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INTRODUCTION

In 1965, the musician Pete Seeger published an article in which he explained his interest in folk music. Seeger was sixteen when he first attended the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1935. As the child of two musicians, Seeger was no stranger to different genres of music; yet the festival, he wrote, introduced him to something entirely new. It was then that Seeger fell in love with what would become his musical trademark: the five-string banjo. The banjo, however, was not all that drew Seeger's attention; he became enamored with all facets of the music that he heard that day—the rhythms, melodies, and, most of all, the song lyrics. Seeger explained, "Compared to the trivialities of the most popular songs, the words of these songs had all the meat of human life in them. They sang of heroes, outlaws, murders, fools. . . . Above all, they seemed to be frank, straightforward, honest." Folk songs, Seeger learned, told a great deal about the people who performed them. His subsequent experiences with folk music over the next thirty years led him to conclude that these songs could help Americans "learn about ourselves, and . . . learn about each other." As the music of the people, folk music provided a way to understand "where we came from, the trials and tribulations of those who came before us, and the good times and the bad." Seeger argued that the music also enabled Americans to understand their fellow citizens—the ones with whom they most likely would never interact—by asking, "How many white people have rediscovered their own humanity through the singing of American Negro songs? How many town dwellers have learned a bit about a rougher outdoor life from songs created by men with calloused hands?"[1] In short, folk music introduced Americans of many walks of life to each other, thus rendering the "imagined" national community more tangible.

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Seeger published this piece shortly after folk music peaked in popular culture. During the early 1960s, in the years between the end of 1950s rock-and-roll rebellion and before the British Invasion, folk music had become a mainstream musical fad commonly referred to as the folk revival. The actual revival, however, was much more expansive than merely the "boom" of folk music in popular culture. It was, in fact, a movement that began in the early 1930s, which brought public folklorists, cultural preservationists, scholars, musicians, political activists, and musical entrepreneurs together in the effort to protect, preserve, and promote folk music. As with any movement, the revivalists encompassed various, and sometimes conflicting, views and aims. Despite these differences, they shared the core belief that, because it came from the American people and thus depicted American experiences, folk music constituted a critical component of the nation's cultural heritage. The revivalists knew that the music was not dead; what they sought to *revive* was Americans' knowledge and interest in their living, musical heritage—a heritage that revealed the essence of their national identity.

Since the movement's end in the late 1960s, scholars have amassed a considerable body of work addressing various aspects of the folk revival in historical accounts, sociological studies, biographies, and autobiographies. While the quantity of scholarship on the revival is too great to list exhaustively, no study to date fully explores the relationship between the revival and concepts of nationalism; yet influencing the ways in which Americans understood the values, the culture, and the people of their nation was the crux of the movement. Seeger's argument that folk music enabled listeners to "understand" themselves as Americans reveals his belief that there were distinct traits that the American people held in common, traits that united them as a national community.

In many ways, my understanding of the revival and my assessment of its impact on American society borrow from the work of the sociologists Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison. Social movements, in their view, are "central moments in the reconstruction of culture," meaning that members of these movements reevaluate societal values and norms, redefining them in the process. These movements also rely on cultural forms to forward political agendas; movement actors often appropriate cultural traditions to define both themselves and their political aims. Although they emphasize political reform, social movements often alter larger social and cultural norms in the process and thus have profound cultural consequences—sometimes beyond what the actors intended—that last even after these movements fade from the national spotlight. By seeking to understand the ways in which social movements alter culture, Eyerman and Jamison also elevate the role of culture within social movements. In doing so, they challenge scholars' tendencies to disconnect culture from politics or dismiss culture altogether in the effort to cast social movements in political terms, relegating culture to the role of a structural "frame" that supports the more properly political activity.[2]

Following Eyerman and Jamison's conceptual framework, I argue that the

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revivalists used the cultural form of folk music to articulate the values embedded in American identity. Music was the central medium through which the revivalists spread their message, and their work had a significant impact on American society. They not only shaped popular conceptions of folk music, but they also inspired other activists to bring this music into programs of political reform. Social movements, including the Civil Rights Movement, labor activism, and antiwar efforts, incorporated folk music either because the revivalists became directly involved or because the activists drew inspiration from the revivalists' earlier efforts. Even as the revivalists participated in other movements, they remained united in the stewardship of the revival and the effort to advance a pluralist version of democracy as essential to Americanism.

It is no coincidence that the revival emerged during the 1930s, when the magnitude of the Depression threw traditional American values into question. Like many cultural workers of the era, the revivalists sought to solve this collective identity crisis by reminding citizens of the qualities that defined their nation. Scholars, however, have neglected to look at the revival as a part of this effort and to determine how it contributed to national identity constructions during the 1930s and subsequent decades. *"I Hear America Singing"* brings the revivalists into debates about the nation's character by examining the type of Americanism (i.e., nationalism in a specifically American context) that they crafted and publicized through the cultural medium of folk music. Since the revival lasted decades beyond the Depression, studying this movement reveals how constructs of nationalism from the 1930s continued to operate in American society for much of the twentieth century. Moreover, because the revivalists brought folk music into debates about the nation's civic and cultural identity, the revival provides particular insight into American cultural politics during the mid-twentieth century.

Numerous participants drifted in and out of the revival over its forty-year span. Rather than studying the movement from the perspective of rank-and-file folk enthusiasts, as many works in history and sociology have done, *"I Hear America Singing"* focuses on the ways in which leading revivalists interpreted folk music and the programs that they initiated to disseminate this music among a public audience. Although the revival changed over time in response to larger cultural and political shifts, an effort to shape how Americans understood themselves and their nation lay at the revival's core. As with most groups engaged in national identity projects, rhetorical allusions to democracy permeated their programs. Democracy, in their view, had a very specific meaning. In general, the leading members were social and political progressives who believed that cultural diversity and the inclusion of all citizens in the political process was the essence of the kind of democracy that lay at the core of American identity. The revivalists grounded their Americanism in social theories that first appeared in politically progressive circles during the World War I era, drawing on cultural pluralism and cosmopolitanism, which emphasized urban ethnic identities, as well as on regionalism, which highlighted rural identities.

