THE SOUND OF ETHNIC AMERICA: PREWAR “FOREIGN-LANGUAGE” RECORDINGS
& THE SONICS OF US CITIZENSHIP

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ABSTRACT

(Under the direction of Jocelyn R. Neal)

This dissertation explores the juncture of sound and citizenship to consider how the boundaries of nation are maintained at both geospatial and cultural borders. Specifically, the project concerns “foreign-language” recordings made by US recording companies prior to World War II (hereafter, prewar). With the onset of war in Europe in 1914, “foreign-language” recordings were increasingly cut domestically, featuring vernacular performers of the Great Wave of immigration that brought Hungarian, Syrian, Ukrainian, Turkish, Polish, Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese peoples, alongside a host of other nationalities, to the US beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Initially marketed to specific immigrant populations in the US, these recordings eventually became the province of postwar record collectors and the reissue music market by the 1970s.

The narrative of the project draws much of its power by connecting their discrete moments of circulation with the political realities that shaped their audition. As such, the project examines the interplay between, what I call, the “national vernacular imaginary” and state policy in regards to immigration and citizenship. At its most basic, The Sound of Ethnic America is a media history of “foreign-language” recordings at prewar, mid-century, and bicentennial intervals. At its most critical, the project is a study of U.S. “roots music,” centered not on the
early country and blues recordings principal to the American folk canon, but instead, on the proximal ethnic vernacular recordings of the same acoustic and early electrical recording periods.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................. xi

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ............................................................................................... xii

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................... 1

The “Roots” of *The Sound of Ethnic America* ...................................................... 11

Chapter Summaries ................................................................................................. 18

The Sonics of Citizenship ......................................................................................... 21

CHAPTER 1: WEAPONS OF SURPISING POWER .................................................. 23

Introduction: 1928 .................................................................................................... 23

The Audiopolitics of “Foreign-Language” Recordings ....................................... 29

Ethnic Sound on US Records .............................................................................. 32

The Foreign Recordings Market ........................................................................... 35

“Foreign-Language” Recordings and Ethnonationalism in the 1920s ............. 40

The Phonograph in Americanization ................................................................... 47

The Retail Recordings Market in Americanization ............................................. 54

Other Voices in Americanization and Sound Recordings ............................... 58

The Overwhelming Whiteness of Americanization ........................................... 62

Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 66
# CHAPTER 2: CANONS, CONSENSUS, AND COLLECTING AT MIDCENTURY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevating the Vernacular</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folkway’s Cultural Capital</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Material Culture of Folkways</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Smith’s <em>Anthology of American Folk Music</em></td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The <em>Anthology</em> As Postwar Sound Object</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The <em>Anthology</em>’s Midcentury Ethos</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Dualism and Collector Practice at Midcentury</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The <em>Anthology</em>’s Muted “Foreign” Origins</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# CHAPTER 3: FOLK MUSIC IN AMERICA, HYPHENATED AMERICANISM, AND THE TURN TOWARD ETHNICITY IN THE 1970S

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 1965 Immigration Act and a Changing Racial Landscape</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventing Ethnicity</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventing <em>Folk Music in America</em></td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spottswood’s Thematics</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising Harry Smith’s <em>Anthology of American Folk Music</em></td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pekka Gronow’s “Musical Subcultures”</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing <em>Folk Music in America</em></td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spottswood &amp; the <em>Recorded Anthology of American Music</em></td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prehistory of the <em>Recorded Anthology of American Music</em></td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prewar “Foreign-Language” Recordings &amp; <em>RAAM</em></td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Limits of Accommodationism........................................................................160
Conclusion...........................................................................................................167

CHAPTER 4: TEXAS-MEXICAN BORDER MUSIC, BORDER CULTURES, & THE NATION-STATE........................................................................................................169
Introduction ..........................................................................................................169

Inventing Mexican Americans..............................................................................172

A Brief History of Mexican Im/migration..............................................................175

La Frontera and Migrant Agency ..........................................................................183

Chris Strachwitz and Comparative Immigrations ..............................................187

Arhoolie and the Folk Revival Economy ..............................................................192

Texas-Mexican Border Music & The Turn Toward Ethnicity ..............................198

Hearing Texas-Mexican Border Music Through Strachwitz’s Ears............... 204

The Women of Texas-Mexican Border Music .................................................214

Conclusion ...........................................................................................................216

CONCLUSION .......................................................................................................218

BIBLIOGRAPHY ....................................................................................................226
LIST OF TABLES

Table I – *The Victrola in Americanization*’s Four Avenues, 1920 ................................. 49

Table II – *Anthology of American Folk Music*, Folkways Record, 1952 ....................... 83

Table III – Library of Congress, Bicentennial LP Project, Jabbour design..................... 128

Table IV – *Folk Music in America*, Library of Congress, Spottswood design.......... 130

Table V – Racial & Ethnic Breakdown of *Folk Music in America* ................................. 163

Table VI – *Texas-Mexican Border Music*, Folklyric Records, 1974-1985 ..................... 201
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAFM</td>
<td>Anthology of American Folk Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFC</td>
<td>American Folklife Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>FMiA</td>
<td>Folk Music in America</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICE</td>
<td>Immigration and Customs Enforcement</td>
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<tr>
<td>JEMF</td>
<td>John Edwards Memorial Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>LULAC</td>
<td>League of United Latin American Citizens</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>National Endowment for the Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAAM</td>
<td>Recorded Anthology of American Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAC</td>
<td>Rockefeller Archive Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMBM</td>
<td>Texas-Mexican Border Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>TMW</td>
<td>Talking Machine World</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

In November 1968, John Cohen entered the cramped Chelsea Hotel residence of Harry Smith for the first of several interview sessions with the famed collagist and avant-garde filmmaker. Cohen, guitar player for the The New Lost City Ramblers, was on assignment for *Sing Out!*, a periodical founded in 1950 servicing the budding folk revival in urban spaces and on college campuses in the United States.¹ Cohen’s interest in Smith, of course, was not the surrealist cinema he was most noted for, but his role as editor of the *Anthology of American Folk Music*, a compilation series released by Folkways Records in 1952, considered the “musical constitution” of the US folk-song movement.²

In reverent language Cohen describes his visits to Smith’s room at the Chelsea as a “somewhat mystifying experience.” Overstuffed with books, records, and other ephemera, the objects occupying space in Smith’s small room include a closet full of Seminole Indian women’s dresses, string-figures stacked on a bureau, paper airplanes, a movie camera, quilts, weavings, art portfolios, “a clay model of an imaginary landscape which is re-created from a dream,” file cabinets, a goldfish, and an arrangement of decorative Ukrainian Easter Eggs. Empty frames decorate the walls. Cohen describes the menagerie as Smith’s “storehouse for cross-disciplinary investigations of visual, anthropological, and musical phenomenon.” In tone, diction, and detail,


Cohen’s writing makes it clear he breathed the rarefied air of genius in the Chelsea that day in November.³

Although the interview drifted into many of Smith’s notable endeavors, from his experimental films to his amateur ethnography of the Lumbee Indians of the Northwest, Cohen’s focus was the aforementioned Anthology. Curated from Smith’s expansive collection of 78rpm records, the Anthology of American Folk Music features eighty-four recordings of blues, country, and Cajun performances produced by commercial record companies between 1927 and 1934 reformatted onto six sequential long-playing discs, and rebranded as folk music of the United States.⁴ Scant sales figures exist for the original issue of the Anthology or its main subsequent repressings, but by the late 1960s the compilation series accrued significant stature particularly within folk music circles and burgeoning countercultural movements.⁵ In an aside to Smith in the interview, Cohen chimes, “To my mind, the Anthology anticipated the popular rock and roll music which followed. Many rock musicians are returning to those sounds. To me, today’s music

³ Cohen, “A Rare Interview with Harry Smith,” 2.

⁴ Smith thought the date range of his source recordings was between 1927 and 1932, but the 1997 Smithsonian Folkways reissue of the Anthology of American Folk Music (Smithsonian Folkways SFW 40090, 1997, six compact discs) corrects this error noting that recording session for track number thirty-nine, “Home Sweet Home” by Breaux Freres” took place on October 9, 1934.

⁵ Katherine Skinner, “‘Must Be Born Again’: resurrecting the Anthology of American Folk Music,” Popular Music 25:1 (2006), 57-75: The vagueness in “many subsequent represses” is intentional. As detailed in chapter two of this dissertation, Folkways always pressed releases in limited batches, and repressed as necessary by demand. Greil Marcus, in “The Old, Weird America”, the music critic’s ode to Smith’s collection, describes original pressings of the Anthology as “three-ringed hinged…contraptions” whereas subsequent editions were housed in red fabric or black matte boxes (Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan’s Basement Tapes, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997, 92). (Please note, that as of writing this footnote, I personally have never seen evidence of a “first pressing” of the Anthology as detailed by Marcus and suspect it possible that such a copy may have been modified into a three-ringed binder “contraption” perhaps by a public or university library.) Although Marcus’ account of the material design of original pressings of the Anthology may be suspect, what can be substantiated is that early pressings of the Smith set were cataloged as Folkways FP 251/3. That assignment would change to FP2951/3 by the late 1950s. In the early 1960s, Smith’s original package designed was shelved in favor of a cover featuring a Depression-era WPA photograph. Other variants include the cost of the handbook Smith assembled for the set, originally sold separately at prices ranging from $1.00 to $5.00 as noted on its cover.
seems like an extension of the music on the *Anthology.*” Smith responds to Cohen’s grandiose statement with affirmation, stating plainly, “That’s what I was trying to do.”

The notion that Smith’s *Anthology* was a precursor or premonition of future tropes and trajectories in US popular music is a characterization echoed far past the reach of a solitary interview in a late-1960s magazine for folk music enthusiasts. In 1968, Cohen may have hedged his proclamation in the personal, stating that “to [him],” the *Anthology* serves this wider purpose. By 1997, on the occasion of the reissue of Smith’s set in a boxed set of compact discs by the newly minted Smithsonian Folkways record label, David Fricke, music editor for *Rolling Stone* magazine, declared, “Today it is impossible to overstate the historic worth, sociocultural impact and undiminished vitality” of the *Anthology*, christening it as “the mother river from which much of our popular music still pours forth.”

Though Fricke uses a water metaphor to characterize what Cohen suggests is the *Anthology*’ anticipation of US popular music movements in the latter half of the twentieth century, both men gesture towards a more common taxonomy, “roots music.” By planting metaphorically and, to some extent, quite literally, the contents of the *Anthology* into the soil of the nation, a “roots” argument states that Smith makes audible the buried origins of late-twentieth-century popular music in the United States. Posed as organic and evolutionary, the metaphor suggests the the representative hillbilly, blues, and Cajun recordings identified by Smith provide a framework for the genre of Americana. The twang of hillbilly, bent notes of the blues, and Cajun’s drawl coalesce, in effect, into a national vernacular sound. The “roots music” metaphor frees the *Anthology* specifically, and Americana more generally, from the trappings of

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6 Cohen, “A Rare Interview with Harry Smith,” 10.

politics, ideology, and hegemony that structure other aspects of nation-building. Roots are raw, they are authentic, they are natural.

Smith’s national vernacular sound, or what I call more generally, the national vernacular imaginary, looked backward, establishing its boundaries on the already arcane sonic aesthetics of the early electrical recording period prior to the Second World War (hereafter, prewar). Advancements in microphone technology and phonography through the 1940s made the limited frequency range and endemic hiss of prewar recordings pressed on shellac discs into relics of an audio past. Smith assembled his anthology for Folkways from otherwise discarded shellac discs purchased at junk shops, thrift stores, and liquidation sales at record company warehouses. As a record collector, Smith held interest in a variety of musical genres. In addition to the blues, hillbilly, and Cajun recordings of the Anthology, Smith collected Irish music, Roumanian bagpipe records, Turkish recordings, discs of Chinese music and Japanese music, Mexican recordings, music of the Kiowa Indians, and Chopian music from Mozambique.8

The prewar recording period from which Smith sourced his record collection provided him with ample styles and genres from which to choose. From the onset of a nascent commercial recordings industry to the outbreak of the Second World War, recording companies operated under a strategy of diversification with the goal of expanding the market for phonographs and phonographic discs across the various demographics of an early twentieth-century US. This small-market system required the tailoring of record offerings to suit the tastes of particular demographics. The era prior to the adoption of mass-marketing popular musics across the record

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8 This list is culled from anecdotes delivered by Smith in two interviews. One interview with Gary Kenton in Breslin Hotel in New York City, and the other with John Cohen in the Chelsea Hotel. Both interviews are featured in the book Think of the Self Speaking: Harry Smith — Selected Interviews, ed. by Rani Singh (Seattle: Elbow/Cityful Press, 1999).
buying publics of the US resulted in recordings catalogs filled with classical, popular, and vernacular music performed in a variety of languages, styles, and genres.

The impulse to record the vernacular musics of white and black working-class populations for sale under the “hillbilly” and “race” monikers—later anthologized by Smith as “American folk music”—originates in earlier efforts by record labels to reach immigrant and ethnic populations of the US in the first three decades of the century. Reaching across cultural and linguistic divides, recording companies like Victor, Columbia, and Edison filled their catalogs with discs and cylinders of German, Ukrainian, Spanish, Mexican, Polish, Armenian, and host of other “ethnic” musics and encouraged their retail affiliates to stock offerings appropriate to their localities. Known to collectors today as “ethnic series” recordings, the industry labeled these recordings under the catch-alls of “foreign” or “foreign-language” recordings.

Initially, US recording companies imported “foreign” catalogs, mostly from Europe, but by the outbreak of the First World War new titles for “foreign-language” series were increasingly cut domestically with performances provided by immigrant and ethnic musicians living in the US. New York City studios recorded performances of Greek, Romanian, and Trinidadian artists both settled in and passing through the city. Companies in Chicago conducted outreach into the Polish and Ukrainian communities, bringing in popular and vernacular musicians to service their requisite ethnic populations. When Victor and Bluebird made their famous “southern journeys” to San Antonio to record hillbilly groups and Texas blues performances, the labels also produced numerous discs for their Mexican lines.\(^9\) In all likelihood, many of the “foreign-language” discs Smith collected were the product of US ethnic performance, but he, like the prewar industry

beforehand, did not categorize them alongside the nominally “American” genres that would occupy the Anthology, animate a midcentury folk revival, define the cultural boundaries of musical Americana.

The story of prewar “foreign-language” recordings, if its told at all, goes something along the lines of this: As the immigrant and ethnic musicians of the prewar “foreign-language” series naturalized into US citizenship, their recordings remained tethered to a “foreign-born” past. Their children and grandchildren assimilated into American culture and away from the international origins that defined the US lives of their parents and grandparents as consensus politics rallied around the vernacular musics of the southeastern US as the “roots” of American folk music.

As a cultural justice project, Smith’s Anthology, alongside the US folk revival and the reissue music economy which rose from it, elevated the value and recognition of working-class white and black vernacular musicians, rejuvenating the careers of performers of acoustic blues and early country as well as producing a cultural memory for artists long since passed. But the vernacular recordings collectors and revivalists chose not to hear, or, like Smith, heard as other than “American,” reveal a parallel political and cultural project with perhaps broader significance to the period.

The selective, casual, and quotidian hearing of certain vernacular musics as part of the sonic character of the nation, and others decidedly not so, speaks to the relative breadth or constraint of the national imaginary. Determining which bodies, and their subsequent sounds, belong within the nation is a project which obviously predates the invention of audio recording. Smith’s entry into the debate is noteworthy for how noncontroversial the Anthology’s parameters are. Certainly, in 1952, Smith’s integration of black and white vernacular musics was
provocative, but, at the same time, blackness and whiteness were central constructions of a midcentury US. In this sense, the politics of the Anthology are fairly small “c” conservative. Smith antagonized a preoccupation with black and white racial distinction, but he did so within a genuinely accepted national framework.¹⁰

I do not level this criticism merely as a dispassionate observer. I am a fan of the Anthology. To my ears, the Smith collection is perhaps the most compelling compendium of prewar recordings I have heard. But I also know that I did not come to this conclusion on my own. Taste is not innate, nor is it an innocent process. I, in many ways, learned to like the Anthology, to value its contents and hear its historical significance to the nation in which I hold citizenship. My first exposure to Smith’s Anthology came not in its recordings but through David Fricke’s featured review in Rolling Stone of the 1997 deluxe reissue of the set on Smithsonian/Folkways in, quoted earlier in this introduction. Fricke was senior editor at the music and culture magazine and, at age sixteen, I knew to hold his opinions in high esteem. Furry Lewis, Dock Boggs, Blind Willie Johnson, and Clarence Ashley were unknown names to me, but when Fricke regaled the Anthology with a perfect five-star score and called these performers and the others on the collection the “bedrock of our national musical identity,” I trusted his judgement and internalized it as my own.¹¹

I would not actually hear the Anthology for several years, but Fricke’s assessment would stick with me. I may not have been able to quote his Rolling Stone review verbatim by the time I received a copy of the boxed set for Christmas a few years later, but its general contours were


¹¹ Fricke, 101.
well understood. Where memory failed, the packaging of the Smithsonian Folkways reissue would fill in the gaps. The obi-strip wrapped around the red fabric box of the sealed copy I received described the set in true “hype sticker” form as, “Perhaps the most influential collection in the history of recorded sound.” Inside the box, the reissue came stuffed with a facsimile of the original handbook designed by Smith for the original pressing of the set in addition to a sixty-eight page supplemental insert unambiguously titled “A Booklet of Essays, Appreciations, and Annotations Pertaining to the *Anthology of American Folk Music,*” filled with anecdotes and exultations on the legacy of the Smith collection from names I recognized like Allen Ginsberg and Elvis Costello, and others I would grow to venerate later in my listening life like John Fahey and Peter Stampfel. By the time I inserted disc one into the CD player, my ears were attuned to what I would hear and what I would hear *in* it.

Of course, the *Anthology* did not act alone in this endeavor. Smith built the Folkways collection in conversation with academic and amateur folklorists, both contemporary and of decades past; An entire apparatus formed around identifying the aesthetics of white and black vernacular musics of the southeastern US as a stand-in for the nation, as benchmarks in the national vernacular imaginary. Neil V. Rosenberg argues that’s the *Anthology*’s “melting pot” is a “vision of American’s southern cultures that conveys the assumption that American working-class art is southern,” noting that the set “ignores the vernacular cultures of the rest of the nation.”

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the supplemental booklet for the 1997 Smithsonian Folkways reissue—points to the bracketed sense of the national imaginary at midcentury when Smith produced the set and that the genre of Americana continues to more or less reproduce. No such apparatus exists for the nation’s other “vernacular cultures” identified by Rosenberg and represented by the “foreign-language” catalogs of prewar record labels. Despite my Polish surname, he Irish and French Canadian lineage on my mother’s side of the family, and the fact that I grew up in a Massachusetts town that is home to a small open-air events arena named Pulaski Park, taglined “The Polka Capital of New England,” I do not hear the polkas, waltzes, oberek s, and jigs of prewar “foreign-language” recordings as “American.” My ears have not been trained that way.

*The Sound of Ethnic America* examines the training of the US national ear by offering an alternative history of “roots music” in the US focused on the vernacular musics of the nation’s diverse ethnic and immigrant populations. Committed to shellac disc during the opening decades of the twentieth century, “foreign-language” recordings circulated within and, in some cases, across ethnic distinction. Extant histories of prewar “foreign-language” recordings, scant in their own right, contain them to the catalogs of a pre-microgroove music industry. These discs have a postwar history, though, reemerging first informally in the holdings of a handful of influential record collectors and then, more significantly, in conversation with Smith’s established Americana on national anthologies produced in commemoration of the US Bicentennial in 1976. *The Sound of Ethnic America* introduces the postwar circulations of prewar “foreign-language” recordings into the historical record, contending with the political and cultural impulses which compelled their reemergence in the late-1970s.

Incorporating prewar “foreign-language” recordings into a discussion of the national vernacular imaginary complicates the history of “roots music” in several generative ways.
Foremostly, *The Sound of Ethnic America* places the history of immigration and immigration policy at the center of the construction of a national vernacular canon. The commercial market for “foreign-language” recordings in the prewar period was dependent on the Great Wave of immigration to the US beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Relatedly, the crystalization of the national vernacular imaginary occurred during the period of immigration restriction directly following that wave. In the history laid out in *The Sound of Ethnic America*, the political, social, and cultural distinctions between these two periods becomes integral to explaining the plurality of vernacular cultures during the prewar recording period and the relatively bracketed aesthetics of the national vernacular imaginary.

Relatedly, the history of US racialization becomes central to *The Sound of Ethnic America*. Whereas Smith’s *Anthology* is predicated on an established binary between black acoustic blues performances and white hillbilly acts, the “foreign-language” catalogs of the prewar recording period sonify a more racially ambiguous moment in the US polity. As these recordings recirculated in the reissue economy of the latter half of the twentieth century, they encountered ears trained under a different, more codified racial stratification system. The ethnic particularity of eastern and southern European immigrants, which, at the turn of the century, functioned in a manner similar to contemporary understanding of race, was repositioned as nationally contingent, identified through what Matthew Frye Jacobson calls “hypenated Americanism”; The Polish, Ukrainian, and Irish “foreign-language” recordings now became music of “Polish-Americans,” “Ukrainian-Americans,” and “Irish-Americans.”¹⁵ For other immigrants to the US whose racial identities solidified outside whiteness, their attendant cultural

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heritages became all the more conditional to the nation. The vernacular musics of Mexican, Japanese, Chinese, and Hawaiian immigrants, for instance, tell a different story relative to their specific racializations.

At its most basic, *The Sound of Ethnic America* chronicles the circulation of “foreign-language” recordings at prewar, midcentury, and Bicentennial intervals. At its most critical, the project is a history of “roots music” in the US centered not on the early country and blues recordings principal to the national vernacular imaginary, but instead, on the proximal ethnic vernacular series of the same acoustic and early electrical recording periods. As these recordings—produced domestically of Mexican, Greek, Ukrainian, Polish, Trinidadian, and other ethnic and immigrant musicians—move between foreign and national taxonomies in the twentieth-century reissue economy, the borders of what sounds “American” contract, expand, and blur. By telling a history of “roots music” at its margins, *The Sound of Ethnic America* argues that the national vernacular imaginary is neither organic or self-evident, but rather, the result of a complex interchange between federal immigration policy, the racial logics of citizenship, and the sonic affectivities of race and ethnicity.

**The “Roots” of The Sound of Ethnic America**

As an interdisciplinary project, *The Sound of Ethnic America* marries the archival depth of cultural history with the analytical rigor of cultural studies. It is a music history deeply indebted to the practices of media and technology studies, and a study of cultural productions steeped in immigration history and policy. The project’s methodology is equally heterodox. I approach the recording and the audio playback formats they circulated on as both sounded experiences and material objects. Likewise, I study the music albums in this dissertation as both technologies and cultural forms. As productions rich with liner notes, annotations, and other
supplementary materials, I pull from the resources of textual and literary analysis. Finally, I complement my material, textual, and phenomenological analyses with a commitment to historicism, using archival research to place these recordings and compilations within broader social, cultural, and political contexts.

Given its rich scope and multifaceted approach, this dissertation pulls from many canons of established academic literature. As a history of commercial sound recordings, the project is build on the groundwork laid by historians William Howland Kenney and David Suisman. Kenney’s *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* charts the historical importance of the phonograph and phonographic records to American cultural and civic life prior the end of the Second World War. Kenney’s focus is on public response to recorded music, highlighting the ways cultural and social forces interplay with economic and industrial factors in shaping the production, distribution, consumption, and reception of recorded sound in US life.\(^\text{16}\)

As an industry-side study, Suisman’s *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in the American Music* covers the rise of the commercial music industry in the United States over the long twentieth century. Suisman articulates how publishing and technological developments worked together to commodify sound over the period. In this way, *Selling Sounds* is a business history of the music industry that it is also acutely concerned with the social and cultural implications of industrialization. Key to this project, *Selling Sounds* concluding chapter maps out what Suisman calls “the musical soundscape of modernity,” a riff on the famous phrase by

composer and sound theorist R. Murray Schafer, giving voice to the audibility of commercial music across urban life.17

Whereas Kenney and Suisman’s work provides much of the general context for my study of the prewar commercial music industry, Michael Denning’s *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* contends directly with the topic of ethnic vernacular music recordings of the period. In the period between the development of electrical recording technologies in 1925 and the worst of the global Great Depression, the commercial recording industry in the US and throughout the “developed” world committed to shellac disc the labor of a variety of working-class musicians and disparate vernacular styles. Denning considers this a “global vernacular musical revolution” more profound in its impacts than the European avant-garde of the period. This noise uprising of the late 20s charts the main alternative history of the period against the narrative of the imperial journey of US popular music of the American Century, and calls into focus the working-class cultures in port cities like New Orleans, Honolulu, and Rio de Janeiro, where recordings were cut and circulated throughout the colonized and colonizing world.18 Whereas Denning covers the global effects of the commercial recording industry, this project considers the national implications of “foreign” musics within the domestic US. The stakes of “vernacular musical revolution” differ significantly in a US national context, which serves as the central concern of this project.

As an alternative history of “roots music,” the project engages with other work on the production of US folk taxonomies by Karl Hagstrom Miller, Benjamin Filene, and Marybeth Hamilton. In *Segregating Sounds: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, Karl


Hagstrom Miller examines the process of compartmentalizing southern music made between 1880s and 1920s into genres divided explicitly along racial lines. The division of music into folk and pop categories, and the attendant meanings and values ascribed to each, was a process engineered largely by outside actors, most notably the commercial music industry and academic folklorists. The monograph is distinct in the way it frames its analysis around artists’ repertoire as opposed to style or performance. Even though *Segregating Sounds* concerns a period in US music history that just precedes the parameters of my study, I take from Miller’s work an emphasis on the constructed or invented aspects of genre, particularly in regards to vernacular forms in the US and their changing distinction of being either of or outside the nation.

More topically connected to this project, Benjamin Filene’s *Romancing the Folk: Popular Memory and American Roots Music* outlines the production of a particularized folk music history in the US that undergirded the midcentury folk revival movement. Because *The Sound of Ethnic America* deals precisely with the vernacular forms left out of this process, the trajectory of southern black and Appalachian white vernacular musics as American “roots” music in *Romancing the Folk* informs a midcentury notion of nationhood and national heritage that this project uses as a jumping off point to compare later constructions of national identity in the 1970s and 1990s in particular. Similarly, this project engages with Marybeth Hamilton’s *In Search of the Blues* a book about the many outside actors – white folklorists and record collectors, mainly – who created a blues music genealogy in the 1950s and 1960s retroactively from prewar recordings of black vernacular musicians. Blues musicians like Robert Johnson and Charley Patton, who mattered very little in terms of sales or significance to black fans in the

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twenties and thirties, were thrust into positions of great importance because the aesthetics of their recorded performances were valued by these white outsiders several decades later. Hamilton’s argument hinges on the constructed, as opposed to natural, aspects of history making; that history is contingent upon the time of its recording and by those who record it. 

*The Sound of Ethnic America* expands Hamilton’s arguments on blues historiography to include the histories of prewar “foreign-language” recordings, specifically, and the national vernacular imaginary, more broadly.

Like Raymond Williams famously argues about television, sound recordings are both a technology and a cultural form. The relationship between recording technology, audio playback formats, and the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they operate draws influence from a variety of work in the fields of musicology and media studies. The emphasis on the pedagogical properties of playback format comes in accordance with Mark Katz’s *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* which concerns the effects of recorded sound technology on musical practice and the listening ear, what the musicologist calls “phonograph effects.” Tim J. Anderson’s *Making Easy Listening: Material Culture and Postwar American Recording* considers one such phonograph effect: the particularites of prewar and postwar listening practices. Anderson considers the period between 1946-1964 to be a “historical schism” between the record and the performer of music in which recordings prevailed as the dominant form of listening experience in the United States. The shift from the record as a recording of a performance to the record as a performance itself is a key distinction between prewar and

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postwar listening practices. As a project set both before and after Anderson’s “historical schism,” The Sound of Ethnic America owes much to Making Easy Listening’s insight into the cultural development of recorded sound as technology in the interim.

As a meditation on the work of collections, both in the form of the “foreign-language” catalogs of prewar record companies and the holdings and gaps of collectors in the postwar decades, this project pulls from theoretical work on collections originating in Jean Baudrillard’s philosophy of consumption and updated in the literary criticism of Susan Stewart. In a critique of late-capitalism, Baudrillard argues, “Individuals no longer compete for the possession of goods, they actualize themselves in consumption.” Objects themselves are best understood as “categories of objects,” which in turn, create “categories of persons” through the consumptive processes. To Stewart, collecting, in effect, acts as Baudrillardian consumption fully realized. “The collection replaces history with classification,” Stewart writes, “with order beyond the realm of temporality.” The collectors featured in this project engage with recordings in a manner similar to both Baudrillard’s and Stewart’s theories on objects and collections. They are more or less defined by the objects they collect, never running from the title of collector. Their collections, and the anthologies they produce of them, serve as projections of the past, but the parameters of which are guided largely by then contemporary classifications. The collection, then, becomes central theoretical concern in the history of prewar vernacular recordings.

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26 Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 151.
Key to this project, separating it from the extant histories and studies of prewar recording period and “foreign-language” recording catalogs more specifically, is the significance granted to federal immigration policies in shaping a “foreign-language” market in both pre- and postwar contexts. The social and political effects of turn-of-the-twentieth-century immigration was first committed to academic monograph in John Higham’s *Strangers in the Land: Patterns in American Nativism, 1860-1925*. Higham’s classic work details cyclical waves of nativism, Americanism, and anti-immigrant politics accompanying economic downturns and increased immigration, both real and perceived, over the period.\(^{27}\)

More recent updates to Higham’s account have been authored by historians Roger Daniels and Mae Ngai. In *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1822*. Daniels periodizes immigration to the US via policy enacted to curtail the movement of people across the nation’s borders. The progression from regulation to restriction of the immigrant populations which served as the market demographic for “foreign-language” recordings provides necessary insight into the role of federal policy in shaping the legacy of the recordings considered in this project.\(^{28}\) In a similar vein, Mae Ngai’s *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* emphasizes the role of race in the creation of the immigration policy. As Ngai argues, the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 overtly restricted immigration from southern and eastern Europe in favor of older central and northern European entrants, but its covert action was to effectively cut-off access to the US to the rest of the world. Immigration restriction cemented whiteness as central to make-up of the nation,


casting immigrants of color as either unwanted or illegal within national boundaries. The Sound of Ethnic America builds on these works of legal and social immigration history, but offering a cultural study of the broader effects of federal immigration policy.

As a sound study, the project responds to recent calls in the field to consider the role of race in sonic culture and history. Jennifer Lynn Stoever’s pioneering work on the racialization of sound in the US, The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening established the framework and vocabulary necessary to consider sonification of race. To Stoever, the audibility of racial difference is heard in volume, timbre, and diction. In racialized sound is heard the resonances of racial history, of continued oppression and subjugation. The sonic color line is heard by what Stoever calls “the listening ear,” or the audition of racial ideology. The Sound of Ethnic America expands Stoever’s work to include racial identification beyond the “volume” of blackness and “inaudibility” of whiteness. This projects makes audible ethnic identity captured at a period when the racial stratification of turn-of-the-twentieth-century immigrants was anything but certain. In this way, the project merges Stoever’s racialized listening with critical histories of white racialization authored by Matthew Frye Jacobson and David Roediger.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one opens at the source chronicling prewar recording companies and the ethnic and immigrant musicians courted to fill “foreign-language” catalogs during the acoustic and early electrical recording periods. Whereas other studies of the early recording industry tether “foreign-language” recordings to ethnic and immigrant family home, the chapter recuperates the public address of “foreign” recordings and music, implicating their audition in the political life of listeners.

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of the nation. As such, considerable attention is paid to the wave of ethnonationalism which dominated US politics in the opening decades of the twentieth century in response to the drop in central European immigration and the rise of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe as well as greater Asia, Mexico and other nations of Latin America. This racist, reactionary backlash crested in the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, known more commonly as the Johnson-Reed Act, which severely restricted immigration from “undesirable” areas—itself build on the backbone of earlier anti-Asian immigration laws and international agreements. The chapter examines how the presence of “foreign-language”—their audile quality—effectively sonified the cultural pluralisms antagonizing “100% Americanism” and the steps record companies took ensure their capital interests did not conflict with the ethos of nationalism.

Chapter two moves forward to the US at midcentury for a more thorough examination of Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music*. In elevating the cultural stock and historical worth of prewar vernacular recordings from trivial working-class black and white popular musics to rich artifacts of bygone US traditions, Smith and other record collectors of the period established the parameters of the national vernacular imaginary for the US folk revival as well as general audiences. Combining academic folklore practices with the conspicuity of middle-class consumption, the *Anthology* and its parent label Folkways Records presented a sonic and material perception of the nation’s vernacular past framed largely around the racial stratification of its midcentury present. Smith’s white and black construction of the US—although progressive in its contemporaneous racial equality agenda—effectively mutes the more racially and nationally ambiguous recordings of the prewar “foreign-language” series from the vernacular past of the nation.
With Smith’s *Anthology* central to the genesis of the US folk revival and establishment of an “old time” and “country blues” reissue music economy, chapter three turns to mid-1970s revisions to Smith’s imagined vernacular past and the reemergence of prewar “foreign-language” recordings within a national vernacular context. Rebranded as “ethnic series” recordings, the musics of turn-of-the-century US immigrants met with a turn toward ethnicity in the 1970s. Major anthologies enabled by the nation’s Bicentennial commemoration like the Library of Congress’ *Folk Music in America* series edited by Richard Spottswood and New World Records’ *Recorded Anthology of American Music* funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, intermingling prewar “ethnic series” recordings with both early blues and country sides as well as contemporary ethnic musics of the US. The emphasis on “ethnic series” recordings of eastern and southern European immigrants on these Bicentennial revisions at the expense of Mexican American recordings, and the altogether absences of recordings representative of many Asian American immigrants points to the centrality of turn-of-the-century eastern and southern European immigration to the national imaginary. The acquired whiteness of eastern and southern Europeans retroactively enveloped their cultural productions within a national context precisely at the moment their descendents where advocating for ethnic particularity. The emergence of “white ethnicity” in the 1970s, a reaction to the perceived “special rights” granted to black and brown peoples, as well as other minorities, served as means to mask what George Lipsitz has called “the possessive investment in whiteness.”

In the final chapter, I focus attention on the exceptional case of Mexican and Mexican American pre- and early postwar vernacular recordings in the reissue economy of the mid-1970s. Caught between Mexican and American distinction, pre- and early postwar Mexican series

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recordings, produced mainly in San Antonio with performers from both nations, are representative of the broader phenomenon of the borderlands within critical ethnic studies. The borderlands, or border cultures, exist outside of and between the bounds of national cultures. The border culture of pre- and early postwar Mexican series recordings materialized in the reissue economy in the *Texas-Mexican Border Music* series. Beginning in 1974 and completing its run in 1985, Folklyric Records, a subsidiary label of folk revivalist Arhoolie Records dedicated to “ethnic series” reissues, released twenty-four volumes of the *Texas-Mexican Border Music* series covering everything from the early recordings of famed Mexican American singer and guitarist Lydia Mendoza to the transformation from string bands to accordion-based music in Norteño tradition. The rich diversity in style and performance as well as sheer volume of available recordings beg the question of why the pre- and early postwar Mexican series recordings were not more incorporated into both Smith’s *Anthology* as well as the more pluralistic *Folk Music in America*. The chapter argues that the sidelining of Mexican series recordings is the result of the long history of both a real and perceived fluidity of the US’s southern border for Mexican migrants as well as the racialization of Mexican heritage, a related phenomenon that position persons of Mexican descent as “always already” at the boundaries of both the nation and the national imaginary.

**The Sonics of Citizenship**

In totality, *The Sound of Ethnic America* examines the relationship between legal citizenship and cultural citizenship. The enactment of citizenship is more than the birthright laws, naturalization processes, and social security numbers. Citizenship exists in a cultural realm as well. The ability to see, hear, and claim one’s culture within the national is a function of full
citizenship. As points of entry to the US opened and closed over the course of the twentieth century, the relative fluidity or rigidity of cultural citizenship shifted with it. This dissertation chronicles those shifts on a sonic level. The codification of the national ear at midcentury muted a diversity of vernacular grammars active in the prewar musical soundscape. The turn towards ethnicity in the 1970s made pluralism a national priority, but emphasizing ethnicity did not occlude the racial logics guarding citizenship. Sonic citizenship as embodied in the national vernacular imaginary is site of contest over the twentieth century. The Sound of Ethnic America takes those contests as its subject, following the national vernacular imaginary as it shifts and sways to the racial politics of its present. Making citizenship audible through vernacular musical performance and the languages, grammars, accents, and rhythms it projects, The Sound of Ethnic America challenges the self-evidency of national vernacular imaginary to understand the politics, policies, and power that sound the nation.

CHAPTER 1: “WEAPONS OF SURPRISING POWER”: COMMERCIAL RECORDING COMPANIES, IMMIGRATION POLICY, AND AMERICANIZATION IN THE 1920S

Introduction - 1928

In February 1928, singer Marika Papagika capped off a decade in the US recording industry when she entered a Columbia Records studio in New York City to cut a number of syrta, kleptikos, and other Greek vernacular song forms. Born in 1890 on the island Kos, off the Greek coast, little is known about Papagika before she entered the US in 1915 at age 26. To officials at Ellis Island, Papagika was a housekeeper who arrived alongside a husband, Constantious “Gus” Papagika, seven years her senior. She was of Greek “race” and “nationality,” but her last known address was listed as Alexandria in Egypt.

After first settling in Chicago, the Papagikas relocated to New York City where Marika began a prolific recording career, producing at least 225 unique performances for both Victor

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33 Ian Nagoski, liner notes to Marika Papagika, The Further the Flame, the Worse it Burns Me: Greek Folk Music in New York City, 1919-1928, Mississippi Records MR-051, 2010, LP.

34 Year: 1915; Arrival: New York, New York; Microfilm Serial: T715, 1897-1957; Microfilm Roll: Roll 2407; Line: 6; Page Number: 90.

and Columbia in an eleven year-run spanning 1918 to 1929. Most often recording alongside traditional Greek string ensembles, Papagika’s powerful yet precise voice cuts through the highs of an improvised violin and lows of a cello or hammered cimbalom. The session in March of 1928 would prove no different with Papagika cutting tunes like “Stis Manzouras ton Antho” and “Sta Vervena Sta Giannen,” and other songs referencing Greek locales for an audience of fellow émigrés in the United States.

Later that year in June, violinist Karol Stoch alongside singer Stanislaw Bachleda and a three-piece string orchestra, assembled at a Victor Talking Machine studio on North Michigan Ave. in Chicago to record a series of dance tunes traditional to the mountainous Podhale region of southeastern Poland. Stoch, a Góral (translation, highlander), was born in Podhale around 1888 before emigrating to the US in 1907 at age 19. Assigned the somewhat generic occupation of “farmer/laborer” on his immigration papers, Stoch was likely one of the many people in rural areas of eastern Europe driven from subsistence farming by automation and industrialization. By 1930, though, Stoch had made Chicago his home, marrying fellow Góralka Katarzyna Skubis, raising a family, and working as a wine, liquor, and soft drinks

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36 Nagoski, liner notes to Marika Papagika, The Further the Flame, the Worse it Burns Me: Greek Folk Music in New York City, 1919-1928.

37 Ibid.


39 Ibid.

retailer. Stoch’s business on June 11, 1928, though, was not in soda and alcohol sales, but as the preeminent performer of Górale dance and folk tunes. With Bachleda’s impressive bellow and Stoch’s masterful lead violin dancing over and around the rigid downstrokes of the string ensemble, the group committed to shellac disc the music of Podhale for commercial sale to greater Polonia.

In April 1928, steel guitarist Sol Ho’opi’i walked into a Columbia recording studio in Los Angeles, California to perform a number of instrumental and vocal tunes in his native Hawaiian language as bandleader for Sol Ho’opi’i’s Novelty Trio. Solomon Ho’opi’i Ka’ai’ai was born twenty-six years earlier in 1902 in Honolulu on the island of Oahu in Hawaii, then a recently declared colonial outpost of the US empire. One of twenty-one children, Ho’opi’i stood out from his many siblings learning to play guitar and ukelele by age four. His skill and dexterity on the steel guitar became apparent at an early age attracting crowds around Honolulu and gigging for Johnny Noble’s famous orchestra in his early teens.

In 1919, Ho’opi’i made his way to the continental US stowed aboard the SS Sonoma, a ship set for San Francisco. Ho’opi’i soon left northern California for Los Angeles where found


work performing on Hawaiