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Creative Process, Performance Practice, and Social Activism in Pete Seeger's Songs: Case Studies

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Table of Contents

List of Figures……iv

Acknowledgements……v

Abstract……..vi

Introduction……1

Chapter 1: Biography…….3

Chapter 2: Pete Seeger and the Living Folk Song Tradition…….21

Chapter 3: Pete Seeger and War……50

Chapter 4: Pete Seeger and the Environment……76

Conclusion……100

Bibliography…….104

Appendix A: Song lyrics……107

Appendix B: “Justice Douglas on Conservation”……..120

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 "Barbara Allen"……29

Figure 2.2 "Come All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies"……30

Figure 2.3 "Old Devil Time"…….32

Figure 3.1 "Adirondack Irish-American Lumberjack song"…….66

Figure 3.2 Seeger's original "Where Have All The Flowers Gone"……..66

Figure 3.3 Adapted version of "Where Have All The Flowers Gone"……..67

Figure 4.1 Introduction and A section of "From Way Up Here"..…….90

Figure 4.2 B section of "From Way Up Here"……..90

Figure 4.3 Interlude of "From Way Up Here"……..91

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Abstract

Creative Process, Performance Practice, and
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This thesis examines selected musical compositions of Pete Seeger through the lens of his musical education and his life experiences and how those influenced his creative output. Drawing on his vast knowledge of the folk music tradition, Seeger crafted songs that gave voice to his own personal sociopolitical philosophy, which often found expression in political activism. The body of the thesis comprises three case studies, each of which provides an analysis of three paradigmatic songs that explore Seeger's creative compositional processes and musical influences, his deeply held anti-war stance, and his efforts on behalf of the environment.

Introduction

Pete Seeger (1919-2014), who the poet Carl Sandburg called "America's tuning fork," was arguably one of the most influential American folk musicians of the twentieth century. His career lasted for over seven decades, spanning from 1939 until his death in 2014, during which he performed for audiences in over forty countries. Seeger filled many roles during his life. He was a prolific songwriter, folkloric archivist, music educator, ethnographer, sailor, television show host, director of non-profit organizations, but he is perhaps best remembered as an active participant—primarily as a performer—at various rallies, picket lines, and protests for many of the most important progressive causes of the century, including labor rights, civil rights, and economic and environmental justice. Seeger was not a fair weather activist: he often performed in the face of great personal physical peril, including violent physical attacks by the Ku Klux Klan. He was also willing to put his own economic livelihood on the line: he was blacklisted by the FBI and held over for trial after a contempt of Congress citation issued for his refusal to answer questions about his supposed "subversive acts" during a hearing of the House Un-American Activities Committee. His deep moral convictions led him to write some of his most well-known and best-loved songs.

Throughout his life, Seeger would often share what he referred to as his parable of the Teaspoon Brigade, which aptly summarizes the reasoning that propelled his unwavering commitment to social activism in the face of the resulting personal sacrifices and social consequences. Seeger wrote:

> Imagine a big seesaw. One end is on the ground, held down by a bushel basket half full of rocks. The other end of the seesaw is up in the air with a bushel basket on it one-quarter full of sand. Some of us have teaspoons and are trying to fill it. Most people are scoffing. "It's leaking out as fast as you put it in." But we say, "No." We're watching closely and it's a little more full than it was. One of these days, that whole seesaw will go 'zoop!' in the opposite direction. People will say, "Gee, how did it happen so suddenly?" Us and our damned little teaspoons over thousands of years.[1]

Understanding Seeger's socio-political stance and the reasoning behind his resolute commitment to these causes is crucial to fully comprehending his performance career and creative output. For Seeger, performing and sharing this music with others was an act of social activism that he, in his own words, just happened to "drift into," having originally intended to become a journalist. In American folk music, Seeger found the musical language that suitable for interacting within these political settings. Having been thoroughly immersed in that world throughout his childhood and early adulthood, largely through the ethnographic work of his father and stepmother, Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford, Pete Seeger was able to harness this musical language in an authentic way that many other prominent musicians of the American folk revival of the 20th century would never achieve.

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[1] Pete Seeger, introduction to *How Can I Keep From Singing,* by David King Dunaway (New York: Villard Books, 2008), ix-x.

Biography

Seeger was born in Manhattan in 1919 to musical parents, Charles Seeger, the renowned modernist composer and ethnomusicologist, and Constance de Clyver Seeger, a concert violinist who had studied at the Paris Conservatory and taught at Juilliard School of Music.[2] Seeger's parents divorced in 1925; Charles Seeger subsequently married Ruth Crawford, another prominent modernist composer and folklorist, who would go on to play a major role in Pete's life.[3]

Seeger was surrounded by music throughout his childhood. At the age of two, he and his two older brothers accompanied his parents on a road trip in a Model T with a trailer, complete with a small, portable piano. They drove down the Atlantic coast with the goal of bringing music to the working, rural people of the South. Charles Seeger would later recount that they discovered that the working people already had a lively music culture; their exposure to the music they heard throughout the rural parts of the country would set Charles Seeger, and eventually Pete Seeger, on a path dedicated to the preservation, cultivation**,** and performance of American folk music. Upon the Seegers' return to New York amidst financial and job struggles, no permanent living situation, as well as a strained marriage, Pete was sent to boarding school in rural Connecticut at the unusually early age of four, where he spent a majority of his free time alone in the woods. He later recalled his rather sheltered experience there:

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[2] The biography provided here is based on the following two sources: David King Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* (New York: Villard Books, 2008); and Pete Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* (Pennsylvania: Sing Out Corporation, 1997).

[3] When the last name "Seeger" is used hereafter, it refers to Pete Seeger; any other member of the Seeger family will be referred to by his or her full name.

> Talk about ivory towers, I grew up in a woodland tower…I know all about plants and could identify birds and snakes, but I didn't know that anti-Semitism existed or what a Jew was until I was fourteen years old. My contact with black people was literally nil…If someone asked me what I was going to be when I grew up, I'd say farmer or forest ranger. Maybe an artist.[4]

As a child, Seeger was the only one out of his siblings who refused to take piano or voice lessons; he was not unmusical, just undisciplined. He recalls, "Whistles, anything that made music I banged on. I didn't want to study, I was just having fun…the idea of reading notes was as boring to me as painting by numbers."[5] When he was eight years old, his parents gave him a ukulele, which he played constantly, often to the annoyance of everyone around him. Music seemed to be the one thing that brought Seeger out of his shell. Although he spent most of his childhood outside in the forest, reading books, and daydreaming, when he had his ukulele, he was content with being the center of attention. He and his roommate once led a group of their peers in singalong of various sea shanties in a school auditorium, with Seeger accompanying them all on his ukulele.

Seeger graduated from boarding school at the age of thirteen and moved to his father and Ruth Seeger's apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. He was quickly exposed to the Composers' Collective and the Pierre Degeyter Club, both left-wing organizations which sought to mix music and political activism, as well to the Communist Party. (These organizations, and the composers' musical projects dedicated to the cause, resulted in what was likely the world's first attempt at twelve-tone protest songs.) On one occasion, Charles took Seeger to a meeting to

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[4] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 34.

[5] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 33.

listen to Aaron Copland, along with other notable twentieth-century composers, discuss how to create modernist music that would spark a revolution. Seeger recalls leaving the meeting confused, but thrilled by the political passion: “I got the feeling that here were people out to change the world. The world might be corrupt, but they were confident they could change it.”[6] Over the following years of his adolescence, Seeger became considerably engaged with left-wing politics, attending May Day protests, having lengthy political discussions with the Communist members of the Composers’ Collective, and reading Bolshevik literature, including Lenin’s *Young Pioneers*.

In 1932, Pete began high school and returned to boarding school, but he would continue to stay with his father and stepmother over holidays. On one such occasion, he heard a performance of a rather famous traditional folk ballad called “John Henry,” performed by Thomas Hart Benton, Charles Seeger’s fellow professor at The New School, and became completely enchanted, specifically with the work's rhythmic qualities. Soon thereafter, he acquired his first banjo — a four-string — and began to study, focusing primarily on jazz tunes by Cole Porter and Irving Berlin. A year later, he would be performing on a tenor banjo with his first musical group, joined by Benton and the soon-to-be famous artist Jackson Pollock.

Seeger’s true immersion in the folk tradition would begin when his father left the Composers’ Collective and turned to folk music, moving to Washington D.C. in 1935 where managed music programs connected to the Work Projects Administration (WPA), an agency created under Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal. Additionally, Charles Seeger began his ethnomusicological research with renowned folklorist John Lomax, and Ruth Crawford Seeger

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[6] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 33.

worked transcribing their field recordings for the Library of Congress. After graduating from high school, Pete joined them Maryland, where he became close friends with John Lomax's son, Alan, immersed himself in an abundance of field recordings of folk music from across the United States, and joined his father on several trips to make field recordings and conduct research. It was on one such trip that Seeger met master Appalachian five-string banjo players such as Bascom Lamar Lunsford and Samantha Bumgarner and realized that neither his four-string banjo or ukulele would do. The five-string banjo then became *his* instrument.

Seeger spent the following months completely and utterly absorbed in the tradition of the banjo, learning everything he could about the instrument's history and its innovators, and transcribing every recording he could get his hands on. At this point, he did not aim to become a professional musician; his mind was set on being a journalist. With the help of a partial scholarship, a job at a boardinghouse, and financial support from his brothers, he attended Harvard, with every intent of following that path. Because Harvard did not have a journalism degree, he studied sociology instead. Finding it incredibly boring, he spent his time playing the banjo and absorbed in reading authors such as Goethe and Carl Sandburg. In his sophomore year, he became heavily involved in radical politics. Seeger viewed school as both pompous and irrelevant, as something that stood in the way of his interests; he dropped out in the spring of 1938, spent the summer biking across around New England, painting watercolors of the landscapes to trade in return for a night's lodging, and then moved in to his brothers' apartment on the Lower East Side of New York City.

Upon realizing that newspapers were not hiring college dropouts and that his paintings were not going to pay the bills, he turned to various odd jobs and the occasional music gig,

performing on street corners, in schools, and with a folk dance group. By this point, Alan Lomax had moved to New York. Lomax quickly connected Seeger to the burgeoning folk scene of Greenwich Village, where he befriended Aunt Molly Jackson and Leadbelly (born as Huddie William Ledbetter), important folk musicians of the era, with whom he would informally study music over the following years. Both would go on to play an enormously influential roles in Seeger's life and music. Witnessing his improvement on the banjo, Lomax convinced Seeger to join him at the Archive of American Folk Song for the Library of Congress, setting Pete on his path of becoming a professional folk musician.

While not working for the Library of Congress, Seeger practiced the banjo nearly all day — and all night — to the point that his roommate, Lomax, would occasionally throw him out of the house and force him to practice outside. In 1940, Lomax, who was at this point quite well-connected, booked Seeger for his first concert, a fundraiser in New York, where he shared the stage with Leadbelly, Aunt Molly Jackson, and Burl Ives. Seeger's performance was a bust due to his nerves, but he did not care because that was the night that he met Woody Guthrie. Lomax would later recall the momentousness of the occasion:

> Go back to that night when Pete first met Woody. You can date the renaissance of American folk song to that night. Pete knew it was his music and he begun to make it everyone's kind of music…it was a pure, genuine fervor, the kind that saves souls.[7]

Not long thereafter, the unlikely pair — remarkable opposites in nearly every way except for their love of folk music — left the East Coast, bound for Oklahoma by way of Tennessee, where they stopped to visit The Highlander Folk School, which would go on to play an important role

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[7] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 69.

in Seeger's career. Guthrie and Seeger continued to travel the across the country, taking the newly paved Route 66 through the regions impacted by the Dust Bowl, all the way to California, bumming meals, befriending vagabonds, trading songs for haircuts, and performing for anyone who was inclined to listen. On his next cross-country trip, Seeger traveled alone, riding the rails, and eventually learned how to make money by performing in saloons. At the end of 1940, after being away several months, Seeger returned to the East Coast, confident that he would be able to provide for himself as long as he had his banjo.

Once back in New York, Seeger began performing with Lee Hays, Pete Hawes and Millard Lampell, and formed his first significant musical group, The Almanac Singers. The core members of the group were Seeger, Hays, Hawes, and Lampbell, and Guthrie. Other musicians from the folk scene such as Bess Lomax, Sis Cunningham, Cisco Houston, and Burl Ives sometimes joined in. The Almanacs' music was based in the American folk tradition, featuring banjo, guitars, the occasional accordion accompanying multi-part vocal harmonies, but the message of their songs was wholly political, focusing on anti-war and pro-labor messages. By May 1941, they were performing for large audiences, most notably an enthusiastic audience of 20,000 striking members of the Transport Workers Union at Madison Square Garden, which resulted in them going on a national tour, performing for various CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) union events. Their political message was not, of course, supported by all. For example, in 1941, Harvard professor Carl Frederick wrote a scathing article in *Atlantic,* in which he described the group as "poison in our system," stating that while they "innocuously" sang of peace, their message was "strictly subversive and illegal."[8] The group departed for their national

[8] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 93.

tour in July 1941, performing for unions and local radicals in Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, Denver, and finally, San Francisco, where among the enthusiastic audience was an FBI informant, who concluded that the members of the audience sang along to these so-called subversive lyrics not from their own desires, but due to "mass psychology," and were unaware of the fact that the meeting was under the "utter control" of the Communists.[9] From that moment forward, Seeger and the rest of The Almanacs were marked by the FBI, which meant that Seeger's every moment was documented in their files. However, the FBI did not know the names of the other members of The Almanacs, nor did they have any other information on the group. The group continued their tour back towards the East Coast, reaching New York in the fall of 1941.

Seeger's musical involvement in both the folk scene and within radical political circles rapidly increased upon his return to New York. The Almanacs rented a house in Greenwich Village, which functioned as a meeting place and venue for like-minded musicians, in which, to cover the rent, they would hold regular hootenannies: an open-mic styled performance of folk music, which regularly featured not only members of The Almanacs, but also the likes of Leadbelly, Aunt Molly Jackson, and Earl Robinson. Between their hootenannies and low-paying gigs in the folk music circuit of the Village, Seeger scraped by. However, their circumstances drastically changed at the end of 1941, when the U.S. entered World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor. In the midst of the war and the Communist Party's subsequent request that unions adhere to a no-strike pledge, The Almanacs found themselves out of work, the labor messages of their music now obsolete. They then shifted to an anti-fascist message (essentially disguised as

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[9] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 95.

pro-war sentiments) and found moderate success with songs like "Reuben James" and "Dear Mr. President." By mid-1942, their hootenannies became popular again, they performed on several CBS radio shows, and they signed an exclusive contract with Decca records to record their "beat-Hitler" music.

Notwithstanding the group's change in focus, the FBI was still on the hunt for members of The Almanacs, as they had decided that their pre-war peace songs from previous years threatened war mobilization efforts. Since The Almanacs purposefully did not include their names on any of their recordings, out of an ideological belief that they did not *own* the music, it took the FBI almost a full year to identify all of the members by name. Just as The Almanacs were on the brink of achieving success, they were blacklisted, resulting in a cancellation of not only their future performances, but also of their contract with Decca. The Almanacs' prospects withered and Pete, having received his draft notice in June 1942, wrote in his journal that he was "almost glad" to get out of the group before it completely fell apart.[10] (Seeger's war-time experiences will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Three.)

While on furlough in 1943, Seeger married Toshi Aline Ohta (1922-2013). Toshi, a Japanese-American with a political and progressive upbringing not unlike Pete's, met Seeger in 1939 at a square dance in Greenwich Village. She would go on to play an invaluable role in both Seeger's personal and professional life. She was often labeled as the "brains" behind Pete Seeger; Pete took care of the music, she took care of everything else. For example, at tax time, when Seeger was upset over the amount of money he made, and therefore the amount of taxes he was paying in support of the unjust wars against which he was actively protesting, Toshi would

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[10] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 115-116.

complete his taxes, cover the information with a blank piece of paper, and have Pete sign his name at the bottom. She once referred to herself as Seeger's personal manager, publicity advisor, road manager, and accountant, joking that she should "make seven carbon copies" of herself in order to "afford the vast organization [necessary to] the Empire" revolving around her.[11] Seeger was well aware of the debt he owed to Toshi. She managed crucial aspects of virtually all of Seeger's projects after their marriage, including the Hudson Sloop Clearwater organization, his television series *Rainbow Quest,* and his People's Songs organization, among others. In addition to her role in Seeger's career, she was also a filmmaker and served on the boards of numerous civic, environmental, and artistic organizations, including the New York State Council of the Arts.[12] Toshi and Pete would have four children together: Peter Ota (who died at 6 months of age), followed by Daniel, Mika, and Tinya, who would all go on to have careers in the arts.

After his stint in the armed forces and his discharge from the armed forces in 1946, Seeger was extremely motivated to return to his political activism via music. Alan Lomax's sister, Bess, recalled that he returned from the war as a very different man:

> He had matured physically and became a stronger singer. Now he was physically vibrant…He was as hard as nails. He'd worked for all kinds of audiences and come back with People's Songs in his head and the same burning intensity.[13]

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[11] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 366.

[12] Douglas Martin, "Toshi Seeger, Wife of Folk-Singing Legend, Dies at 91," *New York Times*, July 12, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/12/arts/music/toshi-seeger-wife-of-folk-singing-legend-dies-at-91.html.

[13] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 132.

Seeger's first task, with the help of Alan Lomax, Lee Hays, and Toshi, was the creation of People's Songs, an organization designed to "create, promote, and distribute songs of labor and the American people," along with the *People's Songs Bulletin,* the organization's monthly publication. Seeger attempted to forge a relationship between People's Songs and the Communist Party, understanding the goals they had in common. However, the Party, consumed with their own internal struggles and unconvinced that folk music would hold any sway over the working class in New York, continually dismissed Seeger, once telling him that he should stop playing the banjo and switch to playing jazz on the clarinet.

Regardless of this lack of support, People's Songs initially flourished, with favorable publicity from the *New York Times, Time,* and *Fortune* magazine, and garnered over two thousand members within the first year. The year 1946 was a good one for labor activism, with the greatest amount of labor unrest since the 1930s: over five million workers held strikes over the course of the year. As soon as the People's Songs' office opened in Times Square, however, the FBI created a file on the group, believing their message of peace and brotherhood to be suspicious. By 1947, the Bureau cited People's Songs as a Communist front, and over the next two years, agents would compile over five hundred pages of documents—often gained without proper warrants or through infiltration of meetings—on the group and on Seeger. The FBI concluded that People's Songs was a threat to national security.

In 1948, Seeger, along with the other members and resources of People's Songs, strongly supported the presidential candidacy of Henry Wallace, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's former Secretary of Agriculture and Vice President, who led the new Progressive Party. Seeger, along with friend and fellow political musician Earl Robinson, toured with Wallace and performed at

various campaign events. While the campaign initially showed considerable momentum, it began to sink in August 1948, under assaults from the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the Ku Klux Klan (which continually disrupted their campaign efforts, sometimes violently), and the desertion of the members of the CIO. Seeger, however, remained committed to the cause. When he returned to New York after Wallace's defeat, he discovered that People's Songs was bankrupt and realized that he never again wanted an office job. The idea of People's Songs had been born too late; it may have worked in the days of The Almanacs, but after the war, unions traded strikes and picket lines for contract bargaining, and there was no longer a role for labor protest songs.

With two young children and no source of a reliable income, Seeger decided to leave New York City, especially after he discovered the price he would have to pay for his recent political activism. At one of his occasional performing gigs, at which Seeger had been asked to record a song for a children's program, the director, realizing that he was the "son-of-a-bitch who sang for the Wallace campaign," sent him home, telling him he was no longer needed. This led Pete and Toshi, in 1949, to purchase a small plot of empty land in Beacon, New York. There, they began to build their own house, following the instructions on "how to build a log cabin" that they found at the New York Public Library. The Seeger family would live in this home for the rest of their lives.

Living in rural upstate New York did not stop Seeger from performing or from engaging in political activism by any means. Soon after relocating, Seeger was booked to perform at a political rally in nearby Peekskill with a fellow leftist, the African-American musician, Paul Robeson. Local racist, anti-Communists vowed to hold a counterdemonstration, shouting threats

of violence. However, thanks to 2,500 union members, who surrounded the concert grounds by creating a human chain, the concert went on without a problem.

After the end of the concert, believing that they had avoided the predicted violence, Seeger, his family, and the other concert-goers left the rally in their cars. However, counter-demonstrators blockaded the roads, forcing traffic in a single direction, while hurling baseball sized rocks through their windshields. Days later, it was revealed that the violent attacks had been coordinated by the local police force and members of the Ku Klux Klan; a friend of Seeger's whose father was on the Peekskill police force revealed that the police and the KKK had the entire concert area surrounded, hiding in the woods with walkie talkies, ensuring the success of the attack.[14]

After the demise of People's Songs, Seeger was eager for a new musical purpose. He and Lee Hays soon founded a new musical group, The Weavers. Initially, they had no intent to become a commercial group, especially after the violence at Peekskill. Regardless, they developed a small following and released a record, including what would become one of Seeger's most beloved songs, "If I Had A Hammer." Toshi offered to become their temporary manager, and she soon negotiated a weekly performance contract with the Village Vanguard in Greenwich Village. It was here that The Weavers would meet Harold Leventhal, who immediately agreed to be their manager—Leventhal would go on to work with Seeger for the remainder of his life—and Gordon Jenkins, who would be the catalyst for the group's recording

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[14] Seeger's song, "Hold the Line" would be written about this event: "Let me tell you the story of a line that was held / and many brave men and women whose courage we know well / how we held the line at Peekskill on that long September day! / We will hold the line forever till the people have their way."

contract with Decca Records. Once they released their first single with Decca, including the immediate chart-topper "Goodnight Irene," The Weavers prospects snowballed. They received offers to perform in the country's top nightclub and were given a weekly national TV spot on NBC. The Weavers' popularity and commercial success made Seeger uncomfortable, leaving him wondering if he was actually making a difference. However, one thing can be said for certain: The Weavers popularized treasured American folk songs and ushered in the second wave of the folk revival.

As the Weavers' success continued, the FBI continued its watch, with informant Harvey Matusow regularly hiding among their audiences. As their first record hit the shelf in June 1950, the Korean War erupted. This marked an escalation of the Cold War and led to the the consequential red scare. Over the course of the previous year, FBI agents created an anonymous periodical entitled *Counterattack* dedicated to fighting communism; the agents' second publication, entitled *Red Channel,* was meant to list communists in the entertainment industry. Many musicians were pressured to testify in front of HUAC in order to clear their name. Seeger was the only member of the Weavers whose name was included in *Red Channel*; he received thirteen communist "citations," placing him among other "dangerous" radical entertainers and artists such as Aaron Copland and Lillian Hellman. The result was almost immediate; The Weavers' TV series was cancelled within the first week as were many of their performance contracts across the country; members of the group were constantly tailed by agents and exposés were published in national newspapers. Notwithstanding, the group's popularity continued for a time. Indeed, their recordings of "Goodnight Irene" and "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine" became enormous radio hits.

In February 1952, after the FBI informant Matusow testified under oath in front of HUAC that The Weavers were members of the Communist Party, the group was blacklisted. They became untouchables and lost all of their remaining performance contracts. With no prospects, the group soon disbanded.

Seeger was on his own again. Blocked from radio and TV, as well as from nightclubs and other similar venues, he turned to performances at colleges, schools, and summer camps; he also began to write a regular column entitled "Apple Seeds" in the magazine *Sing Out!*, which he would continue for the next several decades. In spite of his blacklisting, Seeger soon found a patron in Folkways Records, run by Moses Asch. Seeger visited Asch's studio every few weeks, recording an album over the course of two days. By 1955, Folkways Records had released 29 Seeger albums, including the popular *Darling Corey* and *Goofing Off Suite,* both of which showcase Pete's virtuosic banjo skills and his command of the Appalachian folk tradition; they include songs archived by the Lomaxes during the 1930s, along with his fusions of classical and folk tradition, which will be discussed further in Chapter 2. He spent his free time publishing articles in *The American Journal of Folklore* and *Notes: Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association.* Although he had no desire to follow an academic route like his father, he did want to reach as many people as he could in as many ways as possible.

In August 1955, Seeger received a subpoena from HUAC calling him to testify in two weeks. Seeger hired a lawyer, Paul Ross, who told him that the situation was not promising. Seeger refused to cooperate as a witness, meaning that his only course of action was to either invoke the Fifth Amendment, and refuse to testify against himself, or the First Amendment, which would likely result in years of court battles and no guarantee of avoiding prison time.

Seeger did not want to use either option, but he was adamant that he would not cooperate in any way. Seeger promised his lawyer that he would remain polite and well-behaved.

On the date of the trial, 15 August 1955, Seeger remained polite, but declined to invoke either amendment. Instead, he dismissed each of their questions as being improper, and attempted to share evidence of his deep love for his country, stating that he would not answer any questions as to his "association, philosophical, religious beliefs, or his political beliefs, or how [he] voted in any election or any of these private affairs," claiming that he believed these questions to be very improper for any American to be asked, especially under compulsion.[15] Seeger, however, remained willing to talk about his positive contributions to American society via his music, and, when questioned about one of his songs they believed to be subversive, Seeger offered to perform the song, stating, "My songs seem to cut across and find perhaps a unifying thing, basic humanity, and that is why I would love to be able to tell you about these songs, because I feel like you would agree with me more, sir."[16]

After an hour of questioning, Seeger returned home to New York, waiting for the seemingly inevitable citation of contempt of Congress, which carried a punishment of up to ten years in jail. Uncertain of his future and locked out most performance opportunities, Seeger put all of his energy into making records at Folkways with Moe Asch, releasing six records a year between 1954 and 1958, with the primary goal of preserving traditional songs for posterity. Seeger performed where he could, which was mainly at liberal colleges such as Oberlin and Reed, and kept writing songs. It was during this time that Seeger would write one of his most

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[15] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 212-217.

[16] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 215.

popular and beloved songs, “Where Have All The Flowers Gone” (discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2). Over time, things began to look up in spite of Seeger’s legal troubles. The Weavers had reunited, and the folk revival of the 1960s was beginning to blossom. His college performances at Oberlin and Reed were wildly successful — each performance attracted larger audiences — and Seeger began touring internationally.

In 1957, Congress voted 373 to 9 to cite Seeger with ten counts of contempt. This resulted in substantial restrictions; in some states, he was legally forbidden to tune pianos; in others, he could not collect unemployment. On the date of the trial, 27 March 1961, approximately 500 spectators filled the courtroom in support of Seeger. The government’s lawyer chose to focus solely on Seeger’s contempt of Congress and his FBI files, completely disregarding Seeger’s involvement with the Communist Party, the reason why HUAC had subpoenaed him. This did not prevent the jury from returning a guilty verdict; sentencing would occur six days later. At the sentencing trail, Seeger walked into the courtroom, wearing a suit and with his banjo slung over one shoulder, intending to perform to one of the songs that had been labeled as as subversive, “Wasn’t That A Time,” to the courtroom in one last attempt to clear his name. Seeger asked for permission to do so, but the judge refused, sentencing him a year for each count of contempt, totaling ten years. The bailiff, on the orders of the judge, took Seeger away immediately to be locked in a cell the basement of the courthouse. Hundreds of protesters assembled outside of the courtroom, chanting in protest, as his lawyer and Toshi ran to request an appeal of the sentencing and bail. The bail request was granted, and after nearly a year of waiting, the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that Seeger’s indictment was faulty — on a bureaucratic technicality — and dismissed the case against him.

The 1960s were a prosperous time for Seeger. With his legal troubles behind him and the second wave of the folk revival at its height, Seeger's performances reached full capacity. Folkways had sold nearly a million of Seeger's records and Seeger was hailed by many as one of the earliest advocates for American traditional music, gaining him a considerable amount of attention in the burgeoning folk music scene. He helped found the Newport Folk Festival and finally achieved his dream of hosting an educational TV series about folk music, *Rainbow Quest,* which, due to his blacklisting, was broadcast only on New York public television, on a largely Spanish-language channel. The 1960s also brought to the fore new social problems and provoked a great deal of unrest, providing Seeger several avenues engaging in political activism through song. He became deeply involved in the protests against the Vietnam War, in the movement for Civil Rights, and the nascent environmental movement, all of which had significant impact on his performance and songwriting, as will become clear in the following chapters.

Pete Seeger has been the focus of a significant amount of historical research and biographical work. Many have acknowledged his contributions to the American folk revival scene; a number of scholars have discussed or analyzed individual songs; Seeger himself has written about his own songs and the musical and social or political inspiration behind them. But no one has examined Seeger's songs in a systematic way to understand how they reflect the moral and philosophical stance of someone who defined violence broadly: for Seeger, war, destruction of the environment, and lack of respect for the traditions of others were all a kind of violence that he rejected. Neither has anyone looked closely at how Seeger saw himself as part of

a living tradition and how this is reflected in both his creative process—his knowledge and acknowledgment of the folk, African-American, and classical traditions that he knew and loved —and in his performance practice, his desire to break down barriers between performer and audience, to teach his audience to sing and to have them learn the tradition and (hopefully) pass it on. Since Seeger wanted his own performances to be part of the living tradition, his songs changed and responded to the events of the day. Finally, no one has looked at groups of songs united by a theme and how they reflect Seeger's philosophical stance and practice either over the years or at a specific moment in his life. This thesis provides a model for how to approach the study of Seeger's works by taking into consideration these factors.

The body of the thesis comprises three case studies, each of which provides an analysis of three carefully selected songs that explore Seeger's creative compositional process and musical influences (Chapter Two), his deeply held anti-war stance (Chapter Three), and his environmental activism (Chapter Four). In all cases, Seeger's dedication to American folk traditions will be clear. Although he began his life wishing to revive this musical tradition and share it with his countrymen and women, his goals changed as he became older. Folk music became the vehicle to express his deeply held social and political beliefs and eventually to weave together a community of like-minded souls who could tackle big problems that one person could not solve alone.

Pete Seeger and the Living Folk Song Tradition

Sam Rosenthal describes the living folk tradition as "the ongoing tendency for songs transmitted orally to be reworked accidentally or on purpose," a context that allows for music to be continually reinterpreted as it is passed from between both performers and generations. As these various interpretations of a given song continue over time, the "currents of collective opinion begin to shape the form of the song," resulting in the music becoming a folk song.[17] According to Rosenthal, Pete Seeger's absolute commitment to the living folk tradition stemmed from his "unflagging devotion to a throughly democratic ideology."[18] Seeger believed not only in communal governance, but communal artistic ownership of music, a belief that would dictate his musical output throughout his career.

There were several important factors that contributed to Seeger's creative process in performing and arranging folk songs. Seeger commonly used the following metaphor to describe folk song and the living process of the folk tradition:

> A folk song in a book is like a picture of a bird in mid-flight…the bird was moving before the picture was taken, and continued flying afterwards. It is valuable for the scientific record to know when and where the picture was taken, but no one is so foolish to think that the picture is the bird.[19]

Seeger believed that a folk song had no definitive arrangement and that the beauty of the tradition lay within the music's adaptable nature, allowing for both small and large changes made by the people who performed this music.

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[17] Sam A. Rosenthal, "Folk Song In Flight," in *We Shall Overcome: Essays on a Great American Song,* edited by Victor V. Bobetsky, (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 20.

[18] Rosenthal, "A Folk Song In Flight," 19.

[19] Rosenthal, "A Folk Song in Flight," 21.

Additionally, Seeger's unique background in music (as discussed in Chapter One) allowed him to draw not only from traditional folk genres—sea shanties, African- American spirituals, Appalachian ballads, and folk tunes from virtually every continent—but also from European art music, and American jazz standards, as he saw fit. He would often quote friend and fellow folk musician, Big Bill Broozy, who, when asked if a particular song was folk music, retorted "well, it must be folk music because I've never heard a horse sing it."[20] This sentiment inspired Seeger, who firmly believed that music is music, no matter the genre; thus, he drew musical vocabulary from any source that appealed to him.

Seeger's belief in the living folk process is especially apparent in his creative approach to three of his best known and frequently recorded works: "Barbara Allen"/"Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies"/"Old Devil Time," "We Shall Overcome," and "Hymn to Nations." These three tunes provide compelling case studies of how works are transmitted through time and space and are renewed by each singer-songwriter who takes them up.

"Barbara Allen" | "Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies" | "Old Devil Time"

The traditional folk ballad, "Barbara Allen," may be one of the more widely known traditional folk tunes, thanks in part to Pete Seeger's regular performances of it, as well as the ethnomusicological work of his father, Charles Seeger, and that of Alan Lomax, along with the work of other prominent folklorists such as Francis Child, Bertrand Bronson, and Samuel

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[20] Michael John Simmons, "Bob Shane, Big Bill Broonzy, Louis Armstrong and Horses and the Best Correction Ever," *Fretboard Journal,* April 2012, https://www.fretboardjournal.com/features/bob-shane-big-bill-broonzy-louis-armstrong-and-horses-and-best-correction-ever/.

Bayard.[21] This song is part of an extensive musical "family tree," descending from and influencing in turn many related songs, including one other traditional song that Seeger performed regularly, "Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies," as well as a song that Seeger wrote, "Old Devil Time." These songs demonstrate a process found commonly in folkloric traditions that rely on oral transmission, a process in which Seeger played an active role. Seeger refers to "Barbara Allen" and "Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies" as "first cousins." The melodic similarities are strikingly apparent, with only minor differences in intervals and rhythm. Seeger states that "Old Devil Time" derives from both; he used the aforementioned melodies as a sort of skeleton for his new tune while on a tight deadline for a commission.[22]

The melodies and lyrics of folk song do not exist in a single form and there is no expectation that they will always be performed in even a relatively similar manner. Neither do they have a single author. In fact, the concept of any sort of authorship and consistency of melody, lyrics, and or both, of folk music was virtually nonexistent until the advent of recording technology and the commercialization of folk music during the folk revivals of the twentieth century.[23] Generally speaking, the lack of printed music in the folk tradition, in the words of Charles Seeger, both "encourages and enforces" variations among performances.[24] However, it is

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[21] Charles Seeger, "Versions and Variants of Barbara Allen," in *Studies In Musicology 1935-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 276.

[22] Pete Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone: A Singer's Stories, Songs, Seeds, Robberies,* (Pennsylvania: Sing Out Corporation, 1993), 229-231.

[23] Charles Seeger, Pete Seeger's father points out that the advent of printing primarily stabilized the variations found within the lyrics of a folk song, rather than the musical notes of the folk song, considering the relatively few people who would likely be able to read music; see Charles Seeger, "Versions and Variants," 274.

[24] Charles Seeger, "Versions and Variants," 275.

important to note that while the advent of the printing press certainly contributed to some level of consistency in folk songs, particularly in the lyrics, prior to the twentieth century (and as early as the sixteenth century), fully notated folk songs were not commonly printed, and the concept of authorship only came into regular practice during the folk revivals of that century. Even then, folk songs are, by nature, in a constant state of change.[25] To return to Seeger's commonly used metaphor of a specific version of a folk song being like a bird in flight, "it is valuable for the scientific record to know when and where the picture was taken, but no one is so foolish as to think that the picture is the bird." It is only fair to conclude that any given folk song has a collective authorship that spans both time and geography, resulting in the potential for both musical and lyrical variations.

Another important factor in the evolution of any given folk song is the tradition of musical borrowing. In the context of folk music, there is nothing wrong with musical borrowing; in fact, it is generally encouraged. Throughout history, musical borrowing and revisions of pre-existing musical material has occurred both accidentally and purposefully.[26] Rosenthal comments that, for both Seeger and the folk tradition at large,

> Songs that rang true or presented some relevance lived on, while the rest were consigned to the historical dustbin. If a song was not a complete package, it wasn't a problem. A

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[25] Broadside ballads, a term for a single sheet of printed lyrics for a ballad, along with the name of melody which should accompany it, were popularized in Britain during the 16th century, and were common in both Britain and the United States through the 19th century. Broadside sheets rarely listed authors. While many of these so-called ballads weren't always traditional, folkloric ballads, broadside sheets of Child ballads have been discovered. See Norm Cohen, "Broadside," *Grove Music Online,* February 11, 2013, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002234558.

[26] Rosenthal, "A Folk Song In Flight," 21.

> strong lyric verse could be extracted from an otherwise weak tune, or a good melody could be borrowed and applied elsewhere.[27]

As Seeger regularly commented, "musical borrowing is a two way street."[28] While lyrical borrowing certainly occurs,[29] it is far more common to see variations in the lyrics, while the primary message, storyline, events, or people mentioned within the song remains mostly the same. The same cannot be said for melodic borrowing.

Considering both the regularity of musical borrowing within the American folk music tradition (including its heritage from the British folk music tradition), alongside the "encouraged and reinforced" variations within performance of any given song, the question remains as to when a particular melody stops existing as that particular melody and becomes a new melody entirely. Over the past century, prominent folklorists such as Francis Child, Samuel Bayard, and Bertrand Bronson have engaged in extensive research and cataloguing efforts in order to answer this question.[30] Bayard and Bronson, using the concept of "tune families," not entirely dissimilar to the concept of a "musical family tree," conclude that there are relatively few "tune families" in

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[27] Rosenthal, "A Folk Song In Flight," 22.

[28] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 35.

[29] Charles Seeger provides several examples of this phenomenon, such as the lyrics from "Barbara Allen" are often found in performances of the Scottish Jacobite song, "Wae's Me for Prince Charlie." See Charles Seeger, "Versions and Variants," 315.

[30] Francis Child (1825-1898) was an American scholar and folkloric specialist who researched and published a collection of English and Scottish ballads, (eventually referred to as Child ballads) featured in five volumes, and their variations found in the Appalachian region of the United States. Samuel Bayard (1908-1997) and Bertrand Bronson (1902-1986), both continued Child's work on ballads, through cataloging and analyzing each Child ballad, along with collecting additional American folk tunes.

the vast body of American folk music. If we accept this concept, then the following songs are not distinctive and separate pieces, but instead part of one larger "tune family," in which there exist many other variations of the melody.

As noted above, "Barbara Allen" is perhaps one of the best known of all folk ballads in the Anglo-American repertory.[31] Pete Seeger released four commercial recordings of the tune, and performed it regularly throughout his career. Other musicians, not only those who were part of a folk revival, have released recordings, including Joan Baez, The Kingston Trio, Jean Ritchie, Merle Travis, Dolly Parton, Shirley Collins, Simon and Garfunkel, The Everly Brothers, John Travolta, Norah Jones, The Carter Family, Jerry Reed, Ewan MacColl, The King's Singers, and Rosanne Cash, among others. It is safe to claim that this song is deeply embedded in the American musical consciousness.[32]

As part of his ethnomusicological research, Charles Seeger conducted a study of seventy six recordings of the tune made between 1933 and 1940 in the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress, as well as 200 additional variants of the ballad from printed music, recordings, and handwritten transcriptions from both the United States and Britain. Through melodic transcription,[33] as well as the use of a machine of Seeger's own invention called the

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[31] Charles Seeger, "Versions and Variants," 276.

[32] It is important to stress the connection of American musical consciousness to Britain's musical consciousness, especially when it comes to the Appalachian folk tradition, as the song is originally from Scotland.

[33] Charles Seeger points out that melodic transcription using notation is not enough to account for the difference between versions, as notation was developed for the tradition of Western European art music, not for folk music, hence his use of the melograph. See Charles Seeger, "Versions and Variants," 287.

melograph, he concluded that there were quite extensive differences among all the versions, including the following:[34]

- Variations in tempo of nearly 350% (that is, the fastest example is 3.5 times faster than the slowest example).
- Variations in what Seeger defines as rhythmic density and proportion, that is, the varying degrees of rhythmic values assigned to the melody of a given interpretation.
- Variations in both vocal phrasing and vocal dynamics.
- Wide variations in melodic pitch and melodic rhythm. (It is interesting to note that Seeger found more melodic homogeneity found within the southern United States than in the northern United States and Great Britain.)

Pete Seeger's four recorded versions, as well as live recordings, show similar breadth in variation: in key, accompaniment, melodic pitch and rhythm, speed, contour of the melody, exact lyrics and verses. It is clear that Seeger does not attempt to sing the song in the same manner each time; he knows the skeleton of the song: the basic outline of the melody and the harmony, and he knows the many possible combinations of lyrics and stanzas. The rest is left up to the spontaneity of the performance.

The next song belonging to this "tune family" that was a part Seeger's regular repertory is "Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies" (also sometimes known as "Come Ye Fair and Tender Maidens" or "Tiny Sparrow"), another folk ballad of Appalachian origin. Cecil Sharp, one of the first folklorists to conduct extensive ethnographic work on the music of Appalachia, collected eighteen versions of the tune, showing extensive variations in both the lyrics and melody.[35] The

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[34] Charles Seeger, "Versions and Variants of Barbara Allen."

[35] For all 18 versions of the tune, see Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachians,* reprint edition, (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2008).

tune would later be found in other regions across the States.[36] Like "Barbara Allen," it has been recorded and performed by many American musicians over the course of the twentieth century, such as Joan Baez, Aretha Franklin, Dolly Parton, Bob Dylan, The Carter Family, Emmylou Harris, Peter, Paul and Mary, The Kingston Trio, Odetta, among others.

Unlike "Barbara Allen," the variation of the tune with the lyrics "Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies" has not been found in Britain, thus leading to the assumption that this song was created in the United States using the tune-family melody found in "Barbara Allen" for its structure.[37] That said, some stanzas from other British and American folk songs are quite similar to those in "Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies," so there is evidence of musical borrowing. As with a majority of folk songs, "Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies" seems to be a combination of bits and pieces from a variety of sources.[38] Quite a few other tradition tunes use melodic and or lyrical segments from "Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies" including "The Water Is Wide," "Love Is Teasing," and "The Wheel of Fortune," among others.[39] Seeger's recorded versions of "Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies" in fact includes stanzas from another folk song titled "False Young Man."[40]

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[36] Max Speigel, "Origins: Fair and Tender Ladies / Little Sparrow," accessed November 19, 2020, https://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=19342.

[37] Campbell and Sharp, *English Folk Songs.* See also Roud Folk Song index, available online at https://www.vwml.org/archives-catalogue

[38] Spiegel, "Origins: Fair and Tender Ladies / Little Sparrow."

[39] "Versions of 'Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies'," accessed October 2020. Website is currently down. http://www.bluegrassmessengers.com/us--canada-versions-7ua-young-ladies

[40] Spiegel, "Origins: Fair and Tender Ladies / Little Sparrow."

The similarities in the melody and rhythm of “Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies” and “Barbara Allen” are striking:

Figure 2.1

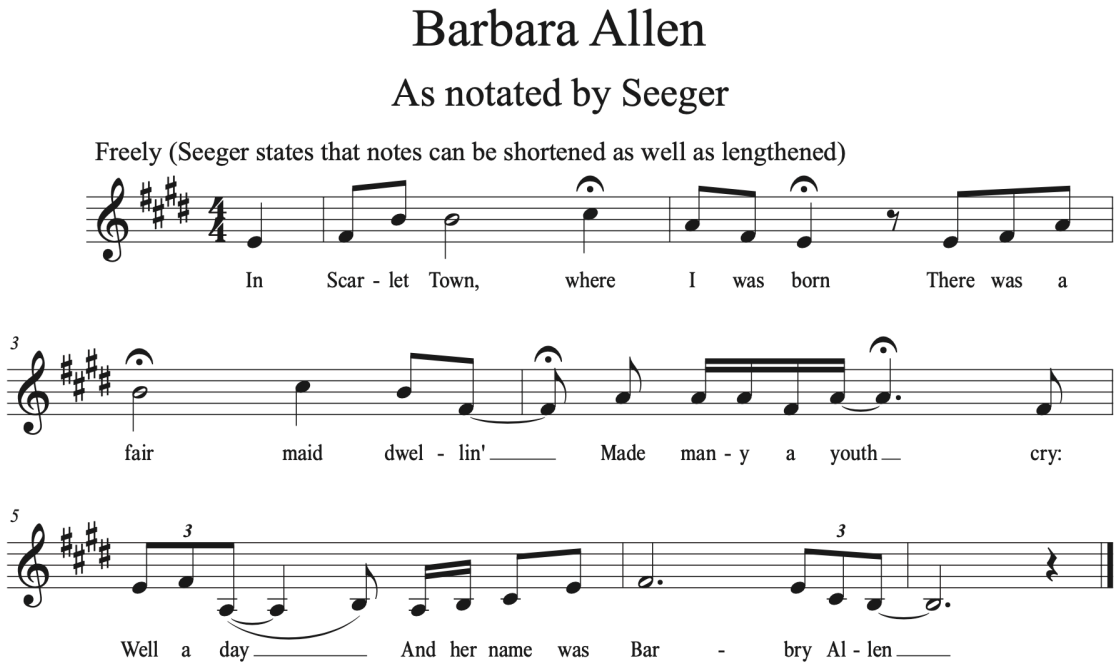
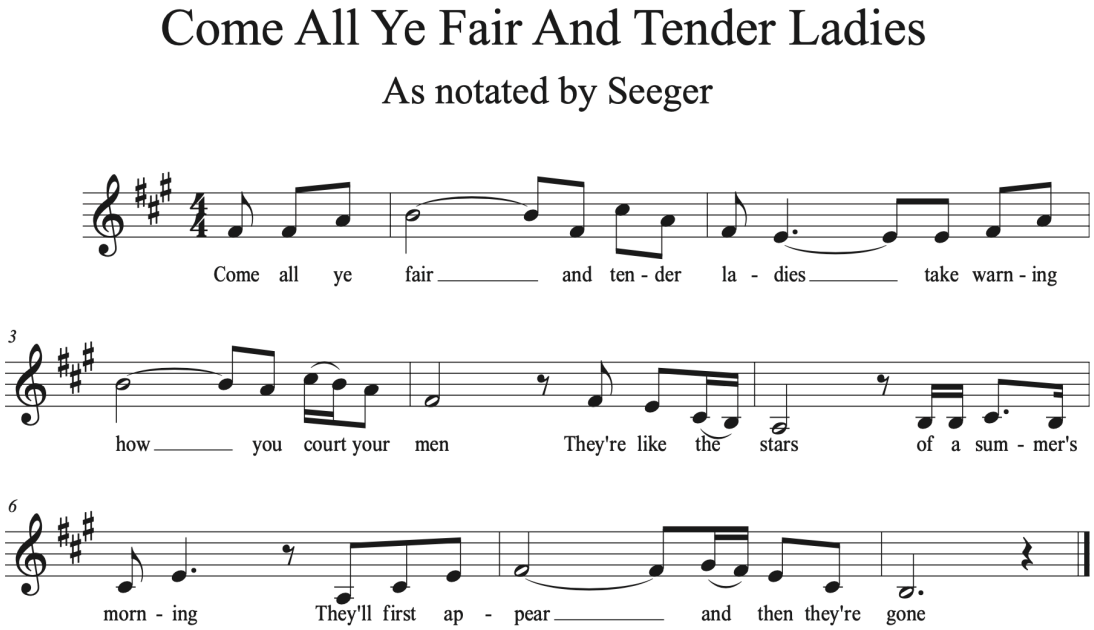


Figure 2.2



Yet another member of this "tune family" did not take shape by passing through many hands over many years, but arose when Pete Seeger faced a deadline for a film project. In 1969, Seeger received a call from filmmaker Otto Preminger,[41] asking if he was "the Pete Seeger who makes up songs and sings them."[42] Preminger was making a movie about the will to live and wanted Seeger to write a song for the title sequence. Seeger gladly agreed, and spent the next month trying out numerous ideas, dissatisfied with the results. In his autobiography, he recounts

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[41] Otto Preminger (1905-1986) was an Austrian-born film and theatre director who directed notable films over his 50 year career such as *Laura* (1944) and *The Man With The Golden Arm* (1955).
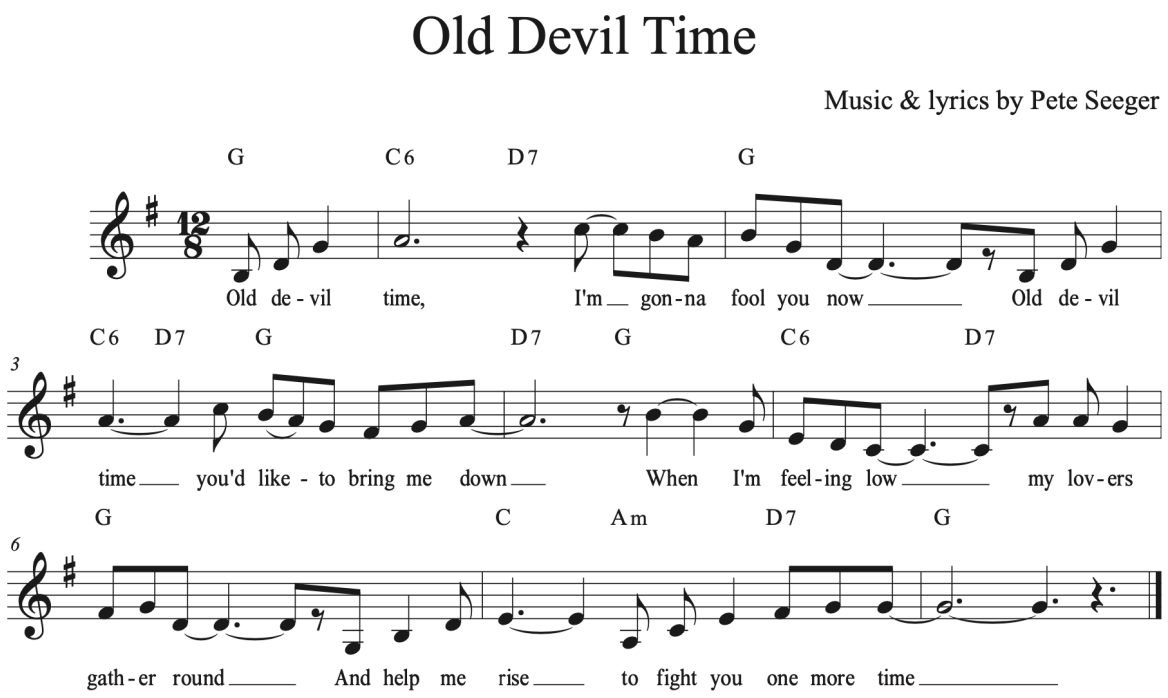
[42] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 229.

that his wife asked if he had the song ready for Preminger, he responded with a "yes," even though it was a lie. When Preminger asked to hear the songs, Seeger said he had several ideas, then performed three or four traditional tunes with a few new verses. Seeing that Preminger was not pleased, Seeger said that he had a couple more in mind and used the next hour in between meetings to write a new song. Using the melodies of "Barbara Allen" and "Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies" and verses that, in his telling, were scraped out of the dregs of his subconscious, Seeger came up with "Old Devil Time," commenting that there is "nothing like a deadline to force something out of you." Preminger was satisfied with the tune, and it would go on to be featured in his film, *Tell Me That You Love Me, Junie Moon.*[43] Seeger was paid what was, at the time, a huge sum (between $1500 and $2000), but states that he was repaid "many times over" by the result of having another good song to sing in his performances. The song would go on to be recorded and performed by Seeger's contemporaries in the folk genre, with Marion Wade adding a verse of her own. "Old Devil Time" is both a member of the musical family tree of "Barbara Allen," and an example of how folk music is a living process. Musical materials are borrowed, repurposed, and, in the words of Seeger, a blend of the old and the new in an "almost unbroken seam."[44]

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[43] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 229-230.

[44] Will Schmid, "Reflections on the Folk Movement: An Interview with Pete Seeger," *Music Educators Journal* 66, no. 6 (1980): 44, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3395807.

Figure 2.3



"We Shall Overcome"

Hailed as the "most powerful song of the twentieth century" by the Library of Congress,[45] "We Shall Overcome" finds its origins in the tradition of nineteenth century African-American spirituals, such as "Down By The Riverside" and several other folk tunes that Seeger helped to popularize.[46] The song's qualities—its repetitiveness, its moral message, and the lack of story that must be followed through many stanzas to be understood—make it highly suitable

[45] David A. Graham, "The Surprising History of Guy Carawan's Civil-Rights Anthem We Shall Overcome," *The Atlantic*, July 12, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/05/we-shall-overcome/392837/.

[46] Seeger's version of "Down By The Riverside" will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Three.

for singing by large groups of people, particularly at demonstrations. Anyone can easily join in with singing the song at any moment, and those who do not know the lyrics can quickly learn at least those of the chorus, often containing the most important part of the message. It is therefore not surprising that it has been used as a protest song throughout its existence; it is today indelibly linked to the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

"We Shall Overcome" has a long history, of which only some traces have been preserved. Like many traditional tunes, the song is built out of borrowed melodies, with adapted and ever-changing lyrics. While discussing the song's history in his autobiography, Seeger points out that "throughout musical history, borrowing has been a two way street."[47] Perhaps he meant to say that part of the beauty and artistic worth of any folk music tradition lies in the multitude of people who contribute to its creation, and, with each generation, adapt it and pass it along to the next.

This song, much like Barbara Allen, is part of a musical "family tree," with both antecedents and descendants. Victor V. Bobetsky notes seven songs whose melodies and/or words relate to "We Shall Overcome" and may well have influenced its creation:[48]

1. "O Sanctissima," an Italian hymn also known as the Sicilian Mariners' Hymn, dating back to at least the eighteenth century. The opening melody of "O Sanctissima" shares striking similarities to "We Shall Overcome," the most important being the first four bars of the melody, which, like "We Shall Overcome" is sol-sol-la-la-sol-fa-mi. The song became popularized in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in both Europe and the United States.

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[47] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 35.

[48] Victor V. Bobetsky, "The Complex Ancestry of We Shall Overcome" in *We Shall Overcome: Essays on a Great American Song,* edited by Victor V. Bobetsky, (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefiekd, 2015), 1-14.

2. "No More Auction Block," also known as "Many Thousand Gone," a song sung by African-American regiments of the union army and referred to as a "secular spiritual." The song shares a similar opening melody and melodic rhythm with "We Shall Overcome," and, based on the historical evidence of the popularity of "O Sanctissima," it is possible that the melody was derived from "O Sanctissima."

3. "I'll Overcome Someday," a gospel hymn by Reverend Charles Albert Tindley.[49] Seeger also believes that "We Shall Overcome" descended from this song. The lyrics are quite similar, but the melodies have nothing in common.

4. "I'll Be Like Him Someday," another gospel hymn written and published by Roberta Evelyn Martin (under the pseudonym Faye E. Brown) in 1945. Measures 5-16 of "I'll Be Like Him Someday" are almost identical to measures 5-16 of "We Shall Overcome." Additionally, Martin also borrowed phrases from Tindley's "I'll Overcome Someday." Bobetsky states that this hymn is a good example of the cross-fertilization and borrowing that resulted in the creation of "We Shall Overcome," and concludes that it is an "important step in the genealogy of We Shall Overcome."[50]

5. "I'll Overcome Someday," a gospel song published in 1945 , with music written by Kenneth Morris and lyrics written by Atron Twigg. This tune has very similar lyrics to both Tindley's "I'll Overcome Someday" and "We Shall Overcome," but shares very little musically.

6. "I'll Be All Right," another gospel hymn that descended as an orally transmitted folk song. Bobetsky considers the song to be an important ancestor and valuable branch of the musical tree for "We Shall Overcome." "I'll Be Alright" features similar lyrics, including "someday" and "deep in my heart, I do believe," as well as the structure of the melodic phrases and the harmonic progressions.

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[49] Reverend Charles Albert Tindley (1851-1933) was a notable Methodist minister in Philadelphia, along with being a published composer of several well-known gospel hymns, including "I'll Overcome Someday." Tindley was known for singing his own hymns during dramatic moments of his sermons and many of his hymns are still sung today in Protestant churches. See Bobetsky, "The Complex Ancestry of We Shall Overcome," from *We Shall Overcome: Essays on a Great American Song,* 7.

[50] Bobetsky, "Complex Ancestry of We Shall Overcome," 9.

7. “I Will Overcome,” a song that Bobetsky describes as “the connecting branch in the family tree.” It is the song that Seeger initially learned from Zilphia Horton that was used as a protest song by the labor movement (see the discussion below).

Seeger’s own understanding of the history of this song matches Bobetsky’s research on several points. Seeger believed that the twentieth-century version of the tune likely descended from one or both of the following sources: first, “I’ll Be Alright” and second, “I’ll Overcome Some Day.” In the mid-1940s, Seeger played a first-hand role in the song’s evolution from “I Will Overcome” to “We Shall Overcome.”

In 1946, several hundred employees of the American Tobacco Company in Charleston, South Carolina were on strike; most of these employees were female and African-American, and would sing hymns, including Reverend Tindley’s rendition of the tune, titled “I Shall Overcome,” on the picket line to keep their spirits up. Lucille Simmons, one of the picketers, is credited with changing the lyrics from “I will overcome” to “we will overcome,” along with singing the melody very slowly, in what Seeger calls a “long meter style.”[51] It is worth noting that this is not the first documented use of a variant of “We Shall Overcome” as a labor protest song. In 1909, it is mentioned in the *United Mine Workers Journal,* saying that strikers sang “the good old ‘We Will Overcome’” at a recent protest.[52] It is safe to assume that the song was used by other labor movements during the early twentieth century.

While in Charleston supporting the strike efforts of the American Tobacco Company employees, Zilphia Horton, a union activist and folk singer from the Highlander Folk School in

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[51] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 34.

[52] Rosenthal, “Folk Song In Flight,” 23.

Tennessee, heard the tune and was particularly moved by the way Lucille Simmons sang it.[53] She then brought the tune back to the Highlander Folk School, where she taught it to Seeger in 1947. The two published the song in *People's Songs* in 1948 (the same publication in which Seeger published many important folk songs, including "Where Have All The Flowers Gone"). Seeger went on to make several notable changes to the song, transforming the title from "We Will Overcome" to "We Shall Overcome," and adding the following two verses: "we'll walk hand in hand" and "we shall live in peace."

At this stage, Seeger still did not know how to perform the song as he thought it should be performed. While visiting California in 1952, he showed the tune to Guy Carawan and Frank Hamilton, folk singers and ethnomusicologists,[54] whom he credits with making a crucial change to the song by changing the meter from 4/4 to 12/8.[55] As Seeger states, "rhythm is such an important part of African-American music. As it is of course in African music. The song isn't the song unless the rhythm is right."[56]

In 1956, Seeger returned to the Highlander Folk School for its 25th Anniversary, where he performed "We Shall Overcome," using Carawan and Hamilton's suggested change of the

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[53] Kate Stewart, "Tracing the Long Journey of 'We Shall Overcome,'" February 6, 2014, https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2014/02/tracing-the-long-journey-of-we-shall-overcome/.

[54] Guy Carawan and Frank Hamilton — folk singers and ethnomusicologists — studied the gospel songs from a local Baptist church prior to their revisions to "We Shall Overcome." Seeger believes they had a more solid understanding of the nuances of rhythm in African-American music than he did.

[55] Video interview with Seeger - Stewart, "Long Journey of We Shall Overcome," https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2014/02/tracing-the-long-journey-of-we-shall-overcome/. See also Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 34.

[56] Video interview with Seeger - Stewart, "Long Journey of We Shall Overcome," https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2014/02/tracing-the-long-journey-of-we-shall-overcome/.

meter, to an audience that included Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Rosa Parks, and Rev. Ralph Abernathy. Presumably, Seeger, in his usual fashion, led the audience in a singalong. Seeger recalls that King was impressed and moved by the song, commenting that it "really sticks with you."[57]

The song continued to spread across the country, particularly in the Civil Rights movement. In 1959, Carawan was appointed as musical director at the Highlander Folk School, where he taught the song to visiting activists, including a large group of African-American students from the the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) who came to the school specifically to learn protest music.[58] The SNCC students would go on to stage important protests across the South, and included "We Shall Overcome" in their repertoire of protest music. The result was that "We Shall Overcome" became "the song" used at protests throughout the South.[59]

The students of the SNCC, along with Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks, would not be the only influential people to learn "We Shall Overcome" at The Highlander Folk School. Another important "spreader" of the song was activist and singer Jamila Jones, who had notably participated in the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-56 at the age of twelve. While visiting The

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[57] Bobetsky, "Complex Ancestry of We Shall Overcome," 13.

[58] The SNCC was a national civil rights organization led by college students during the Civil Rights Movement. It was founded in 1960 after a group of Black college students staged a number of sit-ins challenging segregation in restaurants and other public settings in Greensboro, North Carolina. The SNCC would go on to be involved in a variety of Civil Rights activism, including voting rights, sit-ins, and Freedom Rides. See "The Story of SNCC," SNCC Digital Gateway, May 7, 2018, https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/the-story-of-sncc/.

[59] Stewart, "Long Journey of "We Shall Overcome," https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2014/02/tracing-the-long-journey-of-we-shall-overcome/.

Highlander Folk School at the age of fourteen, the school was raided by the police, who shut off the electricity to the building. In the dark, Jones began to sing "We Shall Overcome," creating the now well-known verse: "we are not afraid." She recalled that at the moment, as the others joined in to sing with her and as the police asked her to stop singing so loudly, that she understood the true power of the song.[60]

In the early 1960s, Seeger's publishers told him that if he, along with Carawan and Hamilton, failed to copyright "We Shall Overcome," "some Hollywood type will come up with a version like 'Come on baby, we shall overcome,'" thus tainting the song.[61] Faced with this dilemma, Seeger, Carawan, and Hamilton decided to copyright the song, even though claimed no ownership of it, crediting instead those who had played a role in its creation, specifically Lucille Simmons, the striking Tobacco Union workers during the 1940s, the African-American musical tradition as a whole. They would go on to create a non-profit organization called the We Shall Overcome Fund; all royalties from the song go to this non-profit, which annually gives grants to promote African-American music in the South.

Over time, "We Shall Overcome" underwent the kind of transformation typical of a "living folk song," accumulating verses in addition to the original by Jamila Jones ("we are not afraid"), and those that Seeger contributed ("we'll walk hand in hand" and "we shall live in peace"). These include:[62]

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[60] Video interview with Seeger - Stewart, "Long Journey of We Shall Overcome," https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2014/02/tracing-the-long-journey-of-we-shall-overcome/.

[61] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 34.

[62] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 34.

- “We shall all be free”
- “We shall be like him”
- “We shall stand together”
- “We shall work together”
- “The Lord will see us through”
- “We shall end Jim Crow”
- “The truth will set us free”
- “The whole wide world around”
- “Black and white together”
- “Love will see us through”

“We Shall Overcome” became most strongly associated with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Folk singer Joan Baez performed the song for the crowds at the 1963 March on Washington, the same event at which Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous “I Have A Dream” speech. President Lyndon B. Johnson referenced the song in his historical address, often referred to as the “We Shall Overcome” address, to Congress in March of 1965 regarding his plan for equal voting rights.[63] In 1966, while visiting South Africa still in the grip of apartheid, Senator Robert F. Kennedy stood on rooftop of his car and led the crowd in singing “We Shall Overcome.” At the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, delegations sang the song in protest over the Vietnam War while marching around the convention floor.[64] In that same year, Dr. King referenced the song in his speech at the Washington National Cathedral:

> We’re going to win our freedom because both the sacred heritage of our national and the eternal will of the almighty God are embodied in our echoing demands. And so, however

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[63] “Remembering LBJ's 'We Shall Overcome' Address 50-Years Later,” MSNBC (NBCUniversal News Group, May 2, 2019). https://www.msnbc.com/politicsnation/watch/lbj-s--we-shall-overcome--address-legacy-414024771609. See also “President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Voting Rights Act Speech,” March 15, 1965, posted on August 6, 2015. Video, 5:42. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbFmicUTb_k

[64] CNN Staff, “Brief History of Chicago's 1968 Democratic Convention,” CNN, 1996, https://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1996/conventions/chicago/facts/chicago68/index.shtml.

> dark it is, however deep the angry feelings are, and however violent the explosions are, I can still sing "We Shall Overcome."[65]

"We Shall Overcome" has a substantial legacy. It now has global recognition and has spread around the world as a fitting protest song for various labor and political movements, including the Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement (1968-1978),[66] the Velvet Revolution in Prague (1989), and the student protests in Tiananmen Square (1989).[67] It has been translated into multiple languages, including Spanish ("Todos Venceremos"), Hindi ("Hum Honge Kaamyab"), Bengali ("Amra Korbo Joy"), and Czech ("Jednou budem dál"), among others.[68] Arguably, it has become one of the best known protest songs, for a good reason; the song has remained in public consciousness for over half of a century and its powerful message can be applied to the many injustices society faces. Martin Luther King, Jr., when commenting on the power of protest music — specifically African-American freedom songs — such as "We Shall Overcome," said:

> In a sense the freedom songs are the song of the movement. They are more than just incantations of clever phrases designed to invigorate a campaign; they are as old as the history of the Negro in America. They are adaptations of the songs the slaves sang — the sorrow songs, the shouts for joy, the battle hymns and the anthems of our movement. I

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[65] Rolling Stone Staff, "'We Shall Overcome': The Theme Song of Civil Rights," *Rolling Stone*, January 13, 2012, https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-lists/we-shall-overcome-the-theme-song-of-civil-rights-12766/dr-martin-luther-king-jr-1968-139531/

[66] Freya McClements, "Derry and 'We Shall Overcome': 'We Plagiarised an Entire Movement'," *The Irish Times*, March 4, 2017, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/derry-and-we-shall-overcome-we-plagiarised-an-entire-movement-1.2989759.

[67] Rolling Stone Staff, "The Theme Song of Civil Rights," *Rolling Stone,* January 13, 2012, https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-lists/we-shall-overcome-the-theme-song-of-civil-rights-12766/dr-martin-luther-king-jr-1968-139531/.

[68] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 34-36. See also Noah Adams, "The Inspiring Force Of 'We Shall Overcome'," NPR, August 28, 2013, https://www.npr.org/2013/08/28/216482943/the-inspiring-force-of-we-shall-overcome.

> have heard people talk of their beat and rhythm, but we in the movement are as inspired by their words. "Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom" is a sentence that needs no music to make its point. We sing the freedom songs today for the same reason the slaves sang them, because we too are in bondage and the songs add hope to our determination that "we shall overcome, black and white together, we shall overcome someday."[69]

While Seeger was always quite reticent to admit it, he played a crucial role in evolution and popularization of "We Shall Overcome" which allowed for the song to become such a powerful anthem for the Civil Rights movement.[70] Seeger merely considered himself to be a single spoke in the wheel of the folk process and the tradition of the living folk song, helping to alter a song to fit a current social needs, then sharing it within his community.

"Hymn To Nations" / "Ode To Joy"

"Hymn To Nations," also commonly referred to as "Hymn for Nations" or "Hymn for the Nations," is technically an arrangement Seeger made from two existing works. The music is based on the "Ode to Joy" theme from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and the lyrics combine those penned by the American writer Josephine Daskam Bacon (1876-1961) and by the

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[69] Patricia Woodward, "Beyond We Shall Overcome: The Lasting Legacy of Freedom Songs," in *We Shall Overcome: Essays On A Great American Song,* edited by Victor V. Bobetsky (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 99.

[70] Rosenthal, "Folksong in Flight," 18, 21, 23.

Appalachian radical leftist and co-founder of the Highlander Folk School, Don West (1906-1992).[71]

Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" forms the last movement of his Ninth Symphony (1824), the first symphony to use require a chorus and soloists. For the lyrics of the last movement, Beethoven turned to Friedrich Schiller's *An Die Freude* (written in 1785 and published in 1786). Although religious interpretations of the poem prevailed during Schiller's lifetime, Beethoven's setting of the text in the last movement of his Ninth Symphony, according to Esteban Buch, stresses the poem's "rich overtones" of liberty and the concept of "mankind's earthly happiness."[72] This challenged long-standing ideas about who should have power and rights, and by extension, whom governing bodies should serve.[73] Over the years, Beethoven's setting of the text became widely popular, not just as music, but also as a cultural symbol of freedom and liberation, often used in political contexts.[74] For example, the song played on loudspeakers as a part of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests; prisoners heard it performed as a message of hope during the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, and Leonard Bernstein conducted a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with its stirring final chorus in both East and West Berlin after the

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[71] Zilphia Horton, the woman from whom Seeger learned "We Shall Overcome," also taught at the Highlander Folk School during the same time period. It is unknown whether or not Seeger learned Don West's lyrics for "Hymn of Nations" while visiting the Highlander Folk School in the 1950s.

[72] During Schiller's lifetime, the poem was typically considered to have a religious viewpoint. See Esteban Buch, *Beethoven's Ninth: A Political History,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 48.

[73] Buch, *Beethoven's Ninth: A Political History*, 47-48.

[74] Kerry Candaele, *Following the Ninth* (San Francisco, California, USA: Collective Eye Films, 2020).

fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.[75] Similarly, the theme has been the anthem for the European Union (the "European Hymn") since 1971. Leaders of China's Cultural Revolution believed that the "Ode to Joy" represented "progressive class struggle."[76] It is also worth noting that the "Ode to Joy" has been used by fascist political movements, such as the white supremacist regime in Rhodesia and most notoriously, by Hitler and the Nazi party in Germany.[77]

One particularly relevant example of the use of "Ode to Joy" being used in a political setting came about in relation to League of Nations, the first intergovernmental organization dedicated to maintaining peaceful international relations. Otherwise known as the *Societé Des Nations*, the League was founded at the Paris Peace Conference in January of 1920 after World War I with the intention of maintaining peaceful international relations, particularly the prevention of wars through promotion of disarmament and collective security. The League also advocated for fair labor conditions, and the abolishment of human and drug trafficking.[78] While the United States never formally joined the League of Nations, the organization created a sort of lobbying organization in the States called The League of Nations Association, Inc., with the goal of stimulating American interest in the League of Nations and mobilizing support for

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[75] Kerry Candaele and Greg Mitchell. *Journeys with Beethoven: Following the Ninth and Beyond*. (New York: Sinclair Books, 2012), preface.

[76] Slavoj Zizek, "'Ode to Joy', Followed by Chaos and Despair," *New York Times,* December 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/24/opinion/24zizek.html.

[77] Buch, *Beethoven's Ninth,* 201-219.

[78] Christopher Riches, "League of Nations," *A Dictionary of Contemporary World History*. Oxford University Press, March 21, 2019. http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191870903.001.0001/acref-9780191870903-e-1346

United States' entrance into the League. The association held an international contest for writing the text to the sixteen-bar melody of "Ode to Joy." Josephine Daskam Bacon won the $100 prize in the competition with her lyrics, "Hymn for the Nations."[79]

It is difficult to determine how popular Daskam's lyrics were during Seeger's lifetime or how Seeger came across the lyrics. Was it through knowledge of Daskam and the League of Nations competition, or through his connection to Don West and the Highlander Folk School, or through some other means? Seeger, however, was not the first to record Daskam's lyrics with the melody of "Ode to Joy"— an earlier recording of the song can be found on the 1951 album of devotional music (connected to the Mormon church) entitled *The Children Sing*; the hymn is also referenced in several online collections of religious music.[80] Despite the political nature of the song's origin, the Christian community must have been attracted by patriotic ideas found in the lyrics. Several recordings of the tune were made well after Seeger's own recordings, including those by the Seattle Labor Chorus and the musical duo Jamie Garamella and Megan Burtt.[81]

Given the political nature of Seeger's music, it is hardly surprising that Seeger would choose to create his own adaptations of "Ode to Joy." In his autobiography, Seeger recalled that he played the "Ode to Joy" (as well as excerpts of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony) for over 50

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[79] "News Notes," *Poetry* 43, no. 6 (1934): 354-56, accessed October 14, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20579393. See also Caryl Clark, "Forging Identity: Beethoven's "Ode" as European Anthem," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 4 (1997): 794, accessed October 14, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344049. I have been unable to find documentation for the precise date of the competition.

[80] "The Children Sing (1951)," SingPraises.net, accessed November 21, 2020, https://singpraises.net/collections/en/the-children-sing?edition=1951

[81] Jaime Garamella and Megan Burtt, "Hymn For Nations," released online in 2018, https://open.spotify.com/track/135hj2oziQFhJDpVCX0nBe. "Seattle Labor Chorus: About Us," Seattle Labor Chorus, accessed November 21, 2020, https://www.seattlelaborchorus.org/.

years, primarily for his "own amazement."[82] Personal amazement aside, Seeger recorded four versions of this song, each with in a different arrangement. They span his career and date from 1955, 1964, 1966, and 1992.

His 1955 recording, released on the album *Darling Corey/Goofing-Off Suite,* was a solo banjo rendition of the tune, or perhaps more appropriately, a solo arrangement of Beethoven's chorale from the Ninth Symphony, as this version has no lyrics. His solo banjo arrangement includes a three-part harmonization of the melody as well as a section with Seeger whistling the melody while playing both a countermelody and an accompaniment part featuring his standard clawhammer accompaniment technique. "Ode to Joy" is not the only melody from the Western European canon for which Seeger either wrote new lyrics or made folk arrangements; he recorded and performed adaptions of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*, themes based on Russian folk songs from Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, and Grieg's *Anitra's Dance.*[83] In the liner notes from *Darling Corey / The Goofing-Off Suite* (1955), Seeger writes:

> I am in favor of folk musicians swiping tunes from symphonies, just as I am all in favor of symphony composers continuing to swipe folk tunes. In time, we may no longer think of different classes of music such as — folk music on one plane, popular music on another place, and somewhere on another level, classical music [...] Composers, arrangers, and performers, whether amateur or professional, will have a cast heritage to draw upon in the folk and fine arts music traditions of every continent.[84]

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[82] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,*122.

[83] These songs were also released on Seeger's album *Darling Corey / The Goofing Off Suite,* the same album that includes Seeger's solo banjo version of "Ode to Joy."

[84] Pete Seeger, Liner notes for *Darling Corey/Goofing-Off Suite* by Pete Seeger. Released 1950, 1955, 1993. Folkways Records, FS 40018: https://folkways.si.edu/pete-steele/banjo-tunes-and-songs/american-folk-old-time/music/album/smithsonian

Seeger's second recording of "Ode To Joy/Hymn to Nations," was released on his 1964 album *Wimoweh and Other Songs of Freedom and Protest.* Seeger must have seen the political potential in "Ode to Joy," both in the melody and the history behind it, as well as the message conveyed in the lyrics. Recorded at a live performance, with the audience humming along, this recording features a combination of lyrics from both Josephine Daskam (the first stanza) and Don West (the second stanza). In fact, this recording would be the only time that he used any of Daskam's poem - his third recording features no lyrics, and his fourth recording from 1992 only uses Don West's lyrics. West's lyrics were clearly closer to Seeger's heart and political beliefs. Whereas Daskam vaunts the country's "undying fame" and stresses praise of the homeland, West paints a picture of a peaceful society in which everyone works together to help the weak, guide the strong and where no one is pushed aside:

Brothers, sing your country's anthem
Sing your land's undying fame
Light the wondrous tale of nations
With your people's golden name
Tell your father's noble story
Praise on high your country's
And, in the final glory,
Brother, lift your flag with mine.

Build a road of peace before us
Build it wide and deep and long
Speed the slow, remind the eager,
Help the weak, and guide the strong
None shall push aside another
None shall let another fall
Work together, oh my brothers,
All for one and one for all.

Seeger's third recording of "Ode to Joy/Hymn to Nations" is featured on his album *Dangerous Songs?!* As with his second recording, Seeger once again chose to include the song on an album that included political protest music such as "Draft Dodger Rag" and "Casey Jones." The title of the album leaves it up to the listeners to decide why this collection of songs was "dangerous." Knowing Seeger's political views and outlook, it was likely a tongue-in-cheek reference to those who considered him, as well as the message of his music, to be dangerously radical, especially after his recent blacklisting resulting from the HUAC trials. The album's cover artwork further supports this theory: the cover depicts a headshot of Seeger on fire, shown against a black background with the title "Dangerous Songs?! Pete Seeger" written in bold, white lettering across the cover.

However, in this rendition of "Ode to Joy," Seeger does not include lyrics from either Don West or Josephine Daskam. Instead, he plays a solo banjo arrangement of the symphony, and then recites a poem. The solo banjo arrangement is similar to that of his first recording of "Ode To Joy" from his 1955 album *Darling Corey / The Goofing Off Suite,* except that, instead of whistling the melody, Seeger hums a bass line constructed from the tonic and dominant pitches. At the end of his arrangement, Seeger speaks the following words:

> Goliath, Goliath, bound in steel.
> Goliath, Goliath, fell on the field.
> A beardless boy not fully grown
> Brought him down with a sling and a stone
> Goliath's mother wept and mourned,
> remembering the day that he was born.
> Goliath's children got the blame.
> Goliath, Goliath got the fame.

Seeger's poem may seem odd in this context. He does not put the emphasis on the little guy (David) besting the stronger, more powerful rival, but on Goliath's becoming famous. However, it is clear that Goliath, the once-powerful, is dead, and although famous, he can do nothing to protect his children, who "take the blame." It is still a parable of the strong wreaking havoc on the weak, even in death.

Seeger's fourth and last recording of this song was released on his 1996 album, *Pete,* the final album released before his death. This song, and the album *Pete* as a whole, differs greatly from the recordings made during the earlier parts of Seeger's career. It was his first time in a recording studio in seventeen years; Seeger always preferred performing to a live audience, regardless of the fact that he recorded over 80 albums throughout his career. By this point, he felt that he had recorded enough. However, his friend and jazz musician Paul Winter convinced him to record one last album; Seeger reluctantly agreed, with the caveat that a choir must sing with him since his voice was now, in his words, "shot."[85] Not only would there be a choir, but there would be a full band, including wind and string instruments, along with percussion. Seeger's albums normally featured just him singing and accompanying himself with either his banjo or his 12-string guitar. In this recording, he uses only Don West's lyrics, with one change: rather than "oh my brothers," he changes the phrase to the more inclusive "sisters and brothers." The instrumentation and musical arrangement of the 1997 adaptation also supports the message of the lyrics; the instrumentations features banjo, solo vocals, a choir, upright bass, and soprano saxophone, instruments common to folk genres. The addition of the choir, reminiscent of

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[85] Paul Winter, "Pete," Paul Winter, April 14, 2016, archived at The Wayback Machine, https://web.archive.org/web/20190306184311/http://www.paulwinter.com/projects/pete/.

Beethoven's Ode to Joy, bolsters the sensation of communal unity and respect for all. The musical arrangement is peaceful, yet still joyful in its expression.

The fact that "Ode To Joy" is not from any folkloric tradition, but is instead part of the classical music canon, a genre in which typically assumes melodic and rhythmic uniformity in various performances of a piece, does not prevent Seeger from using the song in the same way in which he would use any folk song. He performs it because he believes it to be both inspiring and well-suited for his musical purpose. As he did with most, if not all of his repertory, Seeger continually adapted his renditions of "Ode To Joy" over the course of his career as he saw fit, using the original melody and harmony as a skeleton, allowing each arrangement to take a unique shape suited to the occasion.

Pete Seeger and War

Seeger was a lifelong pacifist, a belief that influenced his songwriting and political activism throughout his life, especially in later years, when he protested against United States involvement in the Vietnam, Gulf, and Iraq wars. An online catalogue of works written, performed or recorded by Seeger lists a total of 82 works expressing antiwar sentiments which range from "Impeach Bush and Cheney Now," in which he condemns the architects of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars of the early 2000s, "Mack The Bomb," a parody of Kurt Weill's "Mack The Knife," in which Seeger hints at the devastating effects of radiation on the human body in support of nuclear disarmament, and "Last Train To Nuremberg," a song that symbolically references the post-World War II Nuremberg trials by noting that those who pay the taxes and make the bullets are as responsible for the atrocities of war as those who commit them.

Seeger's relationship with war was complex, however, and depended a great deal on the war's objectives. For example, he supported the anti-Franco Republican Forces in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). He also changed his mind about World War II. During his time with The Almanacs (active 1940-1943), Seeger, along with the group's other members, expressed strong anti-war sentiments, singing songs such as "Franklin D. You Ain't Gonna Send Me Across the Sea," "Plow Under," and "The Strange Death of John Doe." Once the primary objective was defeating Nazi Germany and fascism, Seeger, like many of his leftist peers, including Woody Guthrie, felt a moral duty to support U.S. involvement in the World War II, despite their status as pacifists.

David King Dunaway, Seeger's biographer, claims that "underlying [Seeger's] political back-and-forthing was the basic truth of The Almanacs' antiwar songs: a good cause didn't make war any less horrible."[86] In fact, although Seeger was eventually drafted in 1942, he spent the first two years of his service being shuffled between various bases in the States rather than being placed on active duty because of his radical political beliefs. In 1944, he was shipped out to the Pacific Theater, where was put in charge of entertainment at the army base's hospital. His journal entries, referenced in Dunaway's *How Can I Keep From Singing,* imply that he made a conscious decision not take part in any fighting. Instead, by taking advantage his father's connections in Washington D.C., Seeger was able to provide musical entertainment for the troops, experiment with music therapy on patients at the hospital, exchange songs with the indigenous population, and befriend like-minded fellow soldiers.[87]

In contrast to his eventual acceptance of the necessity of World War II, Seeger never wavered in his opposition to American military involvement in Vietnam, a region with an unhappy colonial history. Modern-day Vietnam was known as Indochina by the French colonial rulers who occupied the territory from 1887 until the fall of France to the Nazis in 1940. Japan then occupied the region until its surrender at the close of World War II in 1945. From March to September 1945, the Viet Minh, led by revolutionary Ho Chi Minh, declared Vietnam's independence, which lasted only until France took back control of the territories that September. The French remained in power until 1954, resulting in the First Indochina War, which lasted from December 1946 until the Geneva Accord of 1954, effectively ending French rule and

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[86] David King Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* (New York: Villard Books, 2008), 92.

[87] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 92-118.

dividing Vietnam into two territories: North Vietnam, run by the communist revolutionaries who had defeated the French, and non-communist South Vietnam.[88]

In the years between the Geneva Accord and 1964 — during the height of the Cold War — successive United States administrations, concerned about the spread of communist ideas and the potential consequential empowerment of the Soviet Union, began providing economic aid and military support to South Vietnam in response to a growing communist insurgency in North Vietnam. By 1964, 23,000 military troops (euphemistically called "military advisors" by the U.S. government) were stationed in South Vietnam.[89]

In August 1964, the U.S. instigated a confrontation with North Vietnamese forces in the Gulf of Tonkin, and claimed that a second confrontation occurred two days later. This was later disproved as evidence surfaced that the U.S. government lied to justify going to war with Vietnam. At the time, however, reports stated that North Vietnam was to blame; as a result, the Johnson administration asked Congress to pass the "Gulf of Tonkin Resolution," authorizing the president to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attacks against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression" and essentially providing the legal foundation

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[88] David Carlton, "Vietnam War," *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics,* Oxford University Press, January 1, 2009, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199207800.001.0001/acref-9780199207800-e-1439. See also N.J. Young, "Vietnam War," *The Oxford International Encyclopedia of Peace*, Oxford University Press, 2010, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195334685.001.0001/acref-9780195334685-e-746.

[89] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 320.

for the official U.S. involvement in the war without the constitutionally required formal authorization from Congress.[90]

The resulting increase in American military involvement and body count, along with public questioning of the morality and objectives of the war, and immense fury about the draft, sparked global protest movements against the war, including mass demonstrations, teach-ins, and civil disobedience. Anger over the draft was a particularly festering sore; by 1967, nearly 50 percent of enlisted men were draftees, and by 1969, draftees amounted to over 88 percent of the army infantry in Vietnam and 50 percent of combat deaths.[91] By late 1969, even college students could no longer count on an automatic deferment from military service, although relatively few were called up.[92]

The socio-political context created by the Vietnam War and resulting antiwar movement (along with the concurrent Civil Rights movement) resulted in a new wave of protest music, not entirely unlike the protest music of the 1930s and 1940s regarding the labor movement and the anti-war movement of World War II, in both of which Seeger had played a prominent role. Unlike his support for the anti-Franco Republican forces of the Spanish Civil War and his

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[90] George C. Herring, "Gulf of Tonkin Resolution," In *The Oxford Companion to United States History,* Oxford University Press, 2001, https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195082098.001.0001/acref-9780195082098-e-0660.

[91] J. Chambers Whiteclay, "Vietnam War (1960–1975)," *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*, Oxford University Press, 2000, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195071986.001.0001/acref-9780195071986-e-0967.

[92] David Card and Thomas Lemieux, "Going to College to Avoid the Draft: The Unintended Legacy of the Vietnam War," *The American Economic Review* 91, no. 2 (May 2001): 97-102, http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0002-8282%28200105%2991%3A2%3C97%3AGTCTAT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-4

eventual support of World War II in the name of anti-fascism, Seeger, like many, wholeheartedly opposed the Vietnam War, largely in part due to its lack of moral justification. He became consumed with the ethical concerns surrounding the war, filling his journals with political musings, worries, and newspaper clippings, including one discussing an incident in which the U.S. Air Force accidentally dropped a cluster bomb on a school in South Vietnam; as compensation, military lawyers paid each family $33 for each child killed.[93]

At this stage in Seeger's musical career (for lack a better word, as he did not see it as a career, per se), while he felt he had accomplished his most important musical task — sharing American folk music, particularly that of Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly with the younger generations — he found himself unable to remain silent, and once again took to protesting and expressing the nation's collective anguish over the injustices of the Vietnam War in the way he knew best: through music.

By the mid-1960s, Seeger began performing more and more outside the college concert circuit to which he became accustomed after his blacklisting, including the 1966 Newport Folk Festival, (with an audience of over 12,000 people), and international tours to Europe, East Germany, Russia, Japan, and the Middle East. His performances, along with their accompanying political messages, resonated with audiences around the world. Many of Seeger's antiwar ballads from his time with The Almanacs were still relevant, such as "Get Out and Stay Out of the War," and his new songs, such as "If You Love Your Uncle Sam, Bring 'Em Home," and "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy," were topically aligned with the political and ethical concerns over the war,

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[93] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 317.

including the draft and the use of napalm.[94] Other original songs that became popular during this time because of their direct or indirect antiwar messages were “Where Have All The Flowers Gone,” “Bring Them Home,” “The Torn Flag,” as well as his renditions of traditional folkloric songs such as the African American spiritual “Down By The Riverside.”

In Seeger’s personal conception of an autobiography — a songbook filled with stories, guitar tablature, lyrics, song histories, and personal thoughts — he lists twenty-one songs (some originals, some traditional tunes, and some written by others) as being specifically about the Vietnam War and as songs that he performed as a direct response to the war.[95] Notwithstanding his deep revulsion to the military conflict taking place, he never made it the exclusive focus of his concerts:

> Keep in mind, I’d only sing one or two, at the most three of these songs during a concert, even at the height (depth!) of the Vietnam War. I’d try to touch base with a variety of people in the audience, always singing “something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue”… And not forgetting something funny. What a stupid race we are. The gods must be laughing. We have the know-how to provide education and other necessities for every soul on Earth. Instead we waste most of it fighting.[96]

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[94] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 325-345.

[95] The songs are as follows: “King Henry,” “Bring ‘Em Home,” “Waist Deep In The Big Muddy,” “False From True,” “The Calendar,” “I Have A Rendezvous with Death,” “The Torn Flag,” “All My Children of the Sun,” “Two Against Three,” “Give Peace A Chance,” “Lisa Kalvelage,” “Last Train to Nuremberg,” “Teacher Uncle Ho,” “Our Generation,” “If a Revolution Comes to My Country,” “Snow, Snow,” “Where Have All The Flowers Gone,” "Koloda Duda,” “The Long March,” “My Body Was Made For Nurturing.” Interestingly enough, for whatever reason, Seeger does not include “Study War No More (Down By The Riverside)” in this list, regardless of using it throughout his career, especially during the Vietnam War era, as a protest song.

[96] Pete Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone: A Singer’s Stories, Songs, Seeds, Robberies*, (Pennsylvania: Sing Out Corporation, 1993), 165.

As noted above, Seeger composed at least eighty-two songs expressing antiwar sentiments, but three stand out as providing a particular insight into the songwriter's musical, philosophical, and performative concerns over the course of his career: the traditional folk song "Down By The Riverside," and two original songs, "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy," and "Where Have All The Flowers Gone."

"Down By The Riverside"

"Down By The Riverside" is a traditional American folk song based on an African-American spiritual thought to be from the Civil War era. The lyrics are based on a biblical text from the book of Isaiah 2:4: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." It was probably in circulation in one of many forms long before its first publication date of 1918. It was first recorded in 1920 by the Fisk University Jubilee Singers, an a cappella ensemble founded in 1871 comprised of African-American students of Fisk University that is credited with igniting intense public interest in African American spirituals among wider audiences, especially white audiences in the Northeastern United States.[97]

Since then the song has been recorded and/or performed by a myriad of artists - Rosetta Tharpe, Bill Haley, Bing Crosby, Big Bill Broonzy, Elvis Presley, Snooks Eaglin, Etta James, Louis Armstrong, Christian McBride, Peter, Paul, and Mary, Van Morrison, among others. It is

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[97] Sandra Jean Graham, "Jubilee Singers," *Grove Music Online,* October 2013, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002249936.

unknown where or from whom Seeger learned this song, but because of his professional relationship and personal friendship with Leadbelly, it is possible that Seeger learned the tune from him, as he had so many other traditional African-American folk tunes.[98] Leadbelly's first published recording of the song, with the title "Ain't Gonna Study War No More," is likely from around 1940. The song was never released on an album,[99] like a large majority of Leadbelly's recordings, but instead was most likely a field recording made by John Lomax, or his son Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress between 1935 and 1940.[100] Several online sources list the recording as being made in 1940.[101]

Seeger followed Leadbelly's lead when he entitled his song "Study War No More (Down By The Riverside)," choosing to deemphasize the religious aspect and instead emphasize the pacifist message found in the text. Seeger undoubtedly played a prominent role in the song's political popularization; it had a recurring place in his set list at college campus concerts throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, as well as in his national and international concerts in countries such as Australia, Russia, Israel, and East Germany. In addition, he released recordings

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[98] Pete Seeger ―Leadbelly ‖ Liner notes for *Pete Seeger Sings Leadbelly* by Pete Seeger. Folkways Records, FTS 31022, https://folkways-media.si.edu/liner_notes/folkways/FW31022.pdf.

[99] Leadbelly only had one commercial record release during his lifetime, *The Midnight Special and Other Southern Prison Songs,* which was produced by Alan Lomax and released on Victor Records in 1941. All other albums are comprised of recordings by the Lomaxes for The Library of Congress, which were commercially released between 1991-1995. Leadbelly did record extensively for Moses Asch of Folkways Records between 1941-1947, but these recordings were only released by Smithsonian Folkways between 1989 and 2015.

[100] Paul Oliver, "Leadbelly," *Grove Music Online,* 2001, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000016177.

[101] "Ain't Gonna Study War No More," accessed November 13, 2020, https://secondhandsongs.com/performance/503689.

of this one song on no fewer than seven albums over a twelve-year period: *Love Songs for Friends and Foes* (1956), *Pete Seeger and Sonny Terry at Carnegie Hall* (1958), *Pete Seeger with Big Bill Broonzy* (1959) *Sing Out with Pete!* (1961), *Toward World Understanding With Song* (1966), *Waist Deep In The Big Muddy and Other Love Songs* (1967), and *Wimoweh and Other Songs of Freedom and Protest* (1968).

In the 1960s, the relevance of the song to the then-current political situation resulted in its popular revival as an anti-Vietnam war anthem, especially among white college students.[102] Seeger was not the only performer to use this song as a political statement. Protestors can be heard singing the song in the background of an interview with Martin Luther King, Jr., who is expressing his own anti-war sentiments.[103] In 1966, a recording of the song was released on an album by Roger Dewey entitled *Ballad of the Green Berets & Songs of America's Fighting Men*.[104] The song would be included in Elizabeth Morgan's "Socialist and Labor Songs of the 1930s" songbook (written 1958).[105] Electronic musician Moby released his adaptation of the song with politicized narrative voiceover commentary in 2009.[106]

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[102] Daniel R Katz, *Why Freedom Matters: Celebrating the Declaration of Independence in Two Centuries of Prose, Poetry and Song,* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2003), 155.

[103] "MLK: Study War No More" from The Martin Luther King Junior Center for Nonviolent Social Change, posted on March 14, 2016, video, 10:11, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyyl31BSjoY.

[104] "Roger Dewey - Ain't Gonna Study War No More" from *Ballad of the Green Berets & Songs of America's Fighting Men* from Vietnam War Song Project, song released in 1966, posted on July 8, 2020, video, 2:07. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-RAmaC69Uw

[105] Elizabeth Morgan, *Socialist and Labor Songs: An International Revolutionary Songbook*, (Oakland, California: PM Press & Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1997), 38.

[106] Moby, "Study War," recorded 2008-2009, track #4 on *Wait For Me,* Mute Records, 2009, CD.

Three examples of archival footage from the 1960s show Seeger performing for large audiences, two of which were international (Sweden and Australia). Seeger doubtlessly performed and taught this song in the same way at numerous other concerts that were not recorded and uploaded to YouTube; it was a staple of his prolific performing career. Seeger's manner of performing this song is particularly noteworthy. As is common in the folk tradition, Seeger would often improvise his own verses to the song, thus strengthening the anti-war, pacifist, and political message of the text. Some examples include: "gonna lay down these atom bombs," and "gonna lay down my GE stock…[won't] live off war no more." Occasionally, Seeger would sing "gonna" and then stop playing and singing, creating a moment of suspense and allowing the audience to fill in the unspoken (and perhaps vulgar) words, and then continue "those Congressional hawks…[won't] vote for war no more." As he did in many of his performances, Seeger engaged the audience by teaching them the song, demonstrating his commitment to sharing what he considered to be important pieces of America's musical heritage with others with the goal of making folk music a vital force in their lives.[107]

Seeger also used this song to create educational moments for his audiences, acknowledging the tune's roots as an African-American spiritual and thus assuring that his audience knew he was not the composer, but only a performer in a long tradition. His humility in the face of this tradition is evident in his statement at one performance in Melbourne, Australia. As he tunes his banjo and begins to play, he continues, "I wasn't born to this music, but I fell in love with it and I try my best to sing it even though I know I don't sing it exactly right. These are

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[107] "Down By The Riverside - Pete Seeger, 7/24/1963," *Live in Australia*, posted on May 18, 2014, video, 8:43, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYe-bLaqhhY.

the Negro gospel songs and spirituals that have that solid beat…Some of them are very old." Seeger then slips into singing, quoting lyrics from notable spirituals, such as "Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child," "When I Get To Heaven," "Go Down Moses," and "Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen." Before transitioning into "Study War No More," he claims that the song could be a "theme for the whole world," making the case for what he told the audience at the beginning of the evening, that gospel spirituals are "so great that [they] must be able to cross any boundary."[108]

After singing a single stanza, he stops, telling the audience that, unlike certain folk traditions like Irish folk music, these types of songs need to be harmonized, and that no two people need to sing the exact same melody, with "everybody weaving in and out [like a Dixieland jazz band] and going under in every which way." He proceeds to divide the audience into sections and then teaches each section a harmony part. Over the course of about eight minutes, Seeger succeeds in sharing his message, encouraging the audience not only to participate in the music making while also emphasizing the potential political power of the song. He managed to teach an auditorium full of people — an non-American audience — a traditional folk song, all the while sharing its historical background and the defining musical aspects of the genre; he also provided the audience with several titles of other African-American spirituals should they wish to explore the repertory further. But then he turns around and makes the song universal, labeling it a sort of "theme of the world," then stating "don't you wish all of the

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[108] "Down By The Riverside - Pete Seeger," video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYe-bLaqhhY.

generals could be here to hear us singing this…from Melbourne, all the way to Sydney…all the way to Washington, Moscow, Peking, Tokyo, everywhere."[109]

This sort of approach to performing was not a one-time event; a large majority of Seeger's performances were purposefully modeled in this manner. He aimed to get audiences to sing along, not only to share the American folk tradition with them, to engage them politically, or to even provide them with a means of musical protest, but to encourage their own musicality. Seeger once wrote that "the artist in ancient times inspired, entertained, educated his fellow citizens. Modern artists have an additional responsibility — to encourage others to be artists. Why? Because technology is going to destroy the human soul unless we realize that each of us must in some way be a creator as well as a spectator or consumer." His biographer Dunaway summarizes Seeger's intentions another way: "Make your own music, write your own books, [Seeger] fairly shouted, if you would keep your soul."[110]

"Where Have All The Flowers Gone"

It is possible that "Where Have All The Flowers Gone" is Seeger's most popular and perhaps most influential song. Remarkably enough, Seeger's own recording of the song, released on his 1960 album, *Rainbow Quest,* did not achieve notable popularity; it took efforts by other musical groups to make the song both well-known and commercially successful. The tune has been performed and recorded by a plethora of musicians in a wide spectrum of genres throughout

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[109] "Down By The Riverside - Pete Seeger," video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYe-bLaqhhY.

[110] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 420.

the years and around the globe; indeed the text has been translated into over 30 languages.[111] Although it served as a gentle antiwar anthem, it was also played at the Arlington Cemetery funeral for John Paul Vann, the first civilian to lead military forces into battle.[112] His service in Vietnam earned him both the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Distinguished Service Cross.[113] Seeger recounts the story behind the song:

> [In] October 1955, I was sitting in a plane bound for Ohio to sing for the students at Oberlin College. Found in my pocket three lines copied a year before when reading (in translation) *And Quiet Flows the Don,* the Soviet novel by Mikhail Cholokhov. He describes the Cossack soldiers singing as they galloped off to join the Tsar's army: *"Where are the flowers? The girls have plucked them. Where are the girls? They've taken husbands. Where are the men? They're all in the army."* Something clicked in my subconscious. I remember the phrase I'd thought of a couple years earlier, "long time passing." A singable three words. Then I added the hand wringer's perennial complaint, "When will they ever learn?" Twenty minutes later it was completed, that evening I taped it to a mike and tried it out. Three verses.[114]

Seeger, immersed in the traditions of American folklore, borrowed the melody from an Irish-American lumberjack song that had originated in the Adirondacks and slowed it down

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[111] "Where Have All The Flowers Gone" boasts a long list of recordings from artists including, but not limited to: The Kingston Trio, Peter, Paul and Mary, Kronos Quartet and Friends, Marlene Dieterich (in German), Dalida (in French), Jaap Fisher (in Dutch), The Searchers, Bobby Darin, Bill Frisell, Roy Orbison, Vera Lynn, Frank Valli and The Four Seasons, Lars Lönndahl (in Swedish), Joan Baez, Johnny Rivers, Harry Belafonte, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, Wes Montgomery, Rufus Harley (on the bagpipes), Earth, Wind and Fire, Richie Havens, Bernie Sanders (the politician), Oleg Nesterov (in Russian), Green Day, Olivia Newton-John, Sława Przybylska (in Polish), Zlatni Dukati (in Croatian), Erzsi Kovács (in Hungarian), The Fureys, Kabir Suman (in Bengali).

[112] Robert Stone,"The Good Soldier and the Bad War: A Bright Shining Lie," *The Washington Post (1974-Current File),* September 18, 1988, https://search.proquest.com/docview/139357572?accountid=14509.

[113] Vann's life is documented in the Pulitzer-Prize-winning book by Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988).

[114] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 166.

significantly.[115] (See Figure 3.1.) As is clear from the transcription, this tune gave Seeger the melodic outline for the first three phrases of his song (see Figure 3.2). In 1955, he published the song in *Sing Out!* magazine, the publication dedicated to folk music created by Seeger, Alan Lomax, and Woody Guthrie in order to share the repertory with a wide audience. Later, Seeger, thanks to research by the English singer Bert Lloyd, discovered that the song the soldiers sang in the Cholokhov book was indeed an actual traditional Ukranian Cossack folk song, called "Kaloda-Duda."[116] So, not only did Seeger borrow a preexisting melody when writing the tune; he borrowed pre-existing lyrics as well.

To Seeger's dismay, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" did not seem to spark much interest after its publication and after about a year, Seeger stopped performing it, describing it as "one more not-too-successful attempt."[117] In spite of this, the song spread in the manner of a "living folk song," as a song that is adapted and changed as it is passed along by each person who performs it. When Joe Hickerson, leader of the Oberlin College Folksong Club, began playing it, he gave the song a slightly different rhythmic profile, starting phrases on offbeats (see Example 3.3, mm. 1, 5, and 9) and he added two of his own stanzas to it as well.[118] Eventually,

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[115] "Pete Seeger Interview - Pando Populus" from Pando Populus' Seizing the Alternative Conference, posted on June 9, 2015, video, 6:46, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOFnI1KGakE.

[116] Will Schmid, "Reflections on the Folk Movement: An Interview with Pete Seeger," *Music Educators Journal* 66, no. 6 (1980): 43, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3395807.

[117] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 165-166.

[118] Note: Seeger's version only had three stanzas based solely on the quote from Cholokhov's novel: 1) where have all the flowers gone, 2) where have all the young girls gone, and 3) where have all the young men gone. Hickerson added the following two stanzas: 4) where have all the soldiers gone, and 5) where have all the graveyards gone…covered with flowers, every one.

Peter, Paul, and Mary heard the tune in New York and added it to their own repertory, making slight changes to the melody (see Figure 3.3, mm. 3-4, 6, 13, and 15-16) and popularizing it within the folk scene of Greenwich Village. A year later, The Kingston Trio recorded a version, believing it to be an old traditional song. Once this news got back to Seeger, who was on very friendly terms with the members of the Kingston Trio, he called them to clear up the confusion. Regardless of the fact that Seeger had technically abandoned the copyright, having published it only in *Sing Out!*, the group apologized immediately, removed their names, and gave credit to Seeger, who officially copyrighted the song in 1961.

The version of the song that is most commonly heard today, and the one most commonly recorded includes Joe Hickerson's rhythmic profile and two extra verses, and Peter, Paul and Mary's version of the melody. This sort of evolution that "Where Have All The Flowers Gone" went through — and is still going through each time it is interpreted by a different artist —falls within the concept of a living folk song, discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Two. In the folk tradition, there is no expectation for songs for songs to be performed precisely the same way each time, for several reasons. First, the use of oral transmission generally allows for variations in a song's melody and accompaniment as song pass among musicians and down through generations. Second, it is commonplace for performer to improvise lyrics and to interpret the melody of a given song in any way that they please; indeed it is encouraged.

Seeger advocated and stressed the importance — and the tradition — of musical borrowing. In an 1980 interview, he comments on the role of borrowing, stating that one of the most important things that he learned from Woody Guthrie was "blending the old with the new in an almost unbroken seam." Seeger continues: "now, Beethoven also said 'I am joiner' in the

sense of a carpenter who joins planks together. I think that's the kind of songwriter I've been. I've borrowed a technique here and an idea there." He goes on to quote his father, Charles Seeger, who, in a letter to Pete, once described the inherent worth of borrowing in the folk tradition, which continued throughout the 20th century folk revivals, as such:

> When we speak of the revival of folk music, we must view it not alone as a dead repertoire but more importantly as a living process…Let us say that the folk is changing - and its songs with it…from the best materials available, whether old or new. Better than to lament the loss of ancient gold will be to try to understand its permutation into another metal…[119]

If "Where Have All The Flowers Gone" had not followed the tradition of a living folk song, Seeger might have filed it away with his other, less successful efforts. The Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul and Mary might never have recorded it, and it might have never become as beloved as it is today.

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[119] Schmid, "Reflections on a Folk Movement," 44.

Figure 3.1, lumberjack tune from which Seeger borrowed the melody for "Where Have All The Flowers"
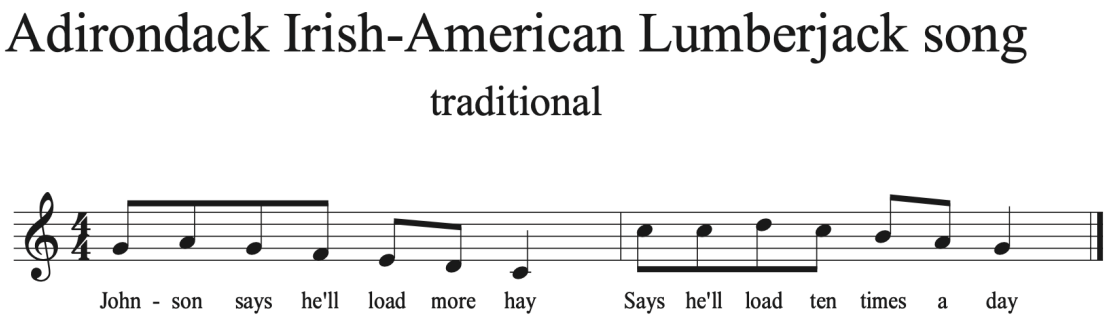


Figure 3.2, Seeger's original version of "Where Have All The Flowers Gone"
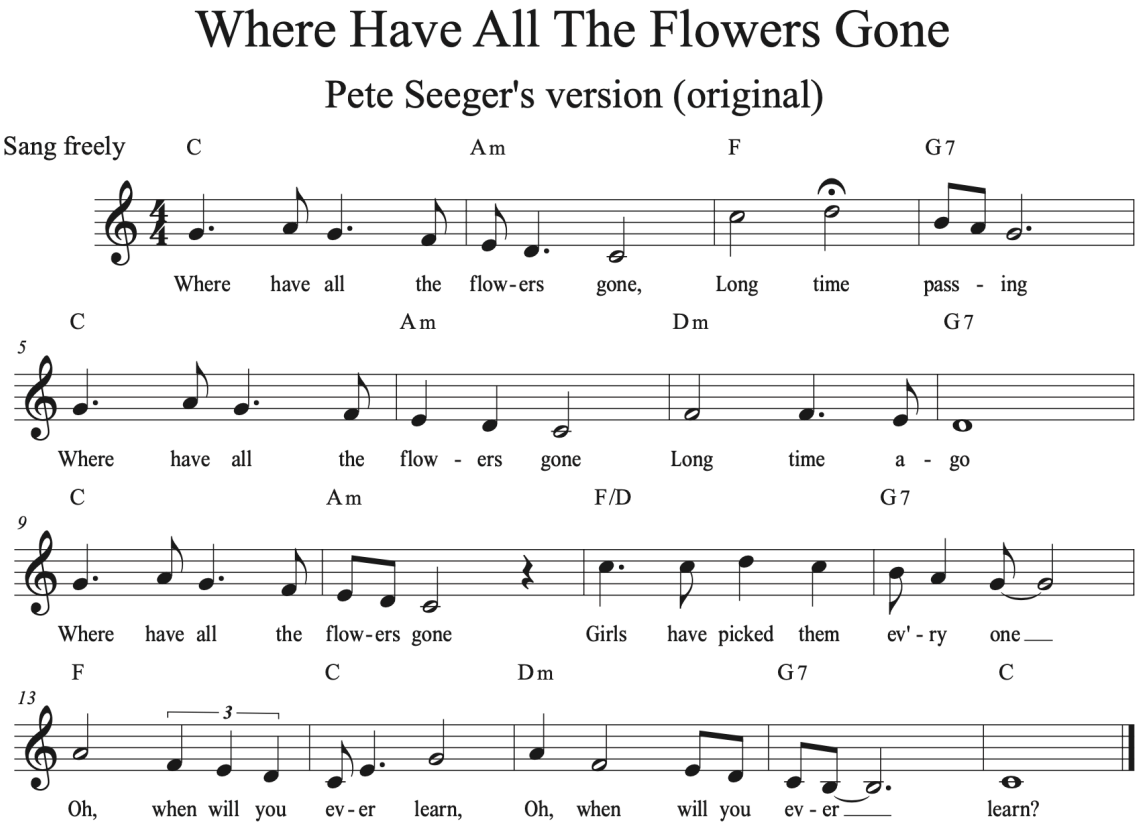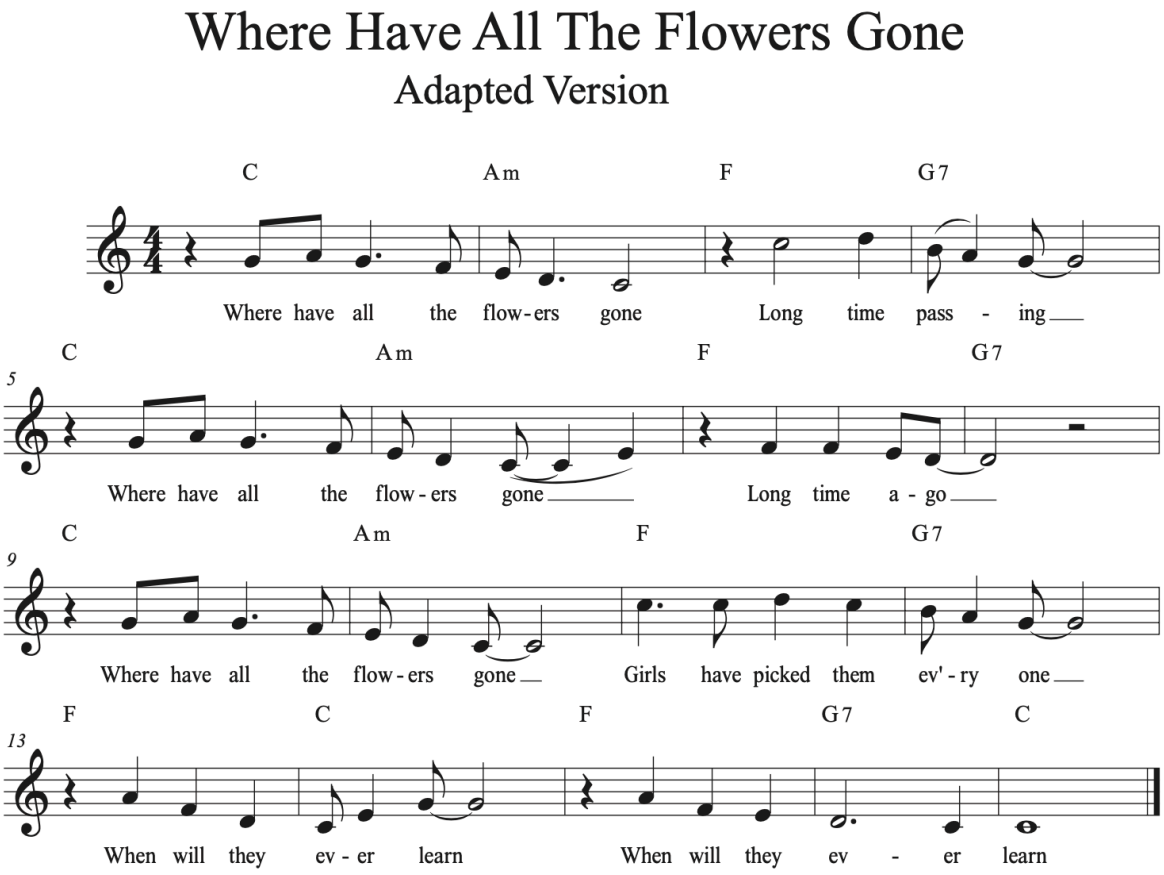


Figure 3.3, Adapted version of "Where Have All The Flowers Gone," including Joe Hickerson's changes to the rhythm and Peter, Paul and Mary's changes to the melody



"Waist Deep In The Big Muddy"

One of Seeger's most influential antiwar songs is "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy." The lyrics tell a story of a platoon in 1942 wading through a "big muddy" river. As the men continue, the water becomes deeper, and when they question whether they should turn back, the Captain repeatedly says to "push on" regardless. Eventually, the the captain drowns, and the other men

turn back to safety just in time. While Seeger was thinking specifically about the situation in Vietnam when writing this song, he drew on his experiences in the U.S. army during World War II, specifically a training exercise he participated in during boot camp in Louisiana, to craft the story. The song was intended to function as an allegory about the universal horror of armed conflict and thus be applicable in the context of another war**.** In fact, Bruce Springsteen revived both this song and another of Seeger's antiwar songs, "Bring 'Em Home" during the Iraq War.[120]

Although Seeger decided to make the song an allegory rather than refer specifically to the Vietnam War, he slips in one topical reference to current events within the following third stanza; "Nervous Nellie" was a commonly used criticism against those who were unsupportive of the Vietnam War.[121]

The Sergeant said, "Sir, with all this equipment,
No man will be able to swim."
"Sergeant, don't be a Nervous Nellie,"
The Captain said to him.
"All we need is a little determination;
Men, follow me, I'll lead on."

Unlike the ease with which "Where Have All The Flowers Gone" sprang to life, the songwriting process for "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy" took Seeger several weeks. In 1966, he was inspired by a newspaper photo of American troops in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam; the melody, rhythm and the lyrics for the last line of the song — "and the big fool said to push on" — came to him immediately. The song, in Seeger's words, "haunted" him until he finished it. He

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[120] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 313.

[121] Bob Herbert, "The Man Who Said No to War," *New York Times,* December 15, 2005, https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/15/opinion/the-man-who-said-no-to-war.html.

tentatively entitled it "General Fathead," but after completing the song, he settled on "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy."[122] Once the song was completed, he performed it everywhere he could, especially on college campuses, where it received an "explosive reaction."[123] After one particular concert at a college in the Midwest, Seeger stayed overnight at a professor's home. The professor told Seeger that, during his first class of the day after the concert, he had briskly announced to the students to open their books, to which a student responded, "and the big fool says to push on." The whole class, professor included, burst into laughter.[124]

Seeger considered this song to be a love song of sorts, titling the album it would be included on the following year *Waist Deep In The Big Muddy and Other Love Songs.* Clearly, he did not mean this in the traditional sense of a love song, a romantic declaration through music. In his autobiography, Seeger categorizes a variety of songs under the category of "love songs," most of which do not have romantic connotations, such as "My Rainbow Race," "Oh, Had I A Golden Thread," "Times A-Getting Hard, Boys." Seeger's definition of "love" was wide; as he explains, "I confess that I don't like to categorize songs closely. How do you separate love of home, country, kids, love of the…Old Forever…love song[s] for the earth?"[125] The "love songs" featured on *Waist Deep In The Big Muddy* correspondingly cover a wide variety of topics: antiwar protest songs about both World War II and Vietnam, labor rights anthems, romantic love

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[122] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 313.

[123] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 149.

[124] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 151.

[125] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone*, 82.

songs, gospel tunes, solo banjo tunes, songs with philosophical musings, and traditional Appalachian ballads.

Seeger viewed "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," and all his other protest songs as commentary on core issues that plagued humanity. To put the idea in the context of the album's title, *Waist Deep In The Big Muddy and Other Love Songs*, Seeger saw these issues as preventing people from being able to love one another as they should. Ingram claims that Seeger saw the Vietnam War as the "murderous product of the same military industrial complex that was responsible for polluting the Hudson River near his home."[126] For Seeger, protesting against the war was one of the many ways to protest against the many injustices society faced. At an event sponsored by Clearwater, the Seegers' non-profit organization founded to combat the environmental issues surrounding the pollution of the Hudson River (discussed in more depth in Chapter Four), one of the board members asked Seeger not to sing "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy," saying "We're singing about the water. Can't you stay away from all of the Vietnam stuff?" Seeger replied, stating that "all of these subjects are tied together. You know why we don't have money to clean up this river? Guess who takes a big bite out of the tax dollars?"[127] For Seeger, to be antiwar was also to be pro-environment; to support workers' rights, also to support civil rights - in his mind, these issues were one and the same.

Seeger's explanation did not, however, make "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy" any less controversial**.** In 1967, his friends, the comedians, Tommy and Dick Smothers, asked Seeger to appear on their weekly CBS national television show, *The Smothers Brothers*. The network's

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[126] David Ingram, "My Dirty Stream: Pete Seeger, American Folk Music, and Environmental Protest," *Popular Music and Society,* vol. 31, no. 1 (February 2008), 26.

[127] Ingram, *"*Dirty Stream," 26.

executives, initially hesitant to let a recently blacklisted "radical" performer appear on a highly-rated national show on their network, eventually gave the okay. Since his blacklisting by the HUAC committee in the mid-1950s, Seeger had virtually disappeared from the airwaves (with the exception of his own television show, *Rainbow Quest,* broadcast locally in New Jersey on public television). This would be Seeger's first appearance on commercial television in many years.

Seeger flew to Los Angeles to tape the show and had decided to perform a medley of songs related to war, starting with "The Riflemen of Bennington" (a traditional tune dating back to the American Revolution), "John Brown's Body" (another traditional song, this one from the Civil War, memorializing the abolitionist John Brown), "The D-Day Dodgers" (a song written in November 1944 by a member of the 78th Infantry Division of the British Army), and ending with his own "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy." When the show aired in the days following the taping, Seeger discovered that the network had cut out "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy" — in one moment, Seeger was holding a guitar and the next moment, he was holding a banjo. Network executives had obviously censored the song due to its "political tone."

Tommy and Dick Smothers, in the words of Seeger, "took to print media, stating "CBS is censoring our best jokes; they censored Seeger's best song."[128] The *New York Times* interviewed Seeger after the controversy, printing his response to CBS' censorship, in which he stated "it's strange that CBS should have objected to it. No song I've done in the last ten years has got the applause that this one has."[129] *Newsweek* came to Seeger's defense, calling it an "innocent

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[128] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 149.

[129] Ronald Cohen, "Big and Muddy," in *The Pete Seeger Reader,* ed. Ronald Cohen and James Capaldi, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 196.

lament," commenting on the irony that CBS would censor "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy," yet the company's record division, Columbia Records, not only signed Seeger to a record contract, but both agreed to the album's being titled "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy and Other Love Songs" and released the title song as a single.[130]

Yet the odds were against Seeger. Even though Columbia Records had signed Seeger to record *Waist Deep In The Big Muddy and Other Love Songs* (released in 1967), prior to his appearance on *The Smothers Brothers* show, and even as Seeger's social status had shifted from "radical, blacklisted communist" to songwriter of the massive hits "Turn, Turn, Turn" and "Where Have All The Flowers Gone," it was not enough to move sales of the album. Granted, Columbia Records did very little to promote the record.[131] A local distributor for Columbia Records once told Seeger that his records never left the shelves. He noted that his boss, upon listening to "Waist Deep In the Big Muddy," exploded, stating that "those guys in New York must be nuts to think I can sell a record like this."[132]

After considerable public pressure, CBS reversed its decision, allowing Seeger to perform on the show in January 1968. According to Seeger, seven million viewers saw it and only one station in Detroit deleted the song. Seeger claims that this was "the one time in my entire life I really wished I had been able to properly promote a song and get it heard by the

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[130] Cohen, "Big and Muddy," 196.

[131] Cohen, "Big and Muddy," 195.

[132] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 150.

whole country. It could have saved lives."[133] In 1983, Seeger wrote a letter commenting on the Smothers Brothers controversy:

> Most of my life I have assumed that the kind of songs I sing would not normally get played on the airwaves. I pointed to examples like Woody Guthrie's song, This Land Is Your Land, to show that they don't have to get played on the airwaves. If it's a real good song, it will get spread around anyway. But in 1967, I wrote what I thought was a real good song, and I knew there wasn't time for it to get around the country. People were being killed every day in Vietnam. I had a recording contract with Columbia Records at the time, and my friends there even agreed to put out a record of it, but the sales department just laughed at us both. The records stayed on the shelves and weren't even sent to the stores…Did the song do any good? No one can prove a damned thing. It took tens of millions of people speaking out before the Vietnam War was over. A defeat for the Pentagon, but a victory for the American people.[134]

As with many of Seeger's original songs, both the influence of traditional folk music and Seeger's command of the musical language is apparent in his playing and his singing style. This is to be expected, considering the extent of his exposure and dedication to the tradition. The guitar accompaniment, interspersing chordal accompaniment with a bass line, is reminiscent of Leadbelly, from whom he learned how to play the 12-string guitar. The lyrics are written in a manner similar to a ballad, telling its story stanza by stanza. However, it is not traditional folk music, nor could it be, but is best categorized somewhere on the spectrum of the revival folk music of the 1950s and the 1960s. Unlike the music groups such as Peter, Paul, and Mary, it is not as "slicked up" (a polite euphemism used by musicians in the American folk tradition for music that is far removed from the tradition and heavily influenced by commercial music). Yet it also lacks the rawness of Leadbelly or Guthrie, or even the subtle rawness that occasionally

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[133] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone*, 149.

[134] Cohen, "Big and Muddy," 196.

comes out of Seeger when he performs traditional tunes. Instead, "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy" sits somewhere between the two extremes.

Each of the songs discussed above played an important role in Seeger's career. In particular, "Where Have All The Flowers Gone," is arguably one of Seeger's best known songs, popularized through recordings made by popular folk-revival musicians of the era such as The Kingston Trio, Peter, Paul, and Mary, and Joan Baez. Several of these recordings reached the top of the Billboard charts, indicating both the song's popularity and its appeal to a wide and diverse audience. The tune has been performed and recorded by a plethora of musicians in a wide spectrum of genres throughout the years and around the globe.[135] In fact, the song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame for its "qualitative or historical significance."[136]

"Down By The Riverside" provides a prime example of Seeger's intimate knowledge of traditional American folk music and his quintessential approach to its performance. He thought of these works as "living folk song" and he shared this song with his audiences in the same way he performed his countless other renditions of traditional songs: he never played or sang them

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[135] "Where Have All The Flowers Gone" boasts a long list of recordings from artists including, but not limited to: The Kingston Trio, Peter, Paul and Mary, Kronos Quartet and Friends, Marlene Dieterich (in German), Dalida (in French), Jaap Fisher (in Dutch), The Searchers, Bobby Darin, Bill Frisell, Roy Orbison, Vera Lynn, Frank Valli and The Four Seasons, Lars Lönndahl (in Swedish), Joan Baez, Johnny Rivers, Harry Belafonte, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, Wes Montgomery, Rufus Harley (on the bagpipes), Earth, Wind and Fire, Richie Havens, Bernie Sanders (the politician), Oleg Nesterov (in Russian), Green Day, Olivia Newton-John, Sława Przybylska (in Polish), Zlatni Dukati (in Croatian), Erzsi Kovács (in Hungarian), The Fureys, Kabir Suman (in Bengali).

[136] Billboard Staff, "Grammy Hall Of Fame Adds 55 Albums, Songs." *Billboard*, January 04, 2013. https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/76796/grammy-hall-of-fame-adds-55-albums-songs/.

the same way twice. Between verses or as he was teaching vocal harmonies to the audience, he often threw in tidbits of historical information or spoke about the musical qualities that specific to that particular sub-genre of folk music (in this case, African-American gospel music).[137] Seeger used this tune as a sort of template for his antiwar messages, often improvising verses with topical messages and having the audience sing along.

Seeger's "Waist Deep in The Big Muddy" played a notable role during a pivotal time in Seeger's career: it was released during the height of protest against the Vietnam War and at the tail-end of the professional consequences he experienced due to his blacklisting after the HUAC hearing, resulting in several noteworthy instances of censorship that brought him attention from the media and from the public. The topical relevance of this song and its message was not limited to World War II or the Vietnam War; its message could be applied to any war, allowing for later musicians and protesters, such as Bruce Springsteen and Dick Gaughan, to create their own renditions with messages socially and politically relevant to their own times.

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[137] "Down By The Riverside - Pete Seeger, 7/24/1963," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYe-bLaqhhY.

Pete Seeger and the Environment

Prior to the 1960s, concerns about the environment in the U.S. were centered on the preservation of wilderness, supported through the efforts of organizations such as the Sierra Club (founded 1892). The concept of land conservation in the United States took root in the nineteenth century, spearheaded by the depictions of the American wilderness from writers and artists such as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and George Catlin, along with the work of naturalists such as John Muir, the founder of the Sierra Club. The first U.S. national park, Yellowstone Park in Wyoming and Montana, was established by an act of Congress in 1872, as a "public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people."[138] Over the following decades, U.S. administrations, particularly that of President Theodore Roosevelt, established a variety of of public lands, including national parks, national forests, national monuments, and national bird reserves, amounting to hundreds of millions of acres, all set aside in the name of conservation.[139] During the course of the twentieth century, the photographer Ansel Adams, who created stunning photographic depictions of the American West, and the

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[138] "Quick History of the National Park Service (U.S. National Park Service)," accessed November 16, 2020, https://www.nps.gov/articles/quick-nps-history.htm.

[139] "Theodore Roosevelt and Conservation" National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior), accessed November 16, 2020, https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/theodore-roosevelt-and-conservation.htm.

exciting voyages of underwater explorer Jacques Cousteau continued to inspire these conservation efforts.[140]

Significant change began to occur in the 1960s, starting with a burgeoning social awareness of several environmental issues, particularly pollution and its negative health effects and consequential environmental destruction. In 1962, Rachel Carson released the book *Silent Spring,* in which she combined scientific inquiry with environmental advocacy. She examined and documented the ill effects of synthetic pesticides, particularly DDT, concluding that the poisonous chemical was contaminating various biological systems that were crucial to human existence, such as food and water supply. Carson did not focus on solely synthetic pesticides; she also exposed connections of the pesticide industry with the federal government, in addition to linking the destruction of Earth with the callous disregard and arrogance of human society, which she hypothesized would potentially result in irreversible damage of the environment.[141]

Silent Spring received considerable public attention, both positive and negative, and marked a milestone: it functioned as a rallying call for the environmental movement.[142] The book was not the only catalyst for this new surge of social consciousness about environmentalism, but it was certainly one of the first and most influential. A new wave of media, including protest music, was created in response to the environmental injustices, including air and water pollution,

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[140] Adam Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance': The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (September 1, 2003): 525–554; Chris Barrata, ""Interdisciplinarity" Achieved: A Brief Look at Interdisciplinary Environmentalism in the 1960s," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 18, no. 3 (2016): 301-324, muse.jhu.edu/article/629983.

[141] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

[142] Barrata, "Interdisciplinary Environmentalism," 308-313.

pesticides, radiation poisoning, oil spills, and nuclear testing, and Seeger would be on the crest of this wave.

Pete Seeger read *Silent Spring* in 1963, and he recalls that it sparked a turning point in his life. Prior to 1963, he felt that his most important role was sharing American folk music, particularly the music of Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie, with younger generations. In his autobiography, he noted: "I could have kicked the bucket in the 1960s because my job was done. A lot of talented new songwriters came along to pick up where Woody and Leadbelly had left off."[143] Having accomplished what he originally set out to do, he was casting around for a new purpose. In a letter to friends, he explained that he was contemplating quitting music (which he had already threatened to do several times during his life, to no avail) and wrote "one of the weaknesses in my own work…is that I may have friends all around the world, but in my own neighborhood, I am in a very weak position and can be knocked down by anyone who wants to tell a few lies about me."[144] Although still involved in social issues such as opposing the war and advocating for civil rights, Seeger found new purpose in the environmental movement, one that inspired him in political and musical collaborations, writ both large and small.

As his biographer David Dunaway observes, environmentalism was, for Seeger, a cause "[close] to home, one he had understood instinctively as a child."[145] Seeger was a self-proclaimed "nature nut" as a youngster, but by the age of 16, he had decided to put that behind him, concluding that the main job was to help the "meek inherit the earth" so that they could put

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[143] Pete Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* (Pennsylvania: Sing Out Corporation, 1993), 201.

[144] David King Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* (New York: Villard Publishing), 351.

[145] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 280.

an end to the foolishness of the private profit system.[146] Yet, after reading *Silent Spring,* he realized that the earth was being turned into a "poisonous garbage dump," and that by the time the meek inherited the earth, it might no longer be worth inheriting.[147] With this realization, Seeger committed himself to environmental justice through both music and activism.

Seeger's view of environmental justice was intertwined with his other political views. In his mind, destruction of the planet is caused by capitalist exploitation, part of the same exploitation of the working class and of African-Americans. The "war machine" consumed natural resources and money that could instead be used to address social issues, such as pollution. In Seeger's opinion, environmental activism was not by any means a retreat from civil rights activism or from class politics. As he wrote,

> There is as much of a relation between the Clearwater[148] and socialism as there is in putting out a book on how to play the banjo. [Both] are part of a continual struggle to oppose the inhumanity of the technology which capitalism foists on people: ''Don't do anything creative yourself, just do your job, and let the machine do the rest for you.'' But you play a little music yourself, you start making up songs for yourself, and next thing you know, you'll be thinking for yourself. Maybe voting right.[149]

According to Jerome L. Rodnitsky, Seeger was the songwriter who most "consistently championed" environmental causes during the 1960s. Aside from the fact that environmental songs appear on most of his albums and his consistent environmental activism throughout his life, he should also be credited for turning Guthrie's song "This Land is Your Land" from a

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[146] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 201.

[147] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 203.

[148] Clearwater was a non-profit organization created by the Seegers to support cleanup of the Hudson River; Clearwater will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

[149] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 290.

strictly socialist political song into the ecological anthem of the 1960s.[150] Seeger was not, however, the first songwriter to write political environmental protest music; others were addressing environmental issues as early as 1953.[151] Malvina Reynolds, a Berkeley-based folk singer, composed several well-known protest songs touching on the environment: “Little Boxes,” (urban sprawl) and “What Have They Done With to the Rain,” (nuclear fallout), among others. Ernie Marrs, another folk singer who published songs in *Sing Out!,* wrote songs in response to Los Angeles’ smog — “Talking Smog Bowl” and “Smoggy Old Smog” — in 1959. In 1965, Tom Lehrer, a musician and satirist, released his song “Pollution,” which commented satirically on the severity of air and water pollution in the United States. Katie Lee, a folk singer and river raft guide from Colorado, wrote songs in response to the building of the Glen Canyon Dam in 1953; she would later release an album of songs on Folkways Records titled *Folk Songs of the Colorado River* (released in 1964).[152] These songwriters helped pave the way for Seeger’s environmental protest songs of the 1960s and especially for Seeger’s 1966 *God Bless the Grass:* the first album dedicated entirely to environmental protest music and admiration of nature.[153]

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[150] Jerome L. Rodnitzsky, "The Sixties between the Microgrooves: Using Folk and Protest Music to Understand American History, 1963-1973,” *Popular Music and Society* 23, no. 4 (Winter, 1999): 115, https://search.proquest.com/docview/208075643?accountid=14509.

[151] David Ingram, “My Dirty Stream: Pete Seeger, American Folk Music, and Environmental Protest,” *Popular Music and Society,* vol. 31, no. 1 (February 2008), 22.

[152] “Folk Songs of the Colorado River,” Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, accessed November 16, 2020. https://folkways.si.edu/katie-lee/folk-songs-of-the-colorado-river/american-folk/music/album/smithsonian.

[153] Seeger did write protest music about the use of nuclear weapons as early beginning in the 1940s, but these songs were not focused on the impact on the environment; he was more focused on the anti-war message.

Reynolds played a prominent, collaborative role in the creation of *God Bless The Grass;* not only did she contribute four songs to the album, including the title song, "God Bless The Grass," she also cowrote "From Way Up Here" with Seeger. She and Seeger clearly admired one another; she worked alongside Seeger at People's Song and published several songs in *Sing Out!* Seeger (along with other popular musicians of the day, such as Harry Belafonte and Joan Baez) recorded several of her tunes. Reynolds wrote over 500 politically engaged folk songs in the tradition of Seeger and Guthrie; her best known song is undoubtedly "Little Boxes" (1963), which Seeger helped to popularize.[154]

The songs on *God Bless The Grass* cover a variety of topics related to nature and environmental justice, including several traditional folk songs, a collection of songs from various folk singer-songwriters of the 1960s, and two songs written by Seeger, showing both his love for nature, as well as his concern over its destruction:[155]

- "The Power and the Glory" (Phil Ochs) is about Earth's natural beauty and the freedom it offers humanity, but warns that our land and its freedom is "troubled by men who have to hate."
- "Pretty Saro" (traditional) is a love song using imagery of untainted nature.
- "70 Miles" (Malvina Reynolds) makes reference to the seventy miles of the San Francisco Bay that are, in Reynolds' words, a "garbage dump."
- "The Faucets Are Dripping" (Malvina Reynolds) discusses the poor living conditions of impoverished neighborhoods, the landlords who do not bother fixing the problems, and

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[154] David K. Dunaway and Richard Carlin. "Reynolds [née Milder] Malvina," *Grove Music Online*, September 3, 2014, accessed October 29, 2020, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002267531. See also David Blake, ""Everybody Makes Up Folksongs": Pete Seeger's 1950s College Concerts and the Democratic Potential of Folk Music," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 12, no. 4 (Nov, 2018): 384.

[155] Ingram, "My Dirty Stream," 21-36.

the amount of water that is wasted due to landlords' failure of responsibility, connecting environmental issues to class politics.

- "Cement Octopus" (Malvina Reynolds) discusses the never-ending growth of the "cement octopus" or "the freeway misery."

- "God Bless The Grass" (Malvina Reynolds) focuses on the resilience of grass that "breaks through cement" as a metaphor for nature overcoming man, of good versus evil, of the "truth that fights towards the sun."

- "The Quiet Joys of Brotherhood" (Richard Fariña): praises the inherent beauty of nature and the brotherhood, or peace, that it holds, resulting in love being "lord of all". The last stanza discusses man's destruction of this beauty, love, and peace.

- "Coal Creek March" (Pete Steele) is a solo banjo tune written in reference to several incidents in Coal Creek, Tennessee, site of a 1891 miner's rebellion, protesting the use of prison labor, followed by two devastating mine explosions in 1901 and 1911 that killed over 200 miners.[156]

- "The Girl I Left Behind" (traditional English ballad) is solo banjo tune. (It is unclear why Seeger decided to include this song on the album.)

- "I Have A Rabbit" (P. Eliran) is a children's song about rabbits.

- "The People Are Scratching" (Ernie Marrs, Harold Martin, Pete Seeger) focuses on the disastrous effects caused by the use of pesticides and animal poison.

- "Coyote, My Little Brother" (Peter La Farge) is about the destruction of the earth caused by humans and modern society.

- "Preserven El Parque Elysian" (M. Kilian) tells the story of Chavez Ravine, the low-income, ethnic neighborhood established in a bucolic area in the hills near Los Angeles, from which over 300 acres of land were seized by the city. Their stated intent was to build public housing; instead, they sold the land to the owner of the Dodgers baseball team, who then built Dodgers Stadium on the land.[157]

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[156] Ed Kahn, Liner notes for *Banjo Tunes and Songs* by Pete Steele, Folkways Records, FS 3828: https://folkways.si.edu/pete-steele/banjo-tunes-and-songs/american-folk-old-time/music/album/smithsonian

[157] Glen Creason - et al., "CityDig: The Utopia of Elysian Park Before Dodger Stadium," *Los Angeles Magazine*, March 28, 2019, https://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/citydig-the-utopia-of-elysian-park-before-dodger-stadium/.

- "My Dirty Stream (The Hudson River Song)" (Pete Seeger) describes the Hudson River, near Seeger's home in New York and contrasts the river's natural beauty with the constant stream of pollution.
- "Johnny Riley" (traditional English ballad): like "Pretty Saro," is a love song using imagery of nature.
- "Barbara Allen" (traditional English ballad) is another love song including imagery of nature.[158]
- "From Way Up Here" (Malvina Reynolds and Pete Seeger) is a love song to the earth, written from the perspective of viewing Earth from space.
- "My Land Is A Good Land" (Eric Anderson) is another love song to the earth.

The album was released as a part of Seeger's recording contract with Columbia Records during the 1960s; however, the album was out of print by the 1970s. In the liner notes of the Folkways reissue of the album in 1987, Seeger explains that while some people at Columbia thought he would be able to make records that sold, the sales department concluded otherwise, and quickly took the album out of print. He continues:

> I hope that many of you who listen to this, will try out your vocal chords [*sic*, cords] on them, and see how they can echo in the expectant eighties, the none-too-sure nineties, and who knows, the twinkling twenty-first (century).[159]

On both the original album release and the reissue, the liner notes include what Seeger labeled as "interesting words" from Justice William O. Douglas of the U.S. Supreme Court, discussing the importance of conservation and wilderness (see the Appendix).

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[158] See Chapter One for a case study of "Barbara Allen."

[159] Pete Seeger, Liner notes for *God Bless The Grass* by Pete Seeger, Folkways Records, FSS 37232, https://folkways-media.si.edu/liner_notes/folkways/FW37232.pdf.

As noted previously, Seeger was quite familiar with musical collaborative processes. Much of his youth and early adulthood was spent learning various traditions from other musicians and performing with them, both of which continued throughout his life. Additionally, Seeger's work with The Almanac Singers and The Weavers was inherently collaborative, both in the songwriting process and in the performances. Throughout his career, as a wholehearted supporter of musical borrowing and the tradition of the living folk song, Seeger performed and recorded songs written by others without a second thought. However, *God Bless The Grass* is particularly noteworthy in that it focuses a great deal of attention on songs written by Seeger's peers in the folk revival movement, rather than on his own original songs. The album provides a particularly important example of Seeger's collaborative process in working with other living musicians. Indeed, of the three songs that carry Seeger's name on this album, two are collaborations between Seeger and other songwriters. The third, which Seeger wrote on his own, led to political collaborations within his community, and eventually, would lead to a second collaborative album of songs dedicated to the same subject, the Hudson River.[160]

"The People are Scratching"

"The People Are Scratching" was written by Seeger, Ernie Marrs, and Harold Martin in 1962.[161] Marrs had written Seeger a letter asking him to collaborate with him on this song. The lyrics seem to respond directly to *Silent Spring,* for they warn of the disastrous consequences of

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[160] Pete Seeger and Ed Renehan, *Fifty Sail on Newburgh Bay*, Folkways Records, 1976, Vinyl.

[161] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 204.

pesticide use and human interference with ecological systems. The song lays out a chain of disastrous events, all due to the decision of the town's local farmers to poison the local rabbit population. This "chain" unfolds as follows. A harsh winter kills the plants, causing the rabbits to eat the bark off of the trees. Concerned about the trees and their crops, the farmers decide to poison the rabbits, which in turn, poisons the dogs who eat the rabbits. The farmers, unconcerned about this consequence, say "we'll poison those rabbits 'til the last dog is dead." The poisoned rabbits also poison the hawks and the owls, resulting in the "field mice that the hawks used to chase multiplying all over the place." When the fields are barren due to the overpopulation of mice, the mice move into town, where the city folk took the farmer's advice and poison the mice, resulting in the local cats eating the poisoned mice. The song ends with a warning and a prophecy: the dogs and cats will all die soon, the fleas will live on people instead of animals, and humans will pay more to kill the animals instead of letting them survive and sharing the bounty of the earth with them.

"The People Are Scratching" is written in the tradition of the folk ballad, meaning the lyrics recount a story, historical event, or legend — real or imaginative — in verse form, typically with a rhyming structure, commonly ABCB,[162] or, in the case of "The People are Scratching," a series of AABB stanzas, each followed by a recurring two-verse rhyming refrain: "Now the people are scratching all over the street/Because the rabbits had nothing to eat." Songs written in traditional ballad form were quite common in the folk revival of the twentieth century, the form being considerably re-popularized by Guthrie and Seeger during the first half of the

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[162] "Traditional Ballads: The Library of Congress Celebrates the Songs of America," The Library of Congress, accessed November 16, 2020, https://www.loc.gov/collections/songs-of-america/articles-and-essays/musical-styles/traditional-and-ethnic/traditional-ballads/.

century. Well-known traditional ballads include the likes of the aforementioned "Barbara Allen" and "Come Ye Fair and Tender Ladies," as well as "Casey Jones," and "John Henry." Seeger was deeply familiar with the tradition and released several collections of ballads, of both British and American origin: *America's Favorite Ballads, vol. 1-5* (1957-1962), *Frontier Ballads* (1954), *Broadside Ballads vol. 1-2* (1963), *American Industrial Ballads,* (rereleased in 1992) and *Ballads of Black America* (1972). Seeger's familiarity with the tradition of the ballad undoubtedly influenced the writing process of "The People are Scratching."

The tune itself is simple and stepwise, beginning in minor, transitioning to the relative major for the third verse of the stanza. The slight sense of anxiety in the lyrics is communicated by the rising range of the melody, culminating in a raised seventh degree in the fourth line of the stanza, which pushes the tune back into the minor mode. The highest point of the melody is reached at the repetition, in the refrain, of the word "scratching." The melody then slowly drops down to the tonic pitch an octave and a third below. Seeger's singing style emphasizes words over rich vocal tone; the text is delivered with utmost clarity so that the listener can follow the story. The simplicity of the melody, its constant repetition, and the recurring refrain make the song easily learnable and singable, qualities that fit right into the "living" tradition that Seeger wanted to pass on.

Seeger chooses to accompany "The People are Scratching" with simple harmonies on the banjo. He provides a short introduction, as well as a brief interlude that recurs after the refrain to introduce all the subsequent stanzas. The interlude is repeated twice before both the penultimate and the last stanza. The instrumental introduction and interlude both feature melodic lines similar to the melody of the song, an arrangement technique which is found in many of Seeger's

renditions of traditional ballads, including recordings such as “Barbara Allen,” “House of the Rising Sun,” “John Henry," “Black Girl,” and “St. James Hospital.” This accompaniment technique is by no means unique to Seeger, as it is found throughout the American folk tradition.

“From Way Up Here”

Part of Seeger’s collaborative work with Malvina Reynolds on *God Bless The Grass* includes the song which they cowrote together, “From Way Up Here.” Reynolds’ biography shares several similarities with that of Seeger. Reynolds was blacklisted due to her leftist political involvement. She published songs alongside Seeger in *Sing Out!* Magazine and remained politically active throughout her career, focusing on writing protest music about a variety of subjects, primarily the environment, women’s rights, technology, and opposition to the war. Dunaway comments that her strengths as a songwriter is found in her lyrics, which “range from ironic, witty satire to evocative, lyrical statements about the future of humanity.”[163] Reynolds mined the evocative, lyrical strain in the lyrics to “From Way Up Here,” for which Seeger wrote the music.

The song begins from the perspective of someone admiring Earth from space.[164] “From way up here / the Earth looks very small / It’s just a little ball of rock and sea and sand / No bigger than my hand.” These lyrics function as a refrain that recurs (with variations in the second line) at the beginning of the second stanza, and in a transformed version at the beginning of the

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[163] Dunaway and Carlin, "Reynolds [née Milder], Malvina,” *Grove Music Online.* https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002267531.

[164] It is worth noting that “From Way Up Here” was written before Apollo astronauts took the first photograph of Earth from space in 1968.

third stanza (From way up here / The earth is just a ball / A precious little ball / So small, so beautiful and dear). The latter variation then closes the song. The song also has two stanzas with different music. The message of both is the same: since humans have so little time on this earth, one would think they would find a way to get along and "to fill their sunlit days with song."

The refrain melody is the most important element of the tune, as it frames and punctuates the song. The refrain begins by outlining an upward leap of a minor sixth—to mirror the "way up" in the lyrics—followed by a minor third down, but continues with stepwise motion typical of folk songs. Seeger's performance aims to drive home the main points by taking the song out of strict meter in the second and third stanzas as he wonders why human beings cannot find a better way to get along and to use their time. The wistfulness and nostalgia of the song is communicated through the slow tempo, the free rhythm, and through the use of whistling as well. Seeger whistles after the end of the second stanza, after the refrain at the beginning of the third stanza, after the end of the third stanza, and after the final refrain; it is as if his feelings go beyond what can be expressed in words. The song ends with the guitar echoing the opening upward leap of a minor sixth followed by the downward minor third.

Seeger performs the song on his 12-string guitar with an accompaniment technique that is heavily influenced by Leadbelly (who also played 12-string guitar), featuring a bass line interspersed between the chordal accompaniment. The inclusion of dominant seventh chords and the inclusion of A major chords in a song whose overall tonality is largely A minor (through the use of both the natural third and lowered third scale degrees) are equally influenced by Leadbelly's approach to playing the blues as heard in Leadbelly recordings, particularly those such as "Black Girl (Where Did You Sleep Last Night)."

The harmonic progression is relatively complex in comparison to many traditional folk songs; in fact, many of Seeger's original songs, demonstrate a fairly advanced conception of harmony, striking a balance between the harmonic and melodic language inherent to traditional Anglo-American folk music combined with the harmonic language of the African-American folk music, particularly the blues.

While it has been argued that Anglo-American folk songs, the tradition after which most of Seeger's original songs are modeled, demonstrate modal characteristics, harmonically speaking, it is uncommon to feature chords from outside the given key signature. "From Way Up Here," in the key of A minor, features harmonies that, when viewed from a more traditional analytical perspective, would be labeled as non-diatonic chords, including secondary dominants (V7/IV), inclusion of both IV7 and V7 in addition to also including IV minor and V minor. However, both IV7, V7, and V7/IV (or I7, when analyzing from the perspective of the blues) are commonly found in African-American folk traditions. The result is a masterful blend of harmonic structures from two differing traditions. A harmonic and melodic transcription and analysis of "From Way Up Here" is shown below:

Figure 4.1, Intro and A section of "From Way Up Here"

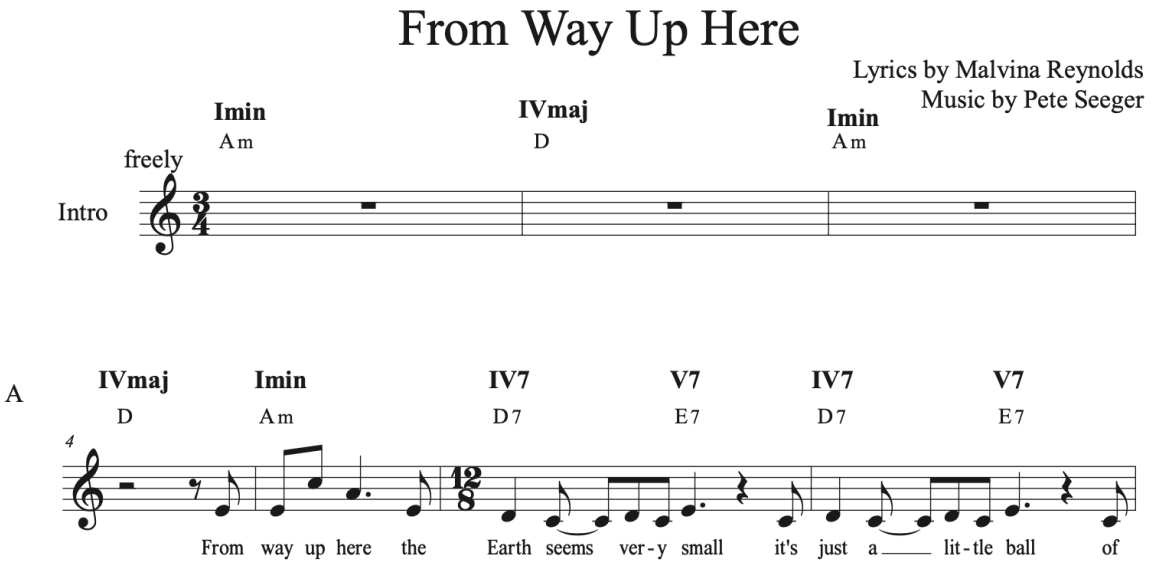


Figure 4.2, B section of "From Way Up Here"

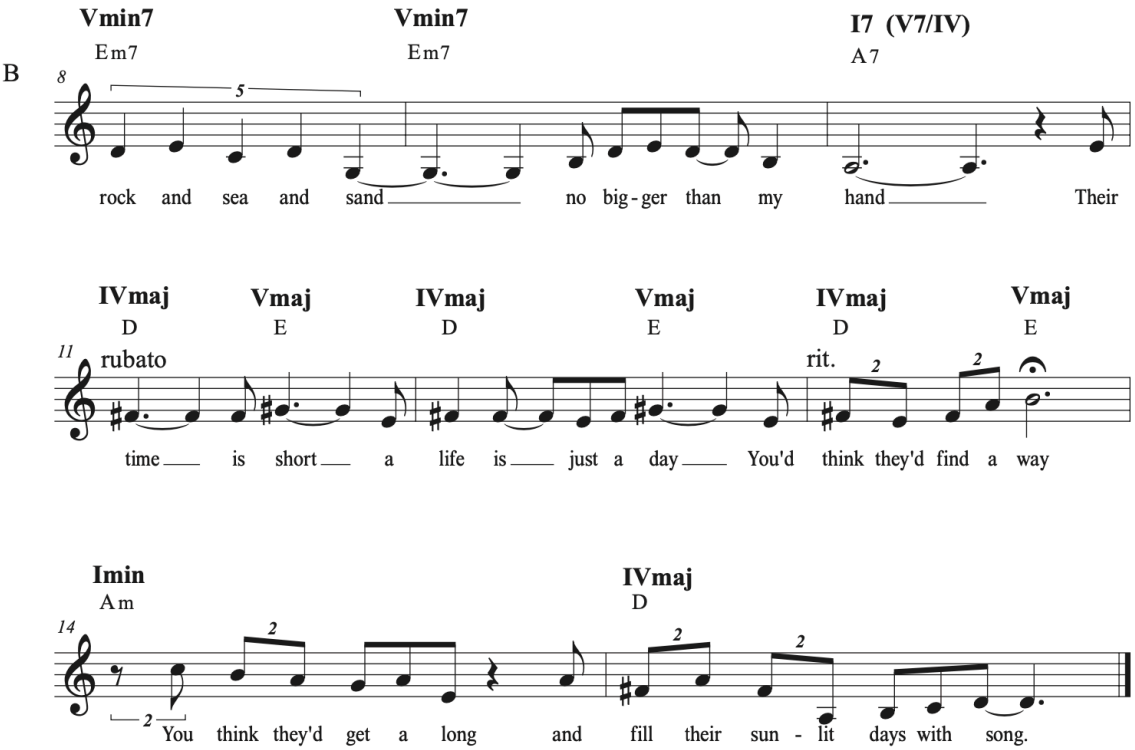
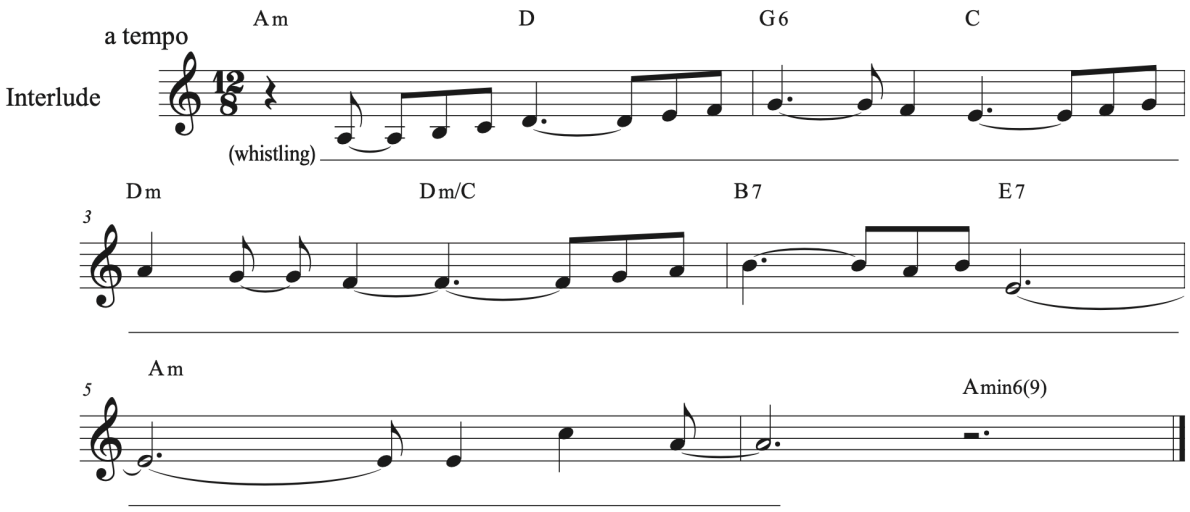


Figure 4.3, Interlude of "From Way Up Here"



"My Dirty Stream (The Hudson River Song)"

The pollution of the Hudson River reached a critical point during the first half of the twentieth century. Between 1947 and 1977, General Electric dumped into the river approximately 1.3 million pounds of industrial waste (specifically polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a chemical that was commonly used in manufacturing up until EPA banned its use in 1977 after discovering the chemical's responsibility in causing a myriad of health problems). The river was also polluted by raw sewage, garbage, oil pollution, urban runoff, heavy metals, cadmium, pesticides, and other forms of toxic waste.[165] Today, even after the extensive cleanup efforts over the past 60 years, that resulted in part from the Seegers' activism, the river's water is

[165] "Hudson River Cleanup," EPA (Environmental Protection Agency, August 25, 2020), https://www.epa.gov/hudsonriverpcbs/hudson-river-cleanup.

still unsafe; the New York Health Department bans fishing in certain sections and advises citizens not to eat fish caught in other sections of the river.[166] Additionally, many areas of the river are still unsafe for swimming.[167]

When the Seegers purchased and built their permanent home in Beacon, New York, in the Hudson River Valley, Seeger spent much of his free time on his boat — what he referred to as a "little plastic bathtub" — floating the Hudson River, either by himself or with his children.[168] He recalls that he would often imagine what it would be like if the river was clean, envisioning what the river must have been like prior to its pollution. In an interview in 1958, while commenting on the severity of the river's pollution, he stated:

> Look at the waste we make of our rivers, beautiful clear streams like the Hudson which flows past my door - an open sewer!…A river which was once clean and clear — Indians speared fish twenty feet down — is now an open sore. Nobody swims in it; you go on a boating trip, you don't look down.[169]

In 1961, Seeger wrote two songs in response to the river's pollution: "My Dirty Stream (The Hudson River Song)" (also known as "Sailing Up My Dirty Stream") and "Sailing Down My Golden River." He followed these up with a string of other songs related to the Hudson River. Not all were about its pollution; some songs focused on the natural beauty of the river.

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[166] "Eating Hudson River Fish," Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, April 28, 2016, https://www.clearwater.org/eating-hr-fish/.

[167] "Hudson River Water Quality," River Keeper Organization, Spring 2019, https://www.riverkeeper.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Hudson-River-Water-Quality-Poster-2019.pdf.

[168] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 203.

[169] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 356-357.

"My Dirty Stream" is arguably Seeger's best known song on the topic. While this was only the beginning of his activism on the matter, the lyrics of "My Dirty Stream" demonstrate his concern over the river's pollution, the complexity of the problem — and of the solution — as well as his love of its natural beauty. Notably, the lyrics show Seeger's beliefs about collective action and responsibility for socio-political problems and solutions, with phrases such as the following:

> It [the Hudson] starts high in the mountains of the north
> Crystal clear and icy trickles forth
> With just a few floating wrappers of chewing gum
> Dropped by some hikers to warn of things to come
>
> At Glens Falls, five thousand honest hands
> Work at the consolidated paper plant
> Five million gallons of waste a day
> Why should we do it any other way?
>
> Down the valley one million toilet chains
> Find my Hudson so convenient place to drain
> And each little city says, "Who, me?
> Do you think that sewage plants come free?"

According to David Ingram, Seeger's use of the first person plural with the line "Five million gallons of waste a day / Why should we do it any other way?" specifically demonstrates not only a collective responsibility, but also a collective complicity in the matter.[170]

The melody of "My Dirty Stream" is based on an arpeggiated major chord; it begins with on the dominant pitch and then leaps up to the tonic, proceeding stepwise to the third, mirroring the action of sailing "up my dirty stream." The second phrase starts on the dominant an octave above where the song begins and proceeds to step back down—a nearly perfect arch of melody. The second, fourth, and sixth stanzas begin at the higher octave, perhaps in response to the lyrics

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[170] Ingram, "My Dirty Stream," 28.

of the second stanza, “It starts high in the mountains of the north.” Seeger takes the easily hummable melody at a moderate tempo and as always, foregrounds the words in his performance.

In the recording of “My Dirty Stream,” Seeger accompanies himself on the banjo with a strumming and picking technique called clawhammer, also referred to as frailing, a banjo picking technique that uses the thumb and fingers, with the hand in a sort of claw-like shape, hence the name, playing the strings by alternating between use of the thumb and other fingers, via the larger motion of the wrist and forearm, rather than by moving the individual fingers to pluck the strings (otherwise referred to as three-finger or Scruggs style). Clawhammer technique allows for a simultaneous combination of harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic elements.[171] This technique for playing banjo is rooted in the American folk tradition. Originally, this banjo-playing style, along with the banjo itself,[172] was brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans in the seventeenth century; both the instrument and, by the mid-nineteenth century, the playing technique had

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[171] “Bela Fleck & Abigail Washburn: Clawhammer vs. Three-Finger Banjo Style,” *Reverb* Interview, posted on May 7, 2018, video, 8:12, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5LeYKLhk6Q.

[172] The banjo was created by enslaved Africans as an adaptation on traditional African lute instruments. Recent research has determined that there are approximately 60 plucked lute instruments from West Africa that show resemblance to the banjo, therefore could be considered the instruments predecessor. See Jay Scott Odell and Robert B. Winans, “Banjo," *Grove Music Online,* January, 2014, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002256043;jsessionid=4850EE51E4602011529BE9851C788C31

spread through the United States.[173] Three-finger style playing, or Scruggs style, would not be popularized until the middle of the twentieth century.

Traditionally, performers using clawhammer technique typically play the strings with downstrokes; however, Seeger, typically used upstrokes, a variation on the clawhammer technique that is now most often referred as Seeger-style picking or up-picking. While Seeger was well-versed in virtually all banjo techniques and often used combinations of two or more techniques while performing a given song, he preferred to use this clawhammer technique when accompanying himself because it is well suited for the task of accompaniment and allows for clear representation of the harmony, something crucial for leading group sing-alongs in three-part harmony, a central aspect to Seeger's performative practice.[174] In his recording of "My Dirty Stream," his use of clawhammer allows for an accompaniment pattern that is rhythmic, yet leaves plenty of musical space for the melody, along with the message of his lyrics.

Although Seeger had composed "My Dirty Stream" in 1961, when he included it on his album *God Bless the Grass* in 1966, the river's situation was still dire. Instead of giving in to despair, Seeger decided to try to effect change by working within his own community, by focusing on one issue that he could call his own and over which he could have some control. In his autobiography, he refers to the concept as "thinking globally, singing locally."[175] It was that

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[173] Odell and Winans, "Banjo," *Grove Music Online,* https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002256043.=

[174] "Seeger and the Long Neck Banjo," *Banjo Newsletter*, March 2014, https://banjonews.com/2014-03/the_seeger_long_neck_americas_third_banjo.html.

[175] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 203-210.

kind of thinking that led him, in 1966, to decide to "build a boat to save the river."[176] His hope was that the boat would unite "wealthy yachtsmen and kids from the ghetto, church members and atheists;" he had confidence that if song brought people together, perhaps a sailboat could as well.[177] He, along with fellow activists, believed that building a historical replica of the sloops which commonly sailed the Hudson River during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, would attract others to the river and its cleanup efforts.[178] Seeger and Toshi, founded Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, a non-profit organization and public advocacy group dedicated to cleaning up the Hudson River, with its primary objective being to protect the ecology of the Hudson River and the well-being of all people in living in its watershed.

The organization's first big venture was the creation of The Clearwater Festival (also referred to as The Great Hudson River Revival and The Clearwater Revival) a yearly three day festival dedicated to cleanup of the river - the first and largest of its kind. The festival hosts approximately 15,000 attendees each year and features a variety of musical acts—Seeger performed at it up until his death—dances, storytelling, and other forms of entertainment, along with a variety of environmental educational programs. Commenting on the success of the festival, Seeger recalls a conversation with his mother, a classical violinist, who told him that "the three B's are Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms," to which he retorted "for me, they are ballads,

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[176] "The Clearwater Story," Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, December 17, 2015, https://www.clearwater.org/about/the-clearwater-story/.

[177] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 355.

[178] A sloop is a type of sailboat with a single mast. Sloops were commonly used on the Hudson River during the 19th century.

blues, and breakdowns."[179] He then concluded that, after the creation of the Clearwater organization, his three Bs are "boats, banjos, and biscuits because one of Clearwater's main education devices has been the riverside festivals, with lots of good food and music. Along the time, people get some ideas about getting together to clean up the river."[180]

In 1969, the organization launched the sloop *Clearwater,* a 106-foot long replica vessel. The sloop is still used by the organization today for educational programs on river biology and the environment and hosts approximately 10,000 passengers on river trips throughout the year. Since the sloop was Seeger's brainchild, it should come as no surprise that each educational river trip also includes a group sing-along.

Seeger went on to write many more songs about the *Clearwater* sloop and the Hudson River, ranging from work songs suitable for a sailor's work to environmental protest songs or songs written in appreciation of nature, much like "My Dirty Stream," including "The Ballad of Sloop Clearwater," "Throw Away That Shad Net (How Are We Going To Save Tomorrow?)," "Broad Old River," "Clean Up The Hudson,"[181] "It's A Long Haul," "Haul, Make Her Go High,"

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[179] In American folk music, breakdowns refer to a banjo tune, or a section of a tune, in which the tempo is too fast for dancers, resulting in the dance "breaking down" while the banjo picks up speed.

[180] Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 205.

[181] It is interesting to note that Seeger wrote this song while spending a week in jail alongside the Reverend Al Sharpton and six others as a result of protesting the Tawana Brawley case in 1989. He recalls that actually he had a time to write a song while in jail because there were "no telephone calls, no mail, and no dishes to wash." See Seeger, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone,* 216.

"Now We Sit Us Down," "Blue Skies (Clearwater Version),"[182] and "Of Time and Rivers Flowing," among others. In addition to these songs, as a part of his activism to clean up The Hudson River, Seeger, along with author, musician, and fellow board member of the Clearwater organization, Ed Renehan, recorded an album of original and traditional songs related to the Hudson River entitled *Fifty Sail On The Newburg Bay: Hudson Valley Songs, Old & New* (released in 1976).[183]

The Hudson River Sloop Clearwater's activism efforts resulted in significant socio-political changes. General Electric was pressured into cleaning up the prior contamination it had caused. In 1970, Seeger sailed the sloop *Clearwater* from Beacon, New York to Washington D.C. to organize a public forum in efforts to pass *The Clean Water Act,* a monumental piece of legislation that would significantly broaden the federal government's regulation of discharging waste into waters and maintaining water quality;[184] in 2002, Seeger was named a "Clean Water Hero" for his prominent efforts in passing the act.[185] After Seeger's death in 2014, the EPA said that the "incredible work" of Seeger and the Clearwater organization helped make the Hudson River cleaner, commenting that his leadership was "extraordinary."[186] Notably, the organization

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[182] Seeger's "Blue Skies" was inspired by the Great American Songbook tune "Blue Skies," by Irving Berlin; it shares similar melodies and harmonies. Seeger wrote entirely new lyrics for his version.

[183] Pete Seeger and Ed Renehan, *Fifty Sail on Newburgh Bay*, Folkways Records, 1976, Vinyl.

[184] "Summary of the Clean Water Act," September 9, 2020, https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-clean-water-act.

[185] "Pete Seeger Named Clean Water Hero," *The Putnam County News & Recorder*, April 29, 2017, https://www.pcnr.com/articles/pete-seeger-named-clean-water-hero/.

[186] "Movement Afoot to Name Bridge after Pete Seeger," *UPI,* February 1, 2014, https://www.upi.com/Entertainment_News/Music/2014/01/31/Movement-afoot-to-name-bridge-after-Pete-Seeger/15581391204873/?ur3=1.

has assisted cities in incorporating sustainable practices at all levels of community planning. Recently, the organization has been active in preventing the Haverstraw Desalinization Plant and the banning of hydrofracking in New York, as well as the continual removal efforts of PCBs from the river and working towards shutting down the aging and leaking Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant. Seeger's contributions to the environmental movement thus live on in the work of the Clearwater organization, but they will never die as long as his songs are part of the living folk tradition he worked his whole life to revive and pass on.

Conclusion

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Seeger engaged in a number of different activities. He turned to writing, publishing articles in *The New York Times*, and writing five books, two of which he would later publish. The best known of these is *The Incompleat Folksinger* (1972), a miscellaneous collection of his writings on various subjects, including recipes, instructions on how to sew your own banjo case, and transcriptions of various folk songs. In 1973, he published a book on how to sight-read musical notation entitled *Henscratches and Flyspecks.* He also wrote a novel, *Fantasies of a Revisionist,* about an invalid with half-baked ideas on how to save the world; this never made it out of manuscript. Pete and Toshi also continued to publish *Sing Out!,* often with financial odds stacked against them.

Seeger also continued to compose prolifically in his later years, releasing five albums in 1980 alone. He released his final album, *Pete*, in 1996. He never gave up performing, singing in benefit concerts and touring, but no longer as a soloist, because at the age of 60, his voice was beginning to wear out. Arlo Guthrie, son of Woody Guthrie, and his grandson, Tao Rodriguez, regularly joined him on tour, and his reputation was such that he was invited to perform with such stars as Bruce Springsteen and Ani DiFranco.

Seeger remained politically active for the remainder of his life. He persisted in his work with the Clearwater organization and continued captaining his latest sloop, the *Woody Guthrie.* He marched with Occupy Wall Street at the age of 91 and wrote political songs, such as "Old Joe," condemning the violence of Josef Stalin's regime. In 2008, at the age of 88, his stature in American social, cultural, and political life was reaffirmed when he was invited to perform at the inauguration of the Barack Obama, the first African-American president of the United States.

Pete Seeger's musical legacy is monumental. Over the course of his career, he released over 150 records of traditional folk music and original songs. He invented and popularized a variation on the five-string banjo, increasing the length of the neck by several frets, and developed a banjo playing style technique that is now commonly referred to as Seeger-style playing. Not only did he bring to life traditional tunes, he created works that have entered the American consciousness as folk songs, including "If I Had A Hammer," "Where Have All The Flowers Gone," "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," and "Turn, Turn, Turn." His invaluable contributions to the American folk revivals of the twentieth century, his dedication to sharing the American folk tradition with younger generations, and the authenticity he brought to the cultivation and performance of the repertory helped preserve an art form that could have been easily lost to time. And finally, his power to unite people through singing was — and arguably still is — unparalleled. Bob Dylan once reflected that Seeger "makes an orchestration out of a simple song and the whole audience sings it…even the ones who had no intention of doing it."[187] In 1972, Gene Marine of *Rolling Stone*, calling Seeger a "guerrilla minstrel," put it another way:

[187] David Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing* (New York: Villard Books, 2008), 423.

> [Seeger] can, all alone, bring excitement and delight to a group of sophisticated collegians on a campus, to a group of black children in a small Mississippi town, to another group of black children in a kids' camp in Kenya, to a handful of friends in a living room, to a roomful of longshoremen or hardhats, to an audience of senior citizens, or to general, mixed audiences in Nairobi, Moscow, New Delhi, London, Berkeley or Omaha…Many performers can turn on an audience as well as Pete can. What they can't do is turn on *any* audience as well as Pete can…[In Moscow], Pete had an audience of 10,000 people who didn't speak English singing four-part harmony to "Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore." I doubt whether Barbra Streisand and Mick Jagger could do that together.[188]

In his semi-autobiographical book, *The Incompleat Folksinger,* Seeger included a mere twelve-page summary of his career, in which he stated that he only wanted to be known as a link in the chain. Towards the end of his life, Seeger often referred to his purpose being a "sower of seeds," referencing the Biblical parable from Matthew 13: 3-9. Seeger surely believed that his songs were the seeds he was sowing, and he hoped they would fall on fertile ground. He acknowledged that "songs won't save the planet…But then, neither will books or speeches. Songs are sneaky things. They can slip across borders. Proliferate in prisons. Penetrate hard shells."[189] He wanted his songs to be performed, yes, but he wanted them to make a difference in people's lives.

As this thesis has shown, Seeger's songs spring from a deep knowledge of the American traditions of folk music and African-American spirituals as well as the classical repertory. They express his bedrock beliefs about the way human beings should try to live in peace together on this earth and treat one another and all of creation with kindness and respect. And they are

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[188] Gene Marine, "Pete Seeger: Guerrilla Minstrel," *Rolling Stone,* April 13, 1972, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/pete-seeger-guerrilla-minstrel-237549/.

[189] Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing,* 426.

intended to be part of a living tradition, linking the past with the future, always growing, developing, and flourishing.

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Appendix A: Song lyrics

“Barbara Allen”

Twas in the merry month of May
When green buds all were swelling
Sweet William on his death bed lay
For love of Barbara Allen

He sent his servant to the town
To the place where she was dwelling
Saying you must come, to my master dear
If your name be Barbara Allen

So slowly, slowly she got up
And slowly she drew nigh him
And the only words to him did say
Young man I think you're dying

He turned his face unto the wall
And death was in him welling
Good-bye, good-bye, to my friends all
Be good to Barbara Allen

When he was dead and laid in grave
She heard the death bells knelling
And every stroke to her did say
Hard hearted Barbara Allen

Oh mother, oh mother go dig my grave
Make it both long and narrow
Sweet William died of love for me
And I will die of sorrow

And father, oh father, go dig my grave
Make it both long and narrow
Sweet William died on yesterday
And I will die tomorrow

Barbara Allen was buried in the old churchyard
Sweet William was buried beside her
Out of sweet William's heart, there grew a rose
Out of Barbara Allen's a briar

They grew and grew in the old churchyard
Till they could grow no higher
At the end they formed, a true lover's knot
And the rose grew round the briar

“Come All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies”

Come all ye fair and tender ladies
Take warning how you court your men
They're like a star on a summer morning
They first appear and then they're gone

If I'd known before I courted
I never would've courted none
I'd a lock my heart in a box of golden
And fastened it up with silver pin

I wish I were some little sparrow
And I had wings and I could fly
I'd fly away to my false true lover
And when he'd speak, I would deny

But I am not some little swallow
I have no wings, neither can I fly
So I will sit down here to weep in sorrow
And try to pass my troubles by

Oh don't you remember our days of courting
When your head lay upon my breast
You could make me believe by the falling of your arm
That the sun rose in the west

Come all ye fair and tender ladies
Take warning how you court your men
They're like a star on a summer morning
They first appear and then they're gone

“Old Devil Time”

Old devil time, I'm gonna fool you now
Old devil time, you'd like to bring me down
When I feel low, my lovers gather round
And help me rise to fight you one more time

Old devil pain, you've often pinned me down
You thought I'd cry and beg you for the end
At that very time my lovers gathered round
And helped me rise to fight you one more time

Old devil fear, you with your icy hands
Old devil fear, you'd like to freeze me cold
When I'm afraid, my lovers gather round
And help me rise to fight you one more time

Old devil hate, I knew you long ago
Before I learned the poison in your breath
Now when I hear your lies my lovers gather round
And help me rise to fight you one more time

No storm nor fire can ever beat us down
No wind that blows but carries us further on
And you who fear, oh lovers gather round
And we will rise to sing it one more time

“We Shall Overcome”

We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome, some day

Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day

We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand, some day

Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day

We shall live in peace
We shall live in peace
We shall live in peace, some day

Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day

We are not afraid
We are not afraid
We are not afraid, TODAY

Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day

The whole wide world around
The whole wide world around
The whole wide world around some day

Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day

“Hymn To Nations”

Josephine Daskam Bacon’s lyrics

Brothers, sing your country’s anthem
Sing your land’s undying fame
Light the wondrous tale of nations
With your people’s golden name
Tell your father’s noble story
Praise on high your country’s
And, in the final glory,
Brother, lift your flag with mine.

Don West's lyrics

Build the road of peace before us
Build it wide and deep and long
Speed the slow and check the eager
Help the weak and curb the strong
None shall push aside another
None shall let another fall
March beside me, o my brother
All for one and one for all

"Waist Deep In The Big Muddy"

It was back in nineteen forty-two
I was a member of a good platoon
We were on maneuvers in-a Loozianna
One night by the light of the moon
The captain told us to ford a river
That's how it all begun
We were -- knee deep in the Big Muddy
But the big fool said to push on

The Sergeant said, "Sir, are you sure
This is the best way back to the base?"
"Sergeant, go on! I forded this river
'Bout a mile above this place
It'll be a little soggy but just keep slogging
We'll soon be on dry ground."
We were -- waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool said to push on

The Sergeant said, "Sir, with all this equipment
No man will be able to swim."
"Sergeant, don't be a Nervous Nellie,"
The Captain said to him
"All we need is a little determination;
Men, follow me, I'll lead on."
We were -- neck deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool said to push on

All at once, the moon clouded over
We heard a gurgling cry
A few seconds later, the captain's helmet
Was all that floated by
The Sergeant said, "Turn around men!
I'm in charge from now on."
And we just made it out of the Big Muddy
With the captain dead and gone

We stripped and dived and found his body
Stuck in the old quicksand
I guess he didn't know that the water was deeper
Than the place he'd once before been
Another stream had joined the Big Muddy
'Bout a half mile from where we'd gone
We were lucky to escape from the Big Muddy
When the big fool said to push on

Well, I'm not going to point any moral;
I'll leave that for yourself
Maybe you're still walking, you're still talking
You'd like to keep your health
But every time I read the papers
That old feeling comes on;
We're -- waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool says to push on

Waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool says to push on
Waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool says to push on
Waist deep! Neck deep! Soon even a
Tall man'll be over his head
We're waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool says to push on

“Down By The Riverside”

I’m gonna lay down my burden
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside
I’m gonna lay down my burden
Down by the riverside and study war no more

[Chorus]
I ain't a-gonna study war no more,
Study war no more
Ain't a-gonna study war no more
Study war no more
Study war no more

Gonna put on that long white robe
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside
I’m gonna lay down my burden
Down by the riverside and study war no more

[Chorus]

Gonna put on that starry crown
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside
I’m gonna lay down my burden
Down by the riverside and study war no more

[Chorus]

Gonna walk with the Prince of Peace
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside
I’m gonna lay down my burden
Down by the riverside and study war no more

[Chorus]

Gonna shake hands around the world
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside
I’m gonna lay down my burden
Down by the riverside and study war no more

[Chorus]

Gonna lay down those atom bombs
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside
I’m gonna lay down my burden
Down by the riverside and study war no more

[Chorus]

Gonna lay down my income tax
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside
I’m gonna lay down my burden
Down by the riverside and I ain't a-gonna pay for war no more

[Chorus]

Gonna lay down my GE stock
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside
I’m gonna lay down my burden
Down by the riverside and live off war no more

[Chorus]

Gonna lay down my Honeywell job
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside
I’m gonna lay down my burden
Down by the riverside and work for war no more

[Chorus]

Gonna ... those Congressional hawks
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside
I’m gonna lay down my burden
Down by the riverside and vote for war no more

“Where Have All The Flowers Gone”

Where have all the flowers gone?
Long time passing
Where have all the flowers gone?
Long time ago
Where have all the flowers gone?
Girls have picked them every one
When will they ever learn?
When will they ever learn?

Where have all the young girls gone?
Long time passing
Where have all the young girls gone?
Long time ago
Where have all the young girls gone?
Taken husbands every one
When will they ever learn?
When will they ever learn?

Where have all the young men gone?
Long time passing
Where have all the young men gone?
Long time ago
Where have all the young men gone?
Gone for soldiers every one
When will they ever learn?
When will they ever learn?

Where have all the soldiers gone?
Long time passing
Where have all the soldiers gone?
Long time ago
Where have all the soldiers gone?
Gone to graveyards every one
When will they ever learn?
When will they ever learn?

Where have all the graveyards gone?
Long time passing
Where have all the graveyards gone?
Long time ago
Where have all the graveyards gone?
Covered with flowers every one
When will we ever learn?
When will we ever learn?

“The People are Scratching”

Come fill up your glasses and set yourselves down
I'll tell you a story of somebody's town
It isn't too near and it's not far away
It's not a place where I'd want to stay

Now the people are scratching all over the street
Because the rabbits had nothing to eat

The winter came in with a cold icy blast
It killed off the flowers and killed off the grass
The rabbits were starving because of the freeze
They started eating the bark off the trees

Now the people are scratching all over the street
Because the rabbits had nothing to eat

The farmers said, "This sort of thing just won't do
Our trees will be dead when the rabbits get through
We'll have to poison the rabbits, it's clear;
Or we'll have no crops to harvest next year."

Now the people are scratching all over the street
Because the rabbits had nothing to eat

So they brought the poison and spread it around
And soon dead rabbits began to be found
Dogs ate the rabbits and the farmers just said
"We'll poison those rabbits 'til the last dog is dead."

Now the people are scratching all over the street

Because the rabbits had nothing to eat

Up in the sky there were meat-eating fowls
The dead rabbits poisoned the hawks and the owls
Thousands of field mice the hawks used to chase
Were multiplying all over the place

Now the people are scratching all over the street
Because the rabbits had nothing to eat

The fields and the meadows were barren and brown
The mice got hungry and moved into town
The city folks took the farmer's advise
And all of them started to poison the mice

Now the people are scratching all over the street
Because the rabbits had nothing to eat

There were dead mice in all the apartments and flats
The cats ate the mice and the mice killed the cats
The smell was awful and I'm glad to say
I wasn't the man hired to haul them away

Now the people are scratching all over the street
Because the rabbits had nothing to eat

All through the country and all through the town
There wasn't a dog or cat to be found
The fleas asked each other, "Where can we stay?"
They've been on the people from then 'til this day

Now the people are scratching all over the street
Because the rabbits had nothing to eat

All you small creatures that live in this land
Stay clear of the man with the poisonous hand!
A few bails of hay might keep you alive
But he'll pay more to kill you than let you survive

Now the people are scratching all over the street
Because the rabbits had nothing to eat

“From Way Up Here”

From way up here the earth looks very small,
It's just a little ball of rock and sea and sand,
No bigger than my hand

From way up here the earth looks very small,
They shouldn't fight at all
Down there, upon that little sphere

Their time is short, a life is just a day,
You'd think they'd find a way.
You'd think they'd get along
And fill their sunlit days with song

From way up here the earth looks very small,
It's just a little ball,
So small, so beautiful and clear

Their time is short, a life is just a day,
Must be a better way,
To use the time that runs
Among the distant suns

From way up here the earth is very small,
It's just a little ball,
So small, so beautiful and dear

“My Dirty Stream (The Hudson River Song)”

Sailing down my dirty stream
Still I love it and I'll keep the dream
That some day, though maybe not this year
My Hudson River will once again run clear

It starts high in the mountains of the north
Crystal clear and icy trickles forth
With just a few floating wrappers of chewing gum
Dropped by some hikers to warn of things to come

At Glens Falls, five thousand honest hands
Work at the consolidated paper plant
Five million gallons of waste a day
Why should we do it any other way?

Down the valley one million toilet chains
Find my Hudson so convenient place to drain
And each little city says, "Who, me?
Do you think that sewage plants come free?”

Out in the ocean they say the water's clear
But I live right at Beacon here
Half way between the mountains and sea
Tacking to and fro, this thought returns to me

Well it's sailing up my dirty stream
Still I love it and I'll dream
That some day, though maybe not this year
My Hudson and my country will run clear

Appendix B: "Justice Douglas on Conservation" (liner notes from *God Bless The Grass*)

Our wilderness problem starts with our population. In 35 years, there probably will be twice as many people on earth as there are today. There will be more than twice as many in areas such as the Pacific West, where living conditions are ideal. A quickly rising population will be accompanied by shorter work week and more leisure time. This requires intense planning for the recreational needs of the oncoming generation.

We must design our wilderness blueprint with the needs of 2000 AD in mind.

Multiple use is the standard that governs the U.S. Forest Service in its administration of public lands and a standard that is now being extended to lands that are under the Bureau of Land Management. A piece of land paved for highway use is dedicated to one single use, not multiple uses. An area set aside as wilderness under the Wilderness Act of 1964 does not bar trails, although it does bar roads.

Wilderness use covers a variety of multiple uses — refuges for elk and goats, hiking and horseback travel, fishing, watershed protection, and the maintenance of the biotic community in complete ecological balance. These values cannot be preserved if logging, highways, hot-dog stands, and motels take over.

Wooded areas can be logged and campgrounds for autoists can be built on those sites, those tracts serving these two multiple uses. But the wilderness advocates do not want those two uses or highway use to preempt every section of land. We want some of the original America left in its primitive condition so that one hundred years from now a lad can walk the hills in the manner of Daniel Boone and see what God has wrought.

There are dollar values in our mountains to be exploited. But a tree is measurable not only by its board, or its cellulose content, but by its beauty, the wildlife it shelters, the community is nourishes, and the watershed protection it gives.

There are spiritual values in the mountains that highway engineers, real-estate promoters, chambers of commerce and editorial writers often overlook. The Psalmist said: "I will lift mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, who made the heaven and earth."

These values disappear once our alpine meadows are converted into Swiss alpine resort areas, when the roar of traffic fills the ridges, when man's last refuge (except the ocean) is converted to commercial uses.

It other words, multiple use means more than logging trucks and highways and the exploitation of dollar values.

We need wilderness sanctuaries for a full life. We should ask those from crowded New England and the crowded Adirondacks to advise us on the preservation of our other areas. For they have felt, more than the rest of us, the impact of the population explosion on wilderness. We should also ask our apartment born people for leadership in these conservation causes. For they often appreciate more than others the value of open spaces.

William O. Douglas
Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.