that had been forming by the early folk song collectors since the turn of the century."[28] Filene also raises the issue that this definition of folk song played into a larger issue of race during this period in the United States:

> Mostly white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, the song collectors asserted that the mountain culture was America's authentic folk inheritance and at the same time stressed that the mountaineers were British. In effect, therefore, the collectors established their heritage as the true American culture.[29]

One very important key word in the above statement is "inheritance." During this time in the twentieth century, many definitions of American culture were being formed. Recognizing how they came into being and why, will help clarify their overall legitimacy. So far, the collectors being discussed approached folksong as derived from English sources. Even in Sharp's somewhat advanced theory, he limited his opinions and criteria to these ideas. Like Child, Sharp made important contributions, most notably in emphasizing melody, collecting orally, and considering the tradition to still be active. According to Filene, Sharp's attitude was not all that unusual for the time he lived. And if his elitist and class defined society is considered for a moment, it sheds light on a main issue of this research. Sharp recognized folk song for what he thought it was, and saw national art music as something completely different, although related. His advice to composers in the 1917 preface to English Folk

[26] Sharp, English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, xxiv; Ibid., xxiii; Sharp, English Folk Songs: Some Conclusions, 1.

[27] Filene references such disappointments written by Sharp in letters, pages 24-27.

[28] Filene, 24.

[29] Ibid., 25.

Songs from the Southern Appalachians was to pay close attention to the tunes that were assembled before them:

> It is my sober belief that if a young composer were to master the contents of this book, study and assimilate each tune with its variants, he would acquire just the kind of education that he needs, and one far better suited to his requirements than he would obtain from the ordinary conservatoire [sic] or college of music.[30]

He believed that the voice of a nation was to be found in the music of its folk: "This national type [of music] is always to be found in its purest, as well as in its most stable and permanent form, in the folk-arts of a nation."[31] He even went so far as to state that without a national folk music, the more cultivated music of a country will be vapid and left without integrity: "If they have none [national folk music], then we can be sure that the educated music of that country will be an artificial product, an alien importation, and comparatively worthless."[32]

Since he did not look to new instances of more distinctly American folk song practices when collecting, Sharp helped perpetuate what became the standard opinion of folk song up until the late 1910s as "an extremely old song, usually a ballad, that had originated from Great Britain and was currently sung by rural, isolated mountain people who were white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants."[33] If there was to be any link to the folk and art music practices in the United States during this period or after, any person that maintained Sharp's opinion would have to make the correlation in this same manner. Fortunately, the practices of an American collector, with ties that dated back to Child, would shift some of these criteria into different directions, and provide an alternate opinion separate, yet not entirely removed from, Child and Sharp.

John Avery Lomax (1867-1948) published a book of songs in 1910 entitled Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads.[34] Whereas this work would not

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[30] Sharp, English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, xxxv.

[31] Ibid., xxxv.

[32] Sharp, Folk Songs: Some Conclusions, 1.

[33] Filene, 26.

[34] John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads, revised edition (New York: Macmillan, 1938).

represent the full impact of his contribution to the field of folk music, and admittedly could not completely overturn the influence of Sharp and Child, its place as a representation of early American folk song opinion is equally important. The fact that Lomax was born in the United States was perhaps his greatest influence on considering folk songs in a different manner. His early childhood experiences of listening to and collecting the "songs cowboys sang as they traveled past his father's two-room house on the Chisolm Trail," would effect his judgment from an early age, and perhaps speaks of a folk experience more authentic than any yet discussed.[35]

Lomax was encouraged to seek out these songs in 1906 after bringing his interest in them to the attention of Kittredge while pursuing graduate studies at Harvard. It is certainly ironic that Child's old pupil would end up encouraging a path of collecting that would indirectly undermine Child's work, but the support for Lomax was not minor. Even after Lomax had completed his year at Harvard, Kittredge along with Barrett Wendell, "helped him win a prestigious postgraduate fellowship, newly endowed to Harvard." The Sheldon Fellowship, intended for the investigation of American Ballads, helped support Lomax's research over a three year period.[36]

By examining not only a native, but a relatively new style of song, Lomax changed the attitude that a folk song had to be old and British.[37] Like Sharp, he also pursued oral sources, writing in the Collector's Note to Cowboy Songs that "the songs of this collection . . . as a rule have been taken down form singing or recitation."[38] However close to Sharp this attitude may have been, Sharp, well aware of Lomax's work, did not see it as an authentic representation of folk music. Sharp admitted to the "supreme cultural value of an inherited tradition" but wrote in his own introduction in 1917:

> Another, though negative, instance of the truth of the same principle may be seen in the contents of a book which Professor Lomax has recently compiled, concerning the songs of the Southern Highlanders. The comparison is a fair one, for the cowboys live a communal life almost as isolated and shut

[35] Filene, 32.

[36] Ibid., 32. Additional biographical information taken from Nolan Porterfield and Darius L. Thieme, "Lomax," in New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, ed. Stanely Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2000), 84-86.

[37] Filene, 32-33.

[38] Lomax, Cowboy Songs, xxx.

> off from the world as that of the mountaineers, and feel, accordingly, the same compelling desire to express themselves in song. They are not, or at any rate they would not I imagine, consider themselves, in any way inferior to their neighbors; they are, I take it, less illiterate, while the life they lead is more vivid and exciting and far richer by incident. Why, then, is it that their songs compare so unfavorably with those of the mountain singers? It can only be because the cowboy has been despoiled of his inheritance of traditional song; he has nothing behind him.[39]

Lomax did however share a lot in common with Sharp in the way he romanticized his subjects, and due most likely to his time spent at Harvard, maintained a respect for the Child inheritance. Lomax saw the cowboy as a great romantic figure in equal standing to the mountaineer. To Lomax, the cowboy was a brave, tragic, heroic figure that lived in primitive and isolated conditions similar to that of the mountain pioneer.[40] These men maintained a tradition of "Anglo-Saxon ballad spirit that was active in secluded districts in England and Scotland . . .This spirit is manifested both in the preservation of the English ballad and in the creation of local songs."[41]

Sharp may have reacted more to the nature of collecting and editing that Lomax employed. Specifically, his editing practice was not very academic, but his intention was not to publish an academic text. Mostly by consolidating verses into a single song example, Lomax admittedly "violated the ethics of ballad gatherers," but he was also quick to admit that his collection was "meant to be popular."[42] Like Sharp, Lomax wanted to increase distribution of the songs he collected, even going so far as to include harmonizations and piano accompaniments in his 1910 edition (the accompaniments were later edited out).[43] Even more striking was Lomax's inclusion of performance suggestions such as "with gusto," "with spirit," and "in ballad style."[44]

By writing down and publishing songs, Child, Sharp, and Lomax were fixing a standard that could be followed by others. It should be further emphasized that this

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[39] Sharp, English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, xxxvi.
[40] Lomax, Cowboy Songs, xxv-xxvii.
[41] Ibid., xxv.
[42] Ibid., xxix.
[43] Ibid., xi.
[44] Ibid., 163, 176, 197.

was their own standard. In "The Magic that Can Set You Free: The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community," Frith argues that "the first folk collectors discovered and selected those songs that supported the arguments with which they began."[45] As mentioned, these men saw their subjects as isolated from the changing world, and therefore recognized the threat of an increasingly modern society, and with good reason. The influence of the emerging record industry would have a colossal effect on the perception of folk song, and would inevitably create an entirely new type of musical experience for Americans . This industry, which experienced fundamental growth during the same time period that has been discussed, would eventually overtake public interest.

The Influence of Commercial Recordings

The origins of recorded sound date back to 1877 in Menlo Park, New Jersey, and the invention that Thomas Edison called the phonograph.[46] Edison's "talking machine" would undergo many modifications before it would ultimately take hold of the public at large. A recent book by musicologist William Howland Kenney traces the phonograph's more widespread notice to 1890, and what Edison called the "automatic phonograph." For a nickel, the automatic phonograph provided people with the experience of listening to a two minute commercially recorded performance through ear tubes.[47]

Musicologist David Laing refers to the 1890s as music recording's "formative years."[48] This was the "decade in which the phonograph industry began its transition into the recorded music business."[49] And with any business, advertising took a key role in distinguishing the image of the product. Throughout the 1890s, as phonograph technology and recording techniques advanced, the major record

[45] Simon Frith, "The Magic that Can Set You Free: the Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community," Popular Music 1 (1981) : 159.

[46] Andre Millard, America on Record (London: Cambridge University, 1995) , 1.

[47] William Howland Kenney, Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999) , 24.

[48] David Laing, "A Voice Without a Face: Popular Music and the Phonograph in the 1890s," Popular Music 10 (January 1991) : 1.

[49] Ibid., 1.

companies campaigned to put the phonograph in the homes of American families. The phonograph was touted as an instrument that was simple to operate and possessing limitless musical selections.[50] Early record industry pioneer Eldridge Johnson even went so far as to instruct prospective retailers on the proper language to use when selling the phonograph, referring to their shops as "stores," themselves as "merchants" and future record collections as "libraries." As for the phonograph, it was considered to be an "instrument of the highest type," offering "the most enchanting selections of the worlds greatest singers."[51]

Despite these efforts, the phonograph did not experience unilateral acceptance as a source of high culture. Early on, Edison had sold his patents to the North American Phonograph Company, which along with the subsidiary Pacific Phonograph Company, as well as the Columbia Phonograph Company and the Ohio Phonograph Company, helped transform the automatic phonograph into a form of popular entertainment. Initially setting the machines up in public and semipublic places, the companies eventually built what they called "phonograph parlors," also know as "penny arcades" and "nickelodeons," small urban theaters which offered customers "a variety of musical distractions."[52]

This unforeseen detour essentially put the phonograph into the popular domain very early on, an unfortunate side effect according to the very businessmen who had created the market. According to Kenney, "Powerful leaders in the phonograph business did not want the talking machine to be what, by 1890, it had already become – a medium of popular culture."[53] This was also due to the fact that the technology of the time was very limited, and the decisions about what to record were left to what might sound best. Kenney states that:

> The early recording machines could not adequately record either the high or the low ends of the vocal range . . . the first companies simply recorded and subsequently sold whatever recordings they had the technology to make . . . raucous "vaudeville trash" that was thought to merit little if any

[50] Roland Gelatt, The Fabulous Phonograph: 1877-1977, (New York: MacMillan, 1977) , 69.

[51] Kenney, 50; Gelatt, 73.

[52] Ibid., 24-26.

[53] Ibid., 45.

audio fidelity. [54]

Opera was the first attribute of the "serious" aim of the industry, and labels like Victor's "Red Seal" featured well respected opera singers such as Enrico Caruso, the first recording star.[55] Kenney examined the marketing aims of the industry:

> Victor's first double-page spread appeared in the Saturday evening post on November 19, 1904. It paraded three photos of its high-priced operatic stars but only one photo of its popular stars. This famous ad marked a beginning to a continuous, long-term advertising campaign designed to change the way the public thought about the phonograph.[56]

The problem was that "a significant portion of what passed for 'opera' records actually presented folk, semi-popular, and popular songs interpreted in operatic style by famous opera stars who lent their cultural prestige to non-operatic music."[57] Despite attempts to elevate the phonograph industry out of "low brow" identity, the emphasis on bringing the phonograph into the home had an effect on the music that it recorded, "The policy of making the talking machine a fixture in every home naturally pushed them to record the entertainment of the masses rather than the culture of the elite."[58]

By the early 1900s, the phonograph had begun to find its way deeper into the American experience. Aided in part by advancements such as Eldridge Johnson's "Victrola," the phonograph and the phonograph industry had found a market and was addressing it. The Victrola, a record player designed to reside in middle-class American homes like any another piece of furniture, was made of solid mahogany and gold plated parts, had a more presentable aesthetic, and "was the phonographic answer to the parlor piano."[59]

Despite the industry's growth, there was still a strong voice of dissent against what some thought the phonograph represented. John Philip Sousa, a band leader

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[54] Ibid., 45.
[55] Kenney, 50.
[56] Ibid., 52.
[57] Ibid., 50.
[58] Millard, 82.
[59] Kenney, 51.

that had experienced significant success in the late nineteenth century, and whose recordings were among the first to receive large sales, saw the phonograph and its "canned music" as a great threat to the overall musical culture of America.[60] Sousa saw the phonograph as something that would "sing for us or play for us a piano, in substitute for human skill, intelligence, and soul."[61] He also foresaw "a marked deterioration in American music and musical taste, an interruption in the musical development of the country."[62]

Negative connotations would continue to surround the relationship between the phonograph and popular music. But despite any opposition, significant improvements were made in phonograph technology between 1900 and 1920, including mass duplication from master cylinders, which greatly increased the selections offered by phonograph companies. The phonograph had taken hold, and after World War I there was a marked increase in phonograph and record sales, which reached a peak in 1921.[63] But It was the year 1920, and an Okeh recording by singer Mamie Smith, that would bring a new market into play. Initially referred to as "race" recordings, and later including "hillbilly" recordings, the record industry would begin blurring the line between what could be considered folk and popular music. Otto Heinemann, a German record industry pioneer who founded the Okeh record label in 1918, had every intention of focusing his efforts on making popular recordings.[64] But it was one of his talent scouts, Ralph Peer, who recorded Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues," who would have the greatest impact on American perceptions about vernacular and folk styles. The "accidental" success of Smith's recording marks, according to Filene, "the first real breakthrough in generating popular interest in indigenous American vernacular music." The most notable aspect of this phenomena was that this interest was "spurred not by folklorists or ballad enthusiasts

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[60] Millard, 83.

[61] Gelatt, 146.

[62] Kenney, 57. Sousa quotes referenced in Kenney's bibliography as "John Phillip Sousa Still Alarmed," Talking Music World II, 9 (Sept, 1906): 21; "Sousa's Protest Against 'Canned' Music," Current Literature 41 (Oct, 1906) : 426-28.

[63] Richard K. Spottswood, "Commercial Ethnic Recordings in the United States," in Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage (Washington: American Folklife Center, 1982) , 58.

[64] Kenney, 114-116.

but by commercial entrepreneurs."[65]

The ramifications of the commercial aspect of race and hillbilly recordings would greatly encourage what was expected from musicians, as well as what would inevitably get recorded.[66] It was not the "classic" blues of singers such as Mamie Smith that would have the greatest impact, but the "country" or "early downhome" blues.[67] This style of blues, which has been called Mississippi Delta, Piedmont, Texas and Ragtime blues, predominately featured male singers, who accompanied themselves on acoustic guitars, sometimes playing with the aid of a knife or bottleneck. The period between 1920 and 1945, was a "robust business in recording Black musicians and vocalists."[68] Kenney designates this entire period the race record era, but it was during the period between 1920-1932 that the style of music most important to this study enjoyed peak success.[69]

The initial success of Blind Lemon Jefferson served as the prototype for what race record producers were after. Jefferson recorded his first selections in 1924 for Columbia's race series when he was sixteen years old.[70] The year before, while Peer was in Atlanta, he had recorded the music of a white country musician named Fiddlin' John Carson. In a circumstance that was similar to that of Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues," Carson's initial record, sold only in Atlanta, and with no real advertising sold out its first five hundred copies within the first month. Later, in 1925, after recording Al Hopkin's string band, Peer dubbed them the "'Hill Billies,' a term that eventually grew to apply to the whole genre of rural white commercial music."[71]

Hillbilly, also know as old-time or old-time country, was by all respect the

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[65] Filene, 34.

[66] Race and hillbilly should be considered synonyms with blues and old-time music.

[67] Jeff Todd Titon, Early Downhome Blues, 2nd edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994) , 59.

[68] Kenney, 110.

[69] Ibid., 111. This is a consolidated date. Some authors place the important starting date for the style of blues considered at 1922, 1924 and as late as 1927. It is widely accepted, however, that the success of Mamie Smith in 1920 opened the doors to this market, and that the years immediately after the stock market crash of 1929 showed a gradual decline and ultimate demise of this initial style.

[70] Paul Oliver, Blues Off the Record: Thirty Years of Blues Commentary (New York: De Capo, 1984) , 65.

[71] Filene, 35.

precursor to many different styles of “country” music, most notably bluegrass. The major difference between blues and old-time music, albeit mostly engineered by record producers, was that unlike the solo singer/guitar player model of the country blues musician, old-time musicians most often played in small ensembles that included fiddle, banjo,and string bass in any variable gathering. That is not to say that there were not examples of solo guitar players in old-time music, both instrumental and as vocal accompaniment. In fact there were many. And just the same, blues guitar players routinely played in groups. Blues and old-time guitar players shared both aesthetic and technical similarities.[72] So, by 1925, the record industry had created two very distinct, and seemingly unrelated markets for music that was utterly foreign to them. “By 1927 companies were releasing ten race records each week,” and between the years 1925 and 1932, “as many as 65 million old-time song or tune performances flooded into the culture.”[73] The benefit of this was that since the early record producers had very little understanding of the music they recorded, they simply recorded what they could, eventually adopting the policy of recording what sold.[74] But after they caught on to what was selling, marketing and commercial techniques took control.

It was clear that these styles lie in American vernacular traditions, and the record companies marketed them as such. However, many of the musicians that recorded during this period were traditional musicians who clearly had no experience recording, and did not live in the areas in which the record companies were established. Likewise, their target audience consisted mainly of cultural groups not routinely marketed to by the industry. Therefore, it was up to the record companies to come up with a suitable strategy to get recordings made. In the case of old-time music, radio played a role in introducing talent. At the time, radio consisted almost entirely of live performances, and many regional stars were likewise targeted by the record industries.[75] But by and large, in order to get the music recorded, “company

[72] Fly Bredenberg and Stephen Cicchetti, Old-Time Country Guitar (New York: Oak Publications, 1976) , 7-8.

[73] Filene, 34, 36.

[74] Kenney, 34.

[75] Ibid., 143.

talent scouts . . . planned yearly or biyearly trips into the region. Notices were placed in the local newspapers alerting readers to the time and place of auditions, usually in a store or in a hotel in the various southern cities."[76] According to Kenney, "the American recording companies helped pry folk musicians from their traditional surroundings by refusing to record in people's homes, where music might remain too much within its customary ceremonial and ritual context."[77] But that is not to say these producers did not play into the public's vision of this type of music. "Pioneer record producers like Peer liked to call their work in the South 'recording expeditions,' leaving a false impression of camping through the mountains in search of pure-hearted rustic musicmakers."[78]

The reactions of folk musicians to the machinery these producers used to record them were at the very least those of bewilderment. The experience was not lessened by the crude "recording studios" that the producers would mock up:

> The rural American's awe before urban technology was encouraged by the carefully insulated, soundproofed (and searingly hot) rooms in which the recording activity took place. Peer and his engineers sought out small unused warehouses and other retail spaces available for rent . . .all of that, not to mention the mutely staring recording horn that had already terrified so many foreign, concert, ethnic, and popular singers, must have made Peer's traveling studio a humbling experience for its rural initiates. [79]

Two other criteria would have a major effect on this music: limitations on who could record what, and copyright laws. Despite the fact that many of the country blues artists being recorded were songsters, musicians with a much wider popular repertoire than strictly blues, white record producers adopted a "blues only" policy when recording blacks. "From the time of Mamie Smith's 1920 recording, white record entrepreneurs wanted African Americans to sing the blues. They insisted on that genre to the nearly total exclusion of the popular songs that appealed to large numbers of whites and at least some blacks."[80] Due in part to the desire to keep race and hillbilly records in separate markets, what inevitably would affect the material

[76] Ibid., 131.
[77] Ibid., 71.
[78] Ibid., 71.
[79] Ibid., 143.
[80] Ibid., 132.

recorded was this fact combined with the focus on gaining copyright control by record producers. If singers were singing popular songs, then the record companies would have to pay royalties to other companies. Kenney states that:

> Due to the nature of copyright law in the record business [producers] insisted that aspiring American blues . . . singers record titles, melodic lines, and lyrics that had not been recorded before, so that the company would not have to pay 2¢ per side in royalties to a competitor, and in addition, might well reap its own windfall in future royalties . . . . Many artists with extensive repertoires sang a lot of traditional material and their own versions of the popular songs of the day. If they didn't have enough of the more original-sounding blues numbers, the white talent scout would either send the aspiring artist away or help him flesh out melodic fragments and/or lyrics and tune titles.[81]

Even more difficult for the rural musicians to cope with, was the meager time allotted them per recording. The 78 rpm record offered one three and a half minute musical performance per side. The process of recording was not easy, and multiple takes not usually available. In the case of blues artists, many of the performance opportunities came from dances, where a performer would be expected to play for much longer periods of time. Musicologist Ralph Eastman wrote that:

> Traditionally . . . the primary source of employment for bluesmen came from providing the musical accompaniments for dancers at roadhouses, juke joints, parties, and picnics. These dances were often extended revels in striking contrast to the . . . performances occasioned by the playing time of a 78 rpm phonograph record . . . No wonder Depression-era bluesman were confused by white talent scouts and record-company representatives who expected them to have four "original" songs between three and four minutes duration in order to be considered for commercial recording.[82]

This information led Eastman to the conclusion that "at best, early recordings . . . managed to capture only frozen moments from a blues performance."[83]

One interpretation would be to pass off the recordings by these blues and old-time musicians as unauthentic representations of folk music. In truth, the academic folklorists of this period remained as true to their own origins as they could, but as has been suggested, the legitimacy to an authentic claim from that camp is also suspect to subjectivity. But when comparing early folk song collectors with early record

[81] Ibid., 132.

[82] Ralph Eastman, "Country Blues Performance and the Oral Tradition," Black Music Research Journal 2 (Fall 1988) : 165, 171.

[83] Ibid., 171.

producers, similarities can be found. First and foremost, both groups set out with individual motivations and more or less preconceived ideas about what they wanted to document. Sharp was careful that his instructions as to what he wanted to be sung were not "misunderstood," just as Peer's insistence on short, original sounding material was made clear. There is little evidence to support the idea that Sharp or even Lomax's subjects had no exposure with popular song at all. And even if they did, the insistence on what was to be sung would interfere with what was given to the collectors. Musicologists Anne and Norm Cohen state that "it is often the case that performers respond to what is requested of them. Folksong collectors, basically antique hunters, have their antennae tuned for the old and the arcane."[84] Any one of Sharp or Lomax's subjects could have hypothetically held a large cache of popular song styles in their mental song repositories, but the collectors would never have known.

One problem with making clear distinctions lies in what ended up being a relatively immovable aesthetic of folk song created by early collectors. The fear of industrialization was not only due to the changes that would be made to traditional culture, but also that the culture somehow maintained a higher level of integrity, despite its simple and illiterate stereotypes. This was based on rhetoric that placed happiness in the simple "American village." This required the folk-like existence to be simple, substantial, [and] untainted.[85] But industrial influence was a logical by-product of the way the United States was changing in the early twentieth century, and "Southern workers could no more escape their industrial present than they could their country past."[86]

The Lomaxes and Mass Media

During the 1930s John Lomax, along with his son Alan, enjoyed a second career as an authority on American folk and vernacular music. The men utilized

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[84] Anne and Norm Cohen, "Folk and Hillbilly Music: Further Thoughts on their Relation," JEMF Quarterly 13 (Summer 1977) : 52.

[85] Titon, Early Downhome Blues, 235.

[86] Kenney, 147.

recording technology, as well as popular means of dissemination to create an image of what they felt "pure" American folk music was. In a 1937 article on field recording, John Lomax stressed the importance of records when documenting folk music:

> Portable recording machines are necessary for a folk song collector who wishes to secure music in its native habitat, where there is the least likelihood of the inclusion of . . . influences, and where the singers feel at ease in their own homes or amid scenes familiar to them for a lifetime. Unless collecting work can be quickly done, it is my opinion that the influence of good roads and the radio combined will very soon put an end both to the creation and to the artless singing of American folk songs.[87]

It is apparent that Lomax still maintained the opinion that the less traditional music was influenced by modern society the better, and that the imminent threat of industrialization needed to be beaten back. With this in mind, John and Alan Lomax took their much celebrated 350 pound trunk-mounted recording machine to "self contained homogeneous communities cut off from the corrupting influence of popular culture."[88]

The Lomaxes most famous "discovery" was Huddie Ledbetter, also known as Lead Belly. The men recorded Lead Belly in 1932 at Angola Prison in Louisiana and felt that they had found "a living link to traditions that were slipping away, a storehouse of old-time songs greater than they had thought possible to find in the twentieth century."[89] It is important to realize that by recording folk as a "living, oral tradition" the Lomaxes successfully broke away from the ever present influence of Child and Sharp once and for all.

The Lomaxes promoted Lead Belly as a "pure" and authentic folk singer. By dressing him in prison garb or sharecropper clothes and utilizing a primitive persona, they created an image of not only what American folk music sounded like, but also what it looked like, delivered to popular audiences through concerts, radio and recordings. Filene interprets this as a pivotal moment in folk song opinion in the United States:

> In a pioneering move, the Lomaxes began to promote not just the songs

[87] John A. Lomax, "Field Experiences with the Recording Machines," Southern Folklore Quarterly 1 (1937) : 60.

[88] Filene, 50.

[89] Ibid., 51.

> they gathered but the singers who sang them. In doing so they produced a web of criteria for determining what a "true" folk singer looked and sounded like and a set of assumptions about the importance of *being* a "true" folk singer. In short, they created a "cult of authenticity," a thicket of expectations and valuations that American roots musicians and their audiences have been negotiating ever since.[90]

John Lomax used his honorary position as curator of the Archive of American Folk-Song at the Library of Congress to legitimize as well as archive his work.[91] He also secured government funds in 1941 in the form of the Radio Research Project. The project consisted of ten volumes of music recorded by the Lomaxes between 1934 and 1941, with voice over lecture by the elder Lomax. The separate volumes consisted of themes such as spirituals, blues and hollers, convict songs, and even a complete volume dedicated to the song about the boll weevil. They were sent to radio stations for air play, and certainly played into the mythology surrounding folk music. Each volume began with an announcer stating:

> For more than thirty years, Mr. Lomax has been gathering the songs of the American people. Songs not written down or learned from books, but folk songs of the people, sung by the people, and made into recordings on the very scene. To collect these songs, Mr. Lomax has ridden night herd with cowboys, visited ballad singers far back in the Ozark mountains, gone to dances in the country, spoken to tenant farmers in the deep south, and yes, he has gone into crowded cell blocks and penitentiaries in many parts of the United States.[92]

By manipulating the public's perceptions of folk music that was created in part by the commercial recordings from the 1920s, the Lomaxes at one time freed perceptions previously held by academic folk collectors, while at the same time initiating some of their own. Whether this is good or bad is not the issue. The important aspect of the Lomaxes work during the 1930s and 1940s was that they overcame the early attitudes and influences of the early folk song collectors while at the same time remaining somewhat connected to them. They combined this with the technology afforded by the record industry, and targeted some of the same markets that this industry had originally created. "In effect they spread their vision of American

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[90] Ibid., 49.

[91] Ibid., 56.

[92] John A. Lomax, The Ballad Hunter: Lectures on American Folk Music Vol I-X, Library of Congress, AAFS L 49-53, 1958.

music by integrating folk into mass culture."[93] No longer could folk and commercial music remain separate; they would forever be linked.

Making a Popular Connection to the Vernacular Experience

One argument that has been made is that the earlier blues and old-time recordings featured a higher level of folk authenticity, or more specifically less change.[94] Titon considers the dilemma that industrialization poses when faced with tradition and perceptions:

> At every stage in America's history, the idea that the best possible life is the one closest to the rhythms of the natural world has competed with the idea that the fruits of man's greatest achievement- civilization- are to be enjoyed in the large cities, where art and technology have not merely replaced nature, but have improved it.[95]

Despite this proverbial "pickle," change is an accepted fact of life. To make things simpler, change can be interpreted as having either a positive, negative, or neutral effect. It is clear that change in industrial terms was viewed by folk song collectors as having a negative effect on tradition. The threat of printed manuscripts tainted traditional repertoire, and as more exposure to recorded sound occurred, harm was done. This did not stop the collectors from printing their songs in widely available folios or releasing them on record, but it seems that to them the effect this would have on traditional style would not make a noticeable impact. It may be that some collectors were idealistic enough to imagine a world where the pure forms of song they collected could be redistributed without any of what they saw as negative change. On the contrary, the early pioneers of the phonograph industry viewed change as something good. Change enabled them to develop new means of recording a variety of different musical styles, music that may never have been experienced by certain social groups. Furthermore, this change in availability provided a means of identity formation that was an integral part of the American experience during the twentieth century.

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[93] Filene., 57.
[94] Cohen, 53.
[95] Titon, Early Downhome Blues, 235.

How then, is a neutral reaction to change defined? The reality is that change is widely accepted as part of the folk process, even by Sharp, albeit within the general form.[96] The folk music discussed thus far, whether it be the "pure" forms presented by academic collectors, or the industry product of record producers, was from a predominately oral tradition, due mainly to the lack of musical notation. David Evans wrote that "the very nature of oral tradition is such as to produce variation . . . altered versions continue in oral tradition and undergo further alteration and recreation by others."[97] In the introduction to Media Sense: The Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum, editors Peter Narvaez and Martin Laba wrote that "folklorists have abundantly documented the fact that any kind of folklore performance, whether it be a ballad, folktale, or gesture, exhibits variation and change- hallmarks of the folk process."[98]

The question may be to what extent is change allowed and by what influence, but at this point it should be accepted that change by any means is a logical occurrence, and subjectivity should be avoided. Change is a process analogous to evolution. The phonograph industry made no slight impact on the American public in the United States. Anne and Norm Cohen state: "Thus the mere fact of recordings forced the previously slow rate of musical change to accelerate markedly."[99] An absolutely unavoidable part of American life for the last two-thirds of the twentieth century, the phonograph had already influenced many of the artists that were making records during the twenties. Despite a boom had by radio in the early 1920s, one that even slowed up the phonograph industry, the phonograph held a greater influence on certain populations, particularly rural blacks, who did not get targeted by early radio programmers. Kenney wrote on the importance of the phonograph in these communities:

> A 1927 study of the homes of both whites and blacks in Greene County and Macon County, Georgia, revealed that none contained a radio . . . practically

[96] Sharp, English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, xxviii.

[97] David Evans, Big Road Blues: Tradition and creativity in the Folk Blues (Berkeley: University of California , 1982) , 6.

[98] Peter Narvaez and Martin Laba eds., Media Sense: The Folklore-Popular Continuum (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State , 1983) , 2.

[99] Cohen, 53.

> no blues or other African American programming got on radio in the 1920s. Because of the relatively greater dedication of the record industry to developing a market among African Americans, 19 percent had purchased phonographs [by 1925].[100]

The importance of the phonograph in the home spread music throughout rural communities. Due to spring-wound motors and portable phonographs like the Artophone Talking Machine, records could be shared outside as well as inside the home. Titon interviewed Mississippi bluesman Fred McDowell who said:

> We had those wind up victrolas, wasn't no electricity then, y'understand. We would maybe stop by after work at someone's house who had one . . . wouldn't be no dancin', just a small bunch of us gathered around listening in the shack. Those people who had a victrola had somethin' y'understand.[101]

Baby Doo Caston, another interview subject of Titon's, claimed that "many people who did not have phonographs bought records anyway and played them on other people's machines."[102] If in no other way, the fixed medium of the phonograph gave prospective blues and old-time musicians a template to work from if they desired to become recording artists. As mentioned, most of these musicians were musically illiterate, that is to say they could not read printed music, not that they did not understand it. With the phonograph, it was natural that an oral tradition would take from a record, much the same as from a person. Muddy Waters, a successful blues artist after World War II, developed his musicianship not long after this initial period, and claimed that his primary source of technique was to learn it by ear from the record.[103] Eastman states that "as records could be played repeatedly and studied closely, all of this exchange of information was accomplished 'by ear,' in the manner of the oral tradition."[104]

The medium was accidentally created and elastic, it then turned strict, and eventually this strictness was turned back into more product. The style created by the early record producers for both blues and old-time music shared traits that were immediately identifiable with more "authentic" versions of folk music presented by

[100] Kenney, 129.

[101] Titon, Early Downhome Blues, 282-3.

[102] Ibid., 283.

[103] John Cowley, "Really the 'Walking Blues:' Son House, Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson and the Development of a Traditional Blues," Popular Music 1 (1980) : 58.

[104] Eastman, 164-5.

the Lomaxes. By appealing to their target market, they attempted to represent distinct and familiar music forms, but since they were motivated by copyright control and limitations of the 78 rpm record, what they created were musical styles that sounded both "new and familiar."[105]

The first wave of commercial folk music ended around the time of the depression, and as the industry picked back up very few trips were made down south. Instead, the record companies simply sent for the musicians they wanted to record, or found them already living in many of the northern cities. The commercial folk music of the 1930s and 1940s differed significantly from that of the 1920s. However, it is worth mentioning that even though many of these recordings were lost or destroyed, enough survived to make for a very large representative cross section of music from the period. The phonograph industry made significant progress in integrating the phonograph into American life, and during the 1930s and 1940s combined radios and phonographs into a single set, called "plug-ins," similar to contemporary entertainment systems. Additionally, starting around 1935, radio broadcasters began switching to records as the primary source of music. This consumer breakthrough, when combined with the conglomeration of radio and phonograph industries, made mass dissemination of recorded music an everyday American experience.[106]

After World War II, an interest in the first wave of commercial folk music was renewed. According to Kenney, of all the historical events of the twentieth century "none were more powerful than the wrenching historical changes of urbanization, domestic and international migrations, and social dislocations that resulted from World War II . . . almost all citizens found in recorded music a vehicle for carrying musical memories through time and into the present."[107] When the record industry started back up after the war, the real influence of old recordings and the American public's relationship with records manifested. The date most often referenced is 1945, and any consideration of music made since this time is linked in one way or another to

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[105] Ibid., 166.
[106] Gelatt, 266-7; Millard,178, 185,; Kenney, 184-5.
[107] Kenney, 182.

recorded music.

Beginning in the late 1940s, the early sounds of the acoustic folk music recorded in the 1920s and 1930s had all but vanished. But in 1952, an experimental film maker named Harry Smith assembled a collection of out of print 78 recordings that "defined a corpus of music . . . that is still very valid today."[108] The American Anthology of Folk Music was released by Moses Asch's Folkways Records, and has had a greater impact on the public opinion on American folk music than any other collection since, recently being reissued on compact disc.[109] What made Smith's collection so distinctive at the time, was that all the recordings that made up the three volumes were taken from commercial recordings made between 1927 and 1932. This music, despite being about twenty years old, was very different from the type of music that was being recorded at the time. In an Interview with author and record collector Dick Spottswood, a formidable influence during John Fahey's youth, this point was immediately raised. Spottswood remarked on experiencing this material: "A 1928 record would have been twenty-four years old in 1952? That's nothing. [But] in 1952 that stuff not only sounded like it came from a different time, it sounded like it came from a different planet."[110]

Smith fully synthesized the popular with the folk, and the academic with the street. The first volume, entitled Ballads, consisted of commercially recorded Child Ballads. In his foreword to the 1952 edition, he credits the modern era of folk recording to have begun with Ralph Peer and Okeh records, and like the Lomaxes, he assumes that only recorded sources are justifiable means of documentation:

> Only through recordings is it possible to learn of those developments that have been so characteristic of American music, but which are unknowable through written transcription alone. Then too, records of the type found in the present set played a large part in stimulating these historic changes by making easily available to each other the rhythmically and verbally specialized musics of groups living in mutual social and cultural isolation.[111]

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[108] Dick Spottswood, interview by Nick Schillace, 3 May 2002.

[109] Harry Smith, ed., The Anthology of American Folk Music volumes one, two and three, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1997, compact disc.

[110] Dick Spottswood, Interview by Nick Schillace, 3 May 2002.

[111] Harry Smith, ed., forward to Anthology of American Folk Music, no page number given.

Smith, like those before him, established criteria that authenticated his opinions. Aided by the increased length of the 33 1/3 rpm long play record, know as the LP, which had become available in 1948, he was able to assemble a large retrospective in order to illustrate this opinion:

> The eighty four recordings in this set were made between 1927, when electronic recording made possible accurate music reproduction, and 1932, when the depression had halted music sales. During this five year period American music still retained some of the regional qualities evident in the days before the phonograph, radio and talking picture had tended to integrate local types.[112]

Many developments in American music have been credited to Smith's Anthology, most notably the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s. While the revival does play a small role in this study, it is not necessarily due to any continuity begun by Smith. Instead, the importance of Smith's influence here lies in generating an interest in these old recordings that were not readily available to one very significant audience for his Anthology: white middle class youth.

Spottswood tells a familiar story: "I had a paper route back then, and I saved up my money from the paper route, and bought those records as soon as they came out. They came out in three sets of two records, so I would buy one, then save up my money until I had enough for the second one, and that's how I acquired them."[113] Smith utilized the matrix numbers issued to the recordings, along with the record companies that released them, in his annotations. This "clue" would encourage people interested in what they heard in his collection to seek out more of these recordings. Jon Pankake recalled in the liner notes to the reissue this revelation:

> Harry Smith's discographical footnotes to the Anthology indicated that the recordings of his collection were but a small part of a larger world of commercially recorded music, the dimensions and contents of which were impossible to ascertain in 1959 but which I also set out to explore.[114]

Persons exposed to this music began to experience, according to Spottswood:

> Nostalgia for a past that hadn't even passed that much . . . but our initial

[112] Ibid., no page number given.

[113] Dick Spottswood, interview by Nick Schillace, 3 May 2002.

[114] Jon Pankake, "The Brotherhood of the Anthology," from the liner notes to the Anthology of American Folk Music volumes one, two and three ,ed. by Harry Smith, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1997, 26.

> cultured, urban experience of all of that . . . all the people who were encountering this stuff in the mid 1950s, we were hearing stuff that packed an enormous wallop and at the same time was so remote from anything else that was in our immediate surroundings.[115]

Samuel Charters wrote in the introduction to The Blind Willie Johnson Anthology that "the few records we knew about, the handful of names that we knew, were like a faint, distant light through a mist, and we had no idea what the light meant."[116] The problem with seeking out these recordings was that even though many still existed, they had long since left circulation. Records, it should be remembered, are a business; if the records stopped selling, like many of the old 78s did, there was little incentive to keep them in print. Spottswood said at the time of the Anthology that "[this] music was dead and forgotten in the record company vaults, and most of it had never come North or come to town in the 20s and 30s in the first place."[117] The war efforts also depleted the numbers available, and many records remain exceedingly rare. Author Eddie Dean wrote:

> Long before the advent of vinyl, records were made of shellac. During World War II, millions of 78s were melted down for raw materials needed in the war effort. In those early days of the recording industry, there were no master tapes stored in record label vaults, only metal discs, most of which were likewise destroyed during the war years– which made the 78s craved by [collectors] all the more rare. Sometimes, only a single copy survived, a lone slab of shellac to prevent a song from disappearing into the black hole of silence.[118]

Contributing to the problem was that these recordings experienced limited, regional release. During the 1920s and early 1930s, these regional areas consisted of a social class that for the most part was very different than that of most record collectors. There were many solutions to this dilemma, one was mail order record auctions, still active today, in which old 78 recordings could be bought, sold and traded. Many people, after the music itself, could get taped copies of the records, in

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[115] Dick Spottswood, interview by Nick Schillace, 3 May 2002.

[116] Samuel Charters, introduction to The Complete Blind Willie Johnson, Columbia/Legacy C2K 52835, 1993, compact disc.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Eddie Dean, " Desperate Man Blues, " in Da Capo Best Music Writing 2000, ed. by Peter Guralnick (United States: Da Capo, 200), 178.

which these could be traded as well.

Joe Bussard, an early record collector who likewise had a big influence on John Fahey, still offers for a small fee custom tapes dubbed from his vast collection of 78s stored meticulously in his basement.[119] Bussard's initial interest in collecting, while predating Smith's Anthology somewhat, is typical. After hearing Jimmie Rogers on the radio in 1947, he went to a local record store to buy some of Rogers' music. He found out, like so many others, that Rogers music was unavailable, and that he needed to seek it out for himself. Bussard drew a logical conclusion, "I figured somebody's got some. So I started going around to old houses. I knocked on this door, and this woman came, and I said, 'You got any old records?' She said, 'Yeah, I got a big box of 'em, just take 'em."[120] Bussard had begun a life long passion "canvassing" for records door to door, in search of lost music archived on the old 78s.[121]

The process of seeking out these old recordings carried many similarities to that of the folk song collectors. The music could only be found in particular areas, and had to be coaxed out of those who had it. In the case of blues recordings, in order to find these records, collectors had to canvass in black neighborhoods. Musicologists Robert C. Kloosterman and Chris Quispel recognize this as an important move in the redistribution of these recordings, writing that "the few whites who had in some way or another become interested in black music, had to go to black neighborhoods to buy their records."[122] Most importantly, many of the records pressed in those early days had deteriorated, and finding high quality examples could prove difficult. Shellac is not particularly sturdy, and these records only carry 75-125 decent plays.[123] Bussard, like folk song collectors and record producers, also worked from a very narrow field of opinion about the value of the music he holds dear. Bussard broadly

[119] Bussard is now online at vintage78s.com.

[120] Marshall Wyatt, "A Visit with Joseph E. Bussard, Jr. ," http:// www.oldtimeherald.org/pages/6-7/6-7/buss.html

[121] The term canvassing refers to the process of setting out to find or buy old records. Between the years of 1950 and 1960, the most fruitful way of doing so was by going door to door.

[122] Robert C. Kloosterman and Chris Quispel, "Not Just the Same Old Show on my Radio: An analysis of the Role Radio and the Diffusion of Black Music Among Whites in the South of the United States of America, 1920-1960, " Popular Music 9 (1990) : 158.

[123] Millard, 202.

claims that "jazz ended in 1934! It was all over by '34! The same with country! The real old-time country music was over by 1934!" In perhaps the greatest subjective claim thus far he states that "1929 was the high point of Western Civilization!"[124]

No matter how opinionated Bussard may be, his intentions, much like early folk song collectors, has always been to bring the music he loves so dearly out into the public. Bussard says that "our greatest works of American music are on these 78s, and they're ignored by just about everybody."[125] His taping services are a natural extension of his desire to disseminate this music further, in hopes that some of the attributes he finds in them may be reinvigorated. At the very least, contributions by collectors such as Bussard, who routinely and enthusiastically makes available his library for anthologies, collections, and reissues, have preserved an era of music that could have easily slipped away. Spottswood notes that "there are surviving examples of American music . . . that would not exist today had Joe not gone out and scoured for them."[126]

Collectors like Spottswood and Bussard still maintain their own theories about what constitutes the best in these recordings, the period covered by the Anthology being a widely held time frame. Spottswood simplifies any arguments by adopting the popular theory that all of this music, or any music, exists on a scale of industrial influence.[127] For example, the earlier folk music recorded by the record companies may have been influenced by popular culture, but significantly less than what was recorded in the 1930s and 1940s. The record producers took existing ephemeral forms of traditional music and created fixed standards which enabled an aesthetic of folk song to be referenced and changed over time, but remained, at least on the surface, similar to the earlier recordings. On differences between collectors and producers, Spottswood says that "the difference between Lomax and people like Ralph Peer is that Lomax recorded music that was a degree or two more primitive, otherwise there wasn't too much difference." Legitimacy is not an

[124] Wyatt.

[125] Ted Anthony, "Life at 78 rpm," http://www.capecodonline.com/cctimes/archives/2001/jun/18/lifeat18.html

[126] Eddie Dean, 181.

[127] Dick Spottswood, interview by Nick Schillace, 3 May 2002.

issue to Spottswood, who views things in a more post-modern way, remarking that "authenticity just means music at a certain point of the evolutionary scale."[128]

It should be restated that the actual music is not what is of concern, but the process in which it is experienced. This research attempts no definition at defining what constitutes folk music per se, rather the process in which Americans have experienced and utilized music, defined as their vernacular. This in turn, will help understand what constitutes the cultivated music of the United States. The argument that has been examined so far is how the music is represented and what distinguishes one opinion from another. The ultimate conclusion reached is that each is as subjective as the next, and any definition of folk music is slippery at best. And according to Spottswood:

> A lot of sins have been committed in the name of folk music, and so today, you can't use the word folk music anymore. Because, are you are talking about Lomax's prison songs, or are you talking about the Kingston Trio? It's all called folk music, so the word has become meaningless.[129]

And therein lies the focus. The essence does not lie in the music, but the actual recordings. Spottswood makes it clear that despite any argument about authenticity in the case of the Lomaxes, what really matters are the recordings they left.[130] Ralph Peer failed to see what others saw in the value in his own contributions, "his records were to him but industrial product in a far more dramatic and exciting world of making money in the phonograph business."[131] The music that collectors were after may be held by a majority as having some intrinsic folk-like qualities, but the fact that these recordings were being dug up and reinterpreted by a new audience is where their actual function lies. Listening to records is part of a larger cultural experience, Kenney writes that:

> Group sensibilities in which listeners shared, debated, analyzed, and fought, often passionately, on their personal paths of empathy and appreciation for what they heard in grooves of 78 rpm recordings . . . Many Americans found ways of expressing important dimensions of their personal lives through their

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[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Kenney, 139.

involvement with recorded sound.[132]

Kenney has examined this subject with more sympathy and in greater detail than most, and treats recorded sound as having value and meaning as objects themselves. When writing about cultural significance in the United States, he notes that:

> Recorded sound has received little consideration. The phonographs' repetitive function acted as a major aid to memory by resounding the patterns of sensibility embedded in commercialized musical formulas of the past . . . the phonograph and recorded sound . . . served as instruments in a ongoing process of individual and group recognition in which images of the past and the present could be mixed in an apparently timeless suspension.[133]

There has already been material presented examining the effects of records on traditional music, but the influence of records has had no less of an impact on other social groups during the twentieth century. Kenney examines the responses from a 1921 Edison survey taken by phonograph customers that clearly shows that very early in the twentieth century, records had become integral to many Americans who "took the occasion of the survey to explain how and why they simply would not have been able to live without their record players and their records."[134] Records gave Americans musical experiences that before could only have been experienced by people of different social classes and regions. What is the difference between art and folk music if all you had ever heard was popular or regional styles? When Sousa attacked the phonograph in the early part of the century, he felt that passively listening to phonograph recordings would diminish the music made by amateurs.[135] What he did not consider, was that recorded sound could bring people certain styles of music they never would have experienced otherwise. In retaliation to Sousa's remarks, music critic Henry T. Finck likened recordings to a railway through the Alps, "being able to climb mountains easily, I [Finck] have little use for them; but I am glad they make the glories of the Alps

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[132] ibid., xv.
[133] Ibid., xix.
[134] Ibid., 5.
[135] Gelatt, 147; Kenney, 59.

accessible to thousands who could never know them without the aid of the railway."[136]

Looking past what others saw as a soiling done by popular music's cross fertilization, it is obvious that new experiences involving music have been forming since the phonograph industry began. Ed Denson, friend and early business partner to Fahey says that "there is a moment when you are open to music and whatever music you perceive in that moment is the music you like best for the rest of your life."[137] With records, the type of music experienced at this moment is as infinite as music itself. This claim illustrates where the folk and commercial world truly meet, combining to create the vernacular process. Narvaez reminds us that in very simple terms, popular culture is mass media, in this case represented by recordings, and folklore performance is small.[138] But when contained on record, and reinterpreted by a new audience, the experience changes. The goal is insuring that the original motivation remains intact behind the recordings, but of course this is impossible.

Historically, the problem with making correlations between popular music and any other type of music, is that popular music carries a stigma that is often very negative. "Popular culture has been conceptualized as a negative and social and ideological influence."[139] Frith makes a correlation between this attitude and academics, who elevate both serious and folk music by virtue of its romanticized and supposedly "authentic" creation, whereas popular music, often tied to sales and marketing, fails to have the same value.[140] The idea that popular music is somehow less valid than other types of music goes beyond academics, and can be seen in the reactions by early record industry pioneers, folk song collectors, and even record collectors that seek out only older recordings. But definitions aside, when the music is brought into individual situations, whatever it may be called is irrelevant; the experience defines the musics' value. Laba's research shows that:

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[136] Gelatt, 148.

[137] Ed Denson, interview with Nick Schillace, 14 April 2002.

[138] Narvaez, 1.

[139] Martin Laba, "Popular Culture and Folklore: The Social Dimension," in Media Sense: The Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum, Peter Narvaez and Martin Laba eds. (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University, 1983) , 9.

[140] Simon Frith, "The Good, the Bad, and the Indifferent: Defending Popular Culture from the Populists," Diacritics 21 (Winter 1991) : 106-7.

> A social reference group will demand or evolve its own adaptive patterns of response for usual interfactional situations encountered in relation to popular culture, and folklore defines those patterns as they become 'traditional.'. . The essential connection between folklore and popular culture is the social sphere . . . the social practice of folkloric communication is structured by the symbolic forms in popular culture and serves as a means by which individuals and groups ritualize, organize and make sense of those forms of their day-to-day experience.[141]

Record collectors, essential to this study, obtained old recordings that had always been artifacts of popular culture. Any recording by default is part of mass media and therefore subject to a popular music definition. Repetitive listens and dissemination may solidify how "popular" a recording becomes, but any recording has the potential, even if only for a single individual. Whether or not the producers were lucky enough to capture these "moments in time" makes no difference. They were commercial ventures. When they were "rediscovered" by people in the late 40s and 50s, they were obsolete commercial ventures. The performers had fallen by the wayside, like so many other musical casualties that get pushed aside as new and more exciting styles overtake public interest. When they were picked back up again, they received new interest because they were taken out of context, and reinterpreted as somehow more authentic by those who became moved by them. To these people, the music became their vernacular, the very foundation in which they based their opinions. It is not so much the music itself, as it is the position in which the music was placed. It is practically irrelevant that this music has been tied to the challenge of defining folk music. To place it in that context illustrates the complex nature of making value judgments based on subjective definitions. To accept this music, or any other as the true folk music of the United States would be to eschew all that would come after.

But what of John Fahey? He is after all the subject of this thesis, more specifically, Fahey as a representation of cultivated music in the United States during the twentieth century. Fahey grew up suburban middle class, and was tied directly to the first wave of 78 collecting that would not only affect his music, but also lead him to take up many of the same considerations about folk music presented here. While his

[141]Laba,17.

individual experiences are unique, the general community he experienced was typical of the post-war years, and in many ways continues to this day. Frith points out that in suburban culture:

> Music is a source of both an emotionally intensified sense of self (as artists are heard to articulate their listeners' own private fears and feelings) and collective excitement, an illicit, immediate sense of solidarity and danger, an unbourgeois innocence of caution, an uncalculated directness and honesty.[142]

Frith assumes that popular music serves as a factor in constructing the identities of listeners.[143] When combined with Narvaez and Laba's idea that "the variables of artistic communication within the folklore-popular continuum can only be interpreted on the basis of case studies," investigating Fahey's vernacular-cultivated connection becomes a logical pathway towards understanding American music.[144]

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[142] Frith," The Magic that Can Set You Free,", 167.

[143] Frith, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music," in Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan Mclary (Cmabridge: Cambridge University, 1987), 144.

[144] Narvaez and Laba, 5.