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The folk music revival emerged at the nexus of intellectual discourses and social movements that sought to define the nation by cultural traditions from the rural hinterlands *and* the cosmopolitan urban centers. Thus, the American identity that the revivalists generated presented an exceptionally diverse picture of the nation—a picture that they worked to sustain over decades marked by war, political turmoil, and cultural factionalism.

In using the folk music revival to understand projects of national identity conceptualization, my work situates itself within a body of scholarship that investigates the various articulations of American nationalism over the course of the twentieth century. In showing that the revivalists placed civic ideals and cultural pluralism at the core of Americanism, *"I Hear America Singing"* presents the argument that they, along with other political progressives, initiated a version of nationalism that ran contrary to many contemporary views of American identity. In doing so, this book contributes to the conversation that such historians as Rogers Smith and Gary Gerstle have initiated. Smith and Gerstle each contend that the history of American nationalism in the twentieth century has been a continuous contest between two notions of national identity: a democratic, civic nationalism, on the one hand, and a militaristic, racially exclusive nationalism, on the other. The construction of American national identity depended on the interplay between civic nationalism and racial nationalism, two visions that not only defined American values but also determined who counted as an American. The contest between these two concepts of nationalism largely fell along political lines. Smith argues that by the eve of World War I, centrist members of the Progressive era who advocated white supremacy, anti-immigration, and cultural homogeneity opposed leftist progressives who advocated pluralistic, inclusive conceptions of American identity. Smith also claims that leftist progressives were unable to articulate anything distinctive about American national identity because their pluralism led them to believe that no one group could speak for the whole nation.[3] The leftist progressive conception of American nationalism challenges this view because, in the hands of revivalists, it became a mechanism for insisting that regional and ethnic diversity and the democratic values associated with such diversity were precisely what made the United States unique. By collecting, recording, and performing the music of communities ranging from rural towns to urban ethnic enclaves, the revivalists used folk music to illustrate American cultural heterogeneity. The revivalists argued that these communities were united under the umbrella of the nation and, although culturally distinct, embodied essential civic ideals, such as a commitment to democratic political participation. Americans, the revivalists believed, ought to uphold the democratic ideal in the cultural realm as much as the political one—all citizens should be allowed to express cultural differences while maintaining a voice in the political process.

In addition to complicating the scholarship on American nationalism, the folk music revival illustrates how early twentieth-century theories of cultural pluralism laid the groundwork for the emergence of multiculturalism in the

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1970s. The revivalists recognized the inherent plurality of American society and worked to ensure that national identity reflected this social reality. By bringing the music of folk communities to a national listening audience, they hoped to achieve that end. Yet they did not just bring the *music* to a mainstream audience; they provided outlets for the musicians of folk communities to present their own traditions directly to the listening public. In this way, the revivalists sought to let the folk speak for themselves. By "giving voice" to these Americans, many of whom were politically and economically marginalized, the folk music revivalists provided a bridge from cultural pluralism to early concepts of multiculturalism, thus revealing that the history of multiculturalism is far longer than it has heretofore been depicted as being.

By showing the connections between cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, I do not imply that they were theoretically one and the same. The contexts from which these theories emerged differed significantly: cultural pluralism was a reaction against the anti-immigrant Americanism of the World War I era, whereas multiculturalism followed on the heels of the racial nationalism and anti-Americanism that characterized the identity politics of the late 1960s. Cultural pluralists sought to secure a place for cultural difference within mainstream American society, but many multiculturalists rejected affiliations with dominant culture and national politics. Furthermore, while both groups encouraged ethnic minorities to sustain their traditions, cultural pluralists emphasized the instrumental value of ethnic traditions—that is, their benefits both for ethnic groups and the nation at large—while multiculturalists emphasized the intrinsic value of ethnic and racial identities, independently of their national consequences. These differences, however, should not obscure the historical connections between these two movements, which hitherto have been largely under-studied.

Currently, there are few studies dedicated to the history of multiculturalism in America. This is not to say, however, that scholars have avoided the subject. Social and educational theorists documented the emergence of multicultural or "multiethnic" education programs from the late 1970s through the 1980s; by the 1990s, historians and sociologists had begun assessing the positive and negative consequences of multicultural theories in American life. In *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism,* the historian David Hollinger provides the most detailed investigation into the emergence of multiculturalism.[4] Hollinger describes the parallels among multiculturalism and earlier twentieth-century ideas of pluralism. However, his focus is not on explaining *how* early constructs of pluralist Americanism came to influence theories of multiculturalism. The folk music revival provides a way to trace how variations of cultural pluralism continued through the mid-century, changed over time, and helped inform programs of multiculturalism. By conducting a close examination of revival programs from the 1930s to the late 1960s, *"I Hear America Singing"* reveals the complex history of American multiculturalism, a history that extends back to the early decades of the twentieth century. Thus, my explanation of the "long

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history" of multiculturalism parallels the work of recent historians who have revealed the "long history" of the Civil Rights Movement.

The idea of "giving voice" to racial and ethnic minorities, which became a guiding principle for programs of multiculturalism, permeated the folk music revival and shaped the revivalists' version of Americanism from the beginning of the movement. Embedded in this idea were the moral imperatives to include the traditions of minority communities in the national culture and to ensure that the members of these communities had full access to local and national politics. The latter conviction led many revivalists into left-wing programs that worked to bring politically and economically marginalized Americans into the democratic process. Several scholars have noted the connection between the folk music revival and left-wing politics, especially during the early years of the movement. Others have documented the revivalists' work in programs of the New Left, such as the Civil Rights Movement and the anti–Vietnam War movement. However, no one has followed the revivalists' political activism from the 1930s *through* the rise and fall of the New Left in the 1960s. Many political activists of the Old Left continued to participate in the resurgence of activism that marked the early years of the New Left. While these two generations of leftists differed in many ways, they also shared remarkable similarities, primarily regarding a faith in the promise of American civic ideals as a means to secure social and political justice. Most important, they all worked to reform the political, social, and economic systems to ensure that all Americans would have access to these ideals.

Viewing the Old Left from the perspective of the revivalists, determining what led them to join programs connected to the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), reveals that many leftists were genuinely motivated by the ideals that permeated the CPUSA's rhetoric during the second half of the 1930s. This perspective therefore challenges the historical assessment that dismisses members of the Old Left as mere "Stalinists," because it exposes how many left-wing and communist political activists of the 1930s through the 1940s were driven by a faith in the type of democratic pluralism that the CPUSA promoted during the Popular Front era. Recent historical scholarship that examines the left at the grassroots level has revealed that the nature of the Old Left was both more complicated and more rooted in the American context than historians had previously thought. By freeing left-wing revivalists of the Old Left of their Stalinist stigma, a project that Richard Reuss began with his study *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927–1957,*[5] this book sheds light on the full impact that these activists had on political discourse in the United States during the twentieth century. In doing so, I align myself with the perspective that Michael Denning developed in *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century.* Denning significantly broadens the historical understanding of the left during this period by casting aside traditional investigations of the Old Left via institutional politics that identify a core of card-carrying members surrounded by a periphery of pink-tinged fellow travelers.

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Rather, he argues that the Popular Front consisted of myriad leftists who, while working with communists and liberals, generated an independent social movement.[6] Like other Popular Front leftists, the left-wing revivalists had varying degrees of sympathy toward or allegiance to the CPUSA over the course of three decades, but their *social* views did not change. When the CPUSA was a force calling for political reform and social justice, left-wing revivalists sought affiliations with the party; when the party showed its undemocratic colors, they severed ties. By noting the incorporation of folk music in left-wing programs and examining certain figures who were active in revival circles, Denning's work is foundational for my own. *"I Hear America Singing"* furthers the conversation that began with *The Cultural Front* by situating the larger folk revival in relationship to the Popular Front, examining how and why revivalists worked to deploy folk music in political activism during the Popular Front period and afterward.

In situating the revivalists in their political context, I employ the term "progressive," the meaning of which changed over time. The early revivalists of both liberal and left-wing persuasions drew inspiration from left-progressives of the Progressive era—figures who believed in cultural pluralism and shared sympathies with political radicals ranging from socialists to anarcho-syndicalists and communists. By the 1930s, the term "progressive," now removed from the context of the Progressive era, largely became associated with the left, such that the distinction of a "left progressive" fell by the wayside. During this period, I apply the term "progressive" when referring to left-leaning and communist revivalists who believed in the pluralist, politically inclusive, and internationalist Americanism that characterized the Popular Front. The progressive label still applied to those revivalists who sustained this Americanism through the Cold War and into the early 1960s. Although the early members of the New Left tended to eschew labels, their understanding of American ideals had remarkable similarities to aspects of Popular Front Americanism; thus, they generated a new variant in the history of American progressivism. However, the term "progressive" would no longer apply to the young leftists of the late 1960s that rejected the belief that American ideals could provide a path toward social justice. While the events of the late 1960s threw the left into turmoil, I explain how the effects proved especially devastating to concepts of progressive Americanism.

The revivalists were able to bring folk music into programs of political, social, and cultural activism because they believed that folk music was a grassroots tradition that expressed the concerns, interests, values, and experiences of the American populace. As such, this music was an intrinsically democratic art form, because the songs belonged to an ongoing oral tradition in which people across generations adapted them to suit their present interests and circumstances; folk songs had no official version. Based on this view, many revivalists defined folk music by the simple maxim: "Folk music is what the people sing."[7] Yet simmering below this seemingly simple statement was a cauldron of contentious issues that academic and public folklorists, amateur song collectors, musical enthusiasts and entrepreneurs, educators, and musicians debated throughout

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the late nineteenth century and twentieth century. The obvious question this definition raises is: who are "the people"? By arrogating to themselves the power to determine who qualified as legitimate folk, early revivalists began a process of determining which traditions belonged in the canon of folk music, a process that grew increasingly complex as the movement developed.

The evolution of the revivalists' understanding of folk music operated dialectically: when existing conceptualizations of folk music encountered new political and cultural trends, novel definitions emerged. As the sociologist Thomas Rochon explains, "culture" consists of a temporally situated and evolving "stock of ideas that define a set of commonsense beliefs about what is right, what is natural, what works." As such, the revivalists' varying definitions of folk music reflected the shifting cultural conditions in which each generation of revivalists operated. Rochon further explains that social movements articulate a particular "discourse," which is the "linguistic expression of a system of thought" that includes "a shared set of concepts, vocabulary, terms of reference, evaluations, associations, polarities, and standards of argument connected to some coherent perspective on the world."[8] The folk revival's primary discourse centered on music, and the revivalists each had their own reasons for appreciating folk music. To some, like Seeger, the music was more "honest"—the opposite of the oft-cited "June-moon-croon" rhyme scheme of Tin Pan Alley pop songs. To later revivalists, beginning with the generation that came of age during the 1950s, the music was a far cry from the teenage rock-and-roll and adult pop standards that infused their suburban surroundings. For these revivalists, folk music became a "vehicle to carry an ideological message," according to the sociologist William G. Roy, a message that entailed their rejection of popular, mass culture.[9] Some revivalists focused on the music of rural, native-born citizens, especially in underdeveloped regions in the Southeast; others emphasized the music that immigrant groups carried with them and sustained in urban ethnic enclaves. Some believed that folk music could be composed only in culturally and socially isolated communities, whereas others included music from almost any group. Even Seeger recognized that definitions of folk music varied over time and chose to refrain from delving into the debate by acknowledging that "definitions change." My approach is similar to Seeger's. Rather than establishing my own definition of folk music or engaging in questions of musical authenticity, I address the various definitions without claiming that some were more legitimate than others. The importance for this project lies not in establishing a concrete definition of folk music but, rather, in understanding *why* the revivalists defined folk music in particular ways and how those definitions related to the social, political, and cultural contexts from which they emerged.

Tuning Up

The beginning of the folk music revival dates back to the 1930s, when the initial revivalists began to infuse folk music into mainstream culture, with the dual

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purpose of reforming both the cultural landscape and popular concepts of Americanism. Although their understanding of folk music and its place in the pantheon of American cultural heritage was largely shaped by the context of the Depression, many revivalists rooted their ideas in the work of folklorists, scholars, and musical enthusiasts stretching back to the late nineteenth century. To understand the folk music revival and its place in twentieth-century America, therefore, we need to begin before the beginning.

Although the British collector Cecil Sharp was not the first to study folk music on American soil, folklorists largely credit him as one of the earliest scholars to identify Anglo folk music traditions in the United States. Sharp believed that British ballads dating back to the Elizabethan era survived in the hollows of the southern Appalachian Mountains. Like the novelists, collectors, and reformers who also turned their attention to the southern mountaineers, Sharp believed that the mountain communities' geographical isolation protected them from the corruptions of mass culture. His interest in the Anglo ballads, coupled with the fear that this cultural isolation would not last long, precipitated his song-collecting recording expeditions around the southern highlands. Seeking only Anglo ballads, Sharp was drawn to the mountain communities as places that time forgot, where Anglo-Saxon settlers preserved an unadulterated British ballad tradition. This view, of course, did not take into account that many of these communities were situated near large towns or middle-class tourist destinations. In his quest to find a connection to the British past, Sharp also conveniently ignored the mountain communities' racial and ethnic diversity.[10] Even as he amassed his collection by listening to local musicians, Sharp included only song lyrics and refrained from documenting the music of the songs. His ballad collections, such as *English Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachians,* which he jointly published with Olive Dame Campbell in 1917, focused exclusively on the song texts rather than the accompanying tunes. Despite these shortcomings, Sharp's methods of collecting songs inspired other song collectors, amateur and professional. Indeed, the image of a white mountaineer singing an Anglo ballad became the ideal of authentic folk music in America for many enthusiasts, especially in the South.

While ballad collectors championed the music of white mountain communities as the epitome of folk music in America, others worked to broaden the definition of the genre. Scholarly folklorists connected to the American Folklore Society (AFS), a professional organization that began in the late nineteenth century, operated concurrently with the Anglo ballad collectors but turned their attention to other ethnic groups, such as American Indians. Much like the Anglo ballad collectors, these folklorists rushed to record their music, crafts, and other cultural artifacts before these traditions disappeared, as the folklorists presumed they would. The anthropological folklorists followed in the footsteps of Franz Boas, who helped establish the AFS in 1888. On the basis of his studies of American Indians in the Pacific Northwest, his scholarship on black folklore, and his experiences living in the multiethnic metropolis of New York

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City, Boas rejected the racialized evolutionary theories that dominated anthropological thought and developed the theory of cultural relativism. Evolutionary theories held that cultures evolved over time and that folkways served as building blocks in that process; cultures that continued to practice folk traditions (i.e., those of the Nordic and Western regions of Europe) remained in a primitive stage of development and had not advanced to the level of modern societies. Boas's work challenged this view by stipulating that all cultures maintained validity and that anthropologists should appreciate the plurality of cultures on an equal plane rather than arrange them in a hierarchical order. By recognizing the cultural significance of non-Western groups, Boas and other folklore anthropologists succeeded in opening up the field of folklore to include non-Western people.[11]

Working alongside other folklorists in the AFS, Boas sought to make the study of folklore a social science worthy of scholarly pursuit. Despite these efforts, the society often lacked funds and public respectability. To counter these deficiencies, AFS leaders encouraged members to organize local chapters in the hopes of garnering more grassroots support. Not surprisingly, these chapters largely catered to the local members' needs instead of following the national organization's guidelines. For example, the members of local chapters in recently settled states were interested in using folk culture more to establish their local identities than to preserve indigenous cultures.[12] Often they used their chapters to stage musical performances such as festivals, concerts, and fiddle conventions that showcased the musical traditions that settlers had brought with them and adapted or new songs that spoke to and of local conditions. In so doing, these regional AFS chapters opened the canon of folk music to include new traditions that people generated based on their experiences migrating to and settling down in frontier regions. This understanding of folk music effectively challenged the ballad collectors' Anglo focus and the anthropologists' emphasis on American Indian cultures—both of which grounded folk traditions in historical epochs and removed them from contemporary, mainstream culture.

While the AFS remained a largely academic organization on the national level, local chapters did succeed in attracting amateur enthusiasts. Mediating between the two groups were the new public folklorists who joined the ranks of academic folklorists in studying, collecting, and defining folk music during the first two decades of the twentieth century while remaining connected to a popular audience. The public folklorists moved beyond the ballad collectors by seeking traditions generated on native soil rather than transplanted by Anglo settlers—shifting the focus from folk music *in* America to *American* folk music. They worked both to generate wider interest in folk music and to use this music to understand the people who continued these musical traditions. Soon, many of these folklorists began arguing that folk music did not just provide insight into small communities throughout the country, but, when taken as a whole, also provided a way to understand the American people as a national body. One of the earliest members of this new cohort was the song collector John Lomax.

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In 1947, Lomax opened the memoir of his song-collecting adventures with a sweeping assessment of his personal motivations: "All my life I have been interested in the songs of the people—the intimate poetic and musical expression of unlettered people, from which group I am directly sprung." By defining the American folk as the "unlettered" of society, Lomax implied that they were unaffected by such modernizing forces as public education and commercial culture. While this definition follows in the same vein as his scholarly predecessors, Lomax set himself apart from figures like Sharp and Boas by declaring that he himself was from that ilk, describing his family as hailing from "the upper crust of 'po' white trash," a hard claim to make considering his Ivy League education.[13] One badge that Lomax could use to separate himself from his academic predecessors was that he was a southerner, born and raised. He was born in Mississippi in 1867, and his family moved to Texas while he was a child. He turned his love for the music of his adopted state, particularly the songs of cowboys, into a scholarly pursuit when he began a master's degree at Harvard University in 1907.

Lomax's first major work was *Cowboy Songs* (1911).[14] Although the collection consisted entirely of the songs of men working in a single occupation, it marked a turning point in the study of American folk music. In *Cowboy Songs,* Lomax parted from the Sharp precedent by providing musical notations and anecdotes to illustrate the songs' subject matter of life on the range, which situated them in a specifically American cultural and geographical context. In another important respect, however, he continued in the Sharp legacy: he asserted that truly authentic folk music existed only in communities isolated from mainstream society. Cowboys, to Lomax, fit this criterion. Driving cattle herds up and down the rural western states, cowboys were transitory figures disconnected from dominant society, living in their own communities and creating songs that spoke directly to their circumstances. Lomax regarded cowboys as not only isolated but also embodying a close-to-nature primitivism, which stemmed from the context of their work. As the historian Daniel Walkowitz explains, this "folk-as-antimodern" view regards the folk as untainted by mass culture and closer to nature. One problem with this view is that it fails to account for the "folk's" cultural dynamism, instead interpreting their traditions as frozen in time and disregarding how members of different communities borrowed from one another in crafting their own traditions.[15] Indeed, cowboys did not exist solely on the open plains; rather, they frequented towns and cities whenever they could. Yet Lomax's myopic view of the cowboys' circumstances was not necessarily intended merely to ascribe an authentic primitivism to them. It was also intended to portray them as products of uniquely national conditions; their authenticity lay in their situatedness in a distinctly American way of life. While the overwhelming majority of their countrymen did not share the cowboys' experiences, Lomax categorized their music as American because, in his view, they created it in response to uniquely American climatic, geographical, and labor conditions.

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Besides cowboy music, the other distinctly American folk music in Lomax's estimation came from black communities in the rural South. A popular interest in black folk music had percolated in American society since the mid-nineteenth century. One of the earliest collections of black music was a series of spirituals that missionaries to the Sea Islands off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina published after the Civil War. Lomax had developed an interest in black folk songs as early as 1904, although he set it aside to concentrate on *Cowboy Songs*.[16] After publishing *Cowboy Songs,* Lomax returned to black folk music, asserting that it was the "most natural and distinctive" of all American music. He often lamented scholars' tendency to ignore black folk music, which, without scholarly attention, was in danger of being lost—corrupted by romantic whites who often adulterated the material in their local color literature, or ignored by educated blacks who, Lomax believed, often shunned the music of their ancestors and that of rural black communities. Lomax's interest in black folk music sharply contrasted with that of most folk song enthusiasts of the era, who were interested in only white traditions. It is even more remarkable that in the early years of the twentieth century, Lomax treated black music as part of the national musical heritage rather than solely that of an allegedly inferior subculture.

In spite of his populist approach and his interest in protecting black folk music traditions, Lomax did not transcend the racism of his time and place. In his writings, Lomax went beyond merely romanticizing southern black music to exoticizing it as the product of a strange, primitive people. He often reinforced racial stereotypes by describing African Americans as "childlike" or resorting to physical descriptions that he rarely applied to the white singers he encountered.[17] In his memoir, Lomax even mentioned with perplexity that northern audiences sometimes viewed his presentation of black folk songs with hostility, finding in it racist elements that Lomax either overlooked or dismissed. His ambiguity on race is displayed throughout *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter.* While he peppered his autobiography with racial stereotypes, he also demonstrated a profound respect for black folk traditions, as he revealed in one passage: "All my life I have laughed with my negro friends—never at them. In particular, I do resent 'takeoffs' of Negro religious ceremonies and spiritual singing such as I have often heard in northern cities."[18] Although he ultimately retained a strong social conservatism that often translated into overt racism, Lomax did view southern black culture as a legitimate form of folk culture. Furthermore, he argued that black secular musical traditions made significant contributions to the development of an American folk music canon and that recordings of black folk music should be preserved and maintained in the Library of Congress, to which he bequeathed all of his recordings.

Lomax was not alone in his effort to broaden the definition of American folk music to include the traditions of other native-born Americans, particularly African Americans, during the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1909, the sociologist Howard Washington Odum completed a doctoral disserta-

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tion at Clark University in Mississippi based on African American secular and religious folk songs that he had collected. Odum first attempted to delineate the psychological and social aspects of black music in his article "Folk-Song and Folk-Poetry: As Found in the Secular Songs of the Southern Negroes" (1911). While Lomax focused on collecting and preserving black traditions for posterity, Odum used them to understand a marginalized racial group. According to the historian Lynn Moss Sanders, Odum believed that folk songs provided insight into African American culture and society because they revealed what blacks "are" instead of "what [they] *appear to be*."[19] Like Lomax, Odum recognized that as a white scholar he knew little about African Americans and turned to their musical traditions as a way to cross social and cultural divides. Odum was a sociologist, and his work in African American folk music, much of which was done in collaboration with his student and eventual colleague Guy B. Johnson, interpreted folk music through a sociological lens. Odum and Johnson's study, *Negro Workaday Songs* (1926), achieved acclaim because it both contained original scholarship on black secular music and provided an analysis of how the songs functioned in society. Through this work, Odum came to believe that black folk music should be preserved and studied not only for its own sake but also because it could be employed in the effort to improve American race relations.[20]

Despite their often erroneous adherence to the "folk-as-primitive" view, Lomax and Odum, by opening up the canon of American folk music to distinctly national groups such as southwestern cowboys and former slaves and their descendants, broadened the understanding of folk music to include songs generated on American soil that related to American conditions. Lomax hoped that his collection of cowboy songs would encourage others to take up the task and collect other variations of national folk music, including "Negro folk songs" and lumberjack, mountaineer, and sea songs.[21] Odum took a more academic path and used folk music to understand American social conditions.

While insisting that American folk music was an indigenous creation, both men restricted their song collecting to specific communities of native-born Americans who were (allegedly) isolated from mass culture. Other folklorists of this era, however, encouraged the collection and preservation of both native and naturalized Americans. As early as 1914, for example, the folklorist Phillips Barry called for members of the AFS to collect the songs "of our fellow-citizens whose power of English is an acquired trait," in addition to collecting from native-born and American Indian groups. Barry listed German, French, Spanish, Gaelic, and Yiddish as "folk" languages, and the "new settlers of our crowded cities," including other white and non-white ethnic groups, such as Italians, Greeks, Slavs, Armenians, Magyars, and Syrians, as some of the neglected folk groups.[22] Few folklorists of the World War I era cared about the folklore of the foreign masses that filled the country's urban and industrial centers. Barry was thus an anomaly in early twentieth-century folklore circles, but his views were very much in line with a new group of public intellectuals

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who looked to protect and preserve immigrant cultures, both for the sake of the ethnic communities and for the nation as a whole.

Theoretical Influences

Horace Kallen, a philosopher and co-founder of the New School for Social Research in New York City, was one of many social theorists who grappled with issues of cultural diversity during the era of mass immigration and migration of the early twentieth century. Kallen opposed programs that forced ethnic minorities to assimilate into dominant culture and advocated what came to be known as the theory of cultural pluralism. Kallen proposed that the United Stated adopt a "federation" approach similar to Switzerland's, in which all ethnic groups could participate on equal footing in political and economic life. Citizens would be united through the official language of English and would have access to dominant political and economic institutions. At the same time, however, they would be permitted to engage in their own cultural practices. Kallen scorned the popular melting-pot theory as a policy of forced homogeneity that stripped away citizens' ethnic heritage. The consequences of this could be devastating, for ethnic identities, according to Kallen, were the roots of individual identities; one could change almost every aspect of one's personal identity, but no one could alter his or her ethnicity. All Americans were hyphenated, even Anglo-Americans, and the time had come for the country to recognize that the national ideals of "individual freedom and liberty" included the right to cultural difference. Kallen's federation idea presented one of the earliest unity-within-diversity views of American society: it characterized the United States as a multicultural society that should protect the rights, both cultural and political, of the various ethnic groups living within its borders.[23]

Many urban progressives shared Kallen's views, particularly activists in the settlement house movement. As part of their effort to assist immigrants living in urban ethnic enclaves, settlement houses often offered classes in ethnic literature, art, and music. The houses even opened their doors to ethnic societies to stage community events that would bring immigrants of different backgrounds together. Jane Addams, a leader of the settlement movement, believed that aspects of the folk traditions of new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe needed to be preserved. Settlement workers collaborated with others interested particularly in folk dance to stage pageants that included the traditions of ethnic groups living in the area in the hope that the incorporation of these practices into mainstream culture could enrich American life and help the immigrants assimilate into their new environment.[24] Through these pageants, the settlement house workers aimed to aid in the immigrants' Americanization process while also enabling them to retain aspects of their cultural heritage. Several folklorists and folk enthusiasts operated in the same vein as the settlement house workers. Some members of regional chapters of the AFS even advocated a culturally pluralist position years before Kallen debuted his theory. As

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early as the 1890s, for example, the Philadelphia branch emphasized the diverse character of the city by instructing its members to collect the traditions of various groups residing there, including "Anglo-American," "Africo-American," and "Local Foreign" (Italian, German, Chinese, and "Gypsy" communities). The organization's guidebook instructed members to collect the living traditions in these communities that provided the groups with their distinctive identities—identities that also shaped the city's overall cultural character.[25]

Shortly after Kallen began challenging efforts to eradicate ethnic identity, Randolph Bourne, a leftist progressive, debuted his own proposal for how America should deal with its diverse populace. Bourne's views were foundationally similar to Kallen's, although his ultimate vision of American identity diverged from Kallen's federation. In the essay "Transnational America," Bourne claims that assimilation programs not only were detrimental to immigrants but also undermined their own intended goal of cultural homogenization. By forcing naturalized citizens to renounce all ethnic ties, 100 percent Americanizers had actually caused immigrants to cling steadfastly to their Old World identities. As did Kallen, Bourne supported cultural diversity, but whereas Kallen argued that ethnic identities were primarily important to the people of different ethnic groups, Bourne argued that these identities were important for individual citizens and for the nation as a whole.

Claiming that Anglo conservatism had been the nation's "chief obstacle to social advance," Bourne maintained that America needed the flow of new immigrants "to save us from our own stagnation." The end result would be a cosmopolitan nation that incorporated the best aspects of different global cultures. Bourne's vision of the ultimate American identity was "a transnationality, a weaving back and forth, with other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors," predicated on a constant interchange with ethnic cultures present in the United States.[26] By arguing thus, Bourne moved beyond the limits of cultural pluralism by ignoring group boundaries and promoting voluntary over involuntary affiliations, meaning that individuals could adopt from a variety of cultural sources, in addition to relying on the traditions of one's ethnic heritage, in constructing a personal identity. In Bourne's system, individuals could indeed change their identities regardless of their lineage. This idea strongly resonated with folk revivalists who later argued that all ethnic, regional, and racial folk music traditions found throughout the nation contributed to an overarching national identity; thus, all citizens, not just those who emerged directly from these groups, could borrow from and partake in these American traditions.

The progressive intellectuals and folklorists generated a vision of Americanism grounded in cultural diversity. Yet there were points of division among the approaches. Kallen and Bourne focused largely on urban groups of naturalized citizens, whereas folklorists such as Lomax and Odum emphasized rural communities of native-born citizens in their work. To overcome the division between rural and urban cultures, a movement that attempted to bring them together within an overarching American national identity emerged in the

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1920s. The regionalist movement, as it became known, connected writers, artists, folklorists, sociologists, urban planners, and scholars who eschewed mass culture in favor of folk cultures. While the movement appreciated both urban and rural cultures, many regionalists specifically looked to rural groups in their effort to locate a distinctly national culture. However, rather than simply advocating rural culture in toto, the regionalists, as their name implies, acknowledged the cultural differences of American regions and tried to determine how the traditions of the Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, Midwest, and West could be woven into a single national fabric. Because they viewed regions as constituent parts of the national whole, the regionalists held a culturally pluralist view of American identity that promoted "heterogeneity over homogeneity" and that provided a means for contesting the homogenizing effects of mass culture by bringing local folkways into mainstream culture. As the regionalist folklorist Benjamin Botkin noted, regionalism emerged as "an effect of the cultural diversity and change due to the geographical distribution and historical diffusion of culture."[27] The regionalists' task was to ensure that American identity reflected the diverse nature of its citizenry.

Regionalists ardently believed that American culture needed to be rooted in the nation's primary folk communities: rural communities, Indian tribes, immigrant folk groups, and African Americans in the South.[28] Near the end of the decade, Botkin described the movement as "developing a new feeling for locality—not the idle small-town spirit of curiosity, gossip, and boosting but the genuine need of taking root, of finding solidarity and unity in identifying oneself with the community, a need growing out of a world unrest and conflict during and since the War."[29] Botkin concluded with a reference to World War I because the social transformations wrought by the wartime domestic policies profoundly affected the early regionalists. The increased xenophobia, heightened vigilance, and open suppression of cultural and political dissent that characterized these years worried regionalists, many of whom were politically progressive. The labeling of political dissenters or ethnic Americans as "un-American" continued with the anti-pluralist 100 percent Americanizers during the postwar years. The regionalists strongly advocated cultural heterogeneity and abhorred programs that limited diversity, such as the Quota Act of 1924, which severely curtailed the number of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and eliminated new immigrants from East Asian and South Asian nations altogether, and groups that stifled political and social dissent, such as the American Legion and the Ku Klux Klan. Regionalists worked to counteract this restrictive, xenophobic nationalism through their literary and artistic works and public programs. According to the editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature,* regionalism, "already booming underway in this country," was ushering in a new concept of nationalism that directly challenged the reactionary nationalism that allegedly patriotic groups such as the Klan espoused. Calling for "a dynamic and realistic defining of the concept of Americanism to take it out of any possible shallow connotation of reaction or conservative implication," the

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Review's editor firmly situated regionalism in a socially progressive vein. Lest there was any doubt as to his social views, he continued: "Classifying people and policies as 'American' or 'un-American' is a poor substitute for reality in a day when the nation needs to go on as a nation, set in the American scene."[30] As with cultural pluralists, regionalists recognized the importance of group identities embedded in local cultures throughout the nation. They sought to preserve the customs and traditions that these communities had generated and sustained over the course of American development while ensuring that citizens in all groups had access to the political process. Ultimately, they advocated a unity-within-diversity interpretation of American identity that included native-born and ethnic citizens in the national composite.

Although the regionalist movement consisted of members from all areas of the humanities and social sciences, literary figures interested in folklore were particularly prevalent. Legends, tall tales, jokes, and other aspects of storytelling appeared in regionalist novels, plays, and story collections. Several regionalists also turned their attention specifically to folk music. Perhaps the most notable figure in this area was Carl Sandburg. A writer and poet, Sandburg often roamed the country, a practice he developed as a young man looking for work. Over the course of his travels, Sandburg collected songs from friends, colleagues, and other people he met on lecture tours, publishing them in a large volume entitled *American Songbag* (1927).[31] Sandburg's primary objective in releasing his collection was to get Americans singing—and singing these particular songs; hence, his inclusion of piano arrangements to accompany the song lyrics. Sandburg often sang these songs himself, generally breaking out into one or more before he ended a public lecture. He arranged his collection thematically, dividing the songs under such headings as "Lumberjack," "Sea Chanties," "Mountain," "Cowboy," and other established categories of folk music. However, he also extended the definitional boundaries by including sections such as "Hobo Songs" and "Prison and Jail Songs" five years before John Lomax began collecting songs from prisoners in southern penitentiaries. He even included a section on urban songs called "Big Brutal City." In so doing, Sandburg ignored the stipulation among academic folklorists that folk songs arose only in isolated communities and that those communities were predominantly rural.

By including urban material in his definition of folk songs, Sandburg followed Barry's inclusion of city dwellers in his definition of folk communities. Sandburg also included in his collection songs from known musicians, breaking from another folk music convention that folk songs were a community affair and not the creations of individuals. He attributed an overwhelming majority of his songs to individual authors, many of whom had composed the songs recently and related them to relatively current events. In these respects, Sandburg represented a trend that the historian Karl Miller argues developed in the 1920s: that of folklorists including commercial music in their collections of American folk music. This can be attributed to two trends: the fact that the view that rural folks were still creating folk songs, a view that both Lomax and Odum advo-

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cated, had gained popularity in folklore circles and the rise of commercial race and hillbilly recordings, which consisted of relatively unknown regional musicians performing material not composed by professional songwriters. The latter trend led some to investigate how commercial music entered regional folk communities, which in turn led them to reevaluate the stipulation that folk groups—especially those in the rural South—were isolated from mass culture.[32] Sandburg combined these trends by asserting that folk songs were both "as ancient as the medieval European ballads brought to the Appalachian Mountains" and "as modern as skyscrapers, the Volstead Act and the latest oil-well-gusher," and that all of them contributed in some way to the making of an identifiable national identity.[33]

The melodies and verses presented in *American Songbag* were from "diverse regions, from varied human characters and communities . . . sung differently in different places," as Sandburg wrote in the introduction to the collection; they were all "ditties brought together from all regions of America. . . . It is an all-American affair, marshaling the genius of thousands of original singing Americans."[34] One of the defining features of America for Sandburg was diversity itself. He did not merely state that this collection was indicative of the pluralist nature of American society; he demonstrated this in the songs he included: Mexican songs such as "La Cucaracha," cowboy ballads such as "Streets of Laredo," mountain fiddle tunes such as "Turkey in the Straw," southern blues such as "Levee Moan," and songs from the Caribbean such as "John B. Sails." Sandburg's recognition of pluralism as a critical feature of American identity would continue among every succeeding generation of folk revivalists.

As with the folk music collectors like John Lomax, social scientists like Howard Odum, and public folklorists like Benjamin Botkin, Sandburg believed that folk music provided particular insight into different groups of Americans and that deciphering what musical variations revealed about these communities would provide a deeper understanding of American society as a whole. His diverse collection of "American" folk songs also reflected the theories of cultural pluralism and cosmopolitanism because it incorporated ethnic songs from communities of recent immigrants. Sandburg, however, went beyond celebrating cultural diversity and became an advocate for the people whose music he collected. For him, folk music was a way to champion economically, socially, and politically marginalized citizens. Through this music, Americans expressed their disillusionment with their circumstances and their hope for a better life. The fact that he included songs from labor strikes and other protests indicates that Sandburg also believed that folk music could be used as a tool in people's struggles. This interest largely stemmed from the radical political views that he developed at an early age. Indeed, Sandburg's belief that the music of the people could be used to help aid movements for social justice became a guiding principle for the initial folk music revivalists, and for the generations that followed.

In his collections of folk songs, Sandburg added a class dynamic to popular understandings of American folk music. This was the final element of the foun-

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dation on which the early folk music revivalists constructed their own view of Americanism. Sandburg's working-class Americans joined with the ethnically, racially, and regionally diverse citizens that other scholars, public intellectuals, and folklorists celebrated in their definitions of the American folk, definitions that the folk revivalists used in constructing their understanding of American folk music and an overarching American identity.

The Medley

In conducting an intellectual history of the folk revival, *"I Hear America Singing"* follows the movement chronologically. Chapter 1, "Hearing the People," explains how and why the revival began during the era of the Great Depression by exploring the reciprocal relationships that the revivalists had with cultural and political leaders/workers. This investigation into how the revivalists contributed to the shaping of dominant cultural norms during the World War II era continues in Chapter 2, "The People's War." The political culture of the wartime years, much like that of the New Deal era, was conducive to the revivalists' music and their larger message, and they ensured that folk music became a vehicle for pro-democracy and pro-diversity propaganda. Many of the leading members of the revival were leftists—either communists or fellow travelers. The history of the Old Left of the Popular Front generation is therefore crucial to the story of the folk music revival; thus, Chapter 3, "Illusion and Disillusionment," examines leftist revivalists during their political heyday, between the Popular Front and the beginning of the Cold War. Chapter 4, "Keeping the Torch Lit," follows the revivalists into the Cold War era and explores how they struggled to survive the anticommunist crusades of the McCarthy period. This chapter also addresses the new, postwar generation of revivalists and determines how they reacted to the cultural and social contexts of the 1950s. In doing so, it adds to the developing historiography that challenges the view that American culture and society was ruled by consensus politics and cultural conformity during the 1950s. Specifically, the revival projects reveal that many Americans continued to believe in the promise of progressive Americanism and voiced their outrage at the disjuncture between democratic rhetoric and constitutional rights, on the one hand, and the political reality of anticommunism, on the other. Through specific musical programs, members of the revival expressed their cultural and political dissent and reaffirmed their faith in cultural and political democracy, all of which served as a precursor to the rise of New Left activism.

Chapter 5, "The Boom," charts the major turning point in the movement—the advent of the folk music fad—tracing the explosion of popular interest in folk music during the early 1960s and the implications this had on the core revival. While teenyboppers fueled the folk music craze in pop culture, a new generation of political activists incorporated folk music in efforts of social and political reform, as had the Popular Front generation. During the 1940s, leftist revivalists viewed folk music as a valuable cultural tool for struggles for eco-

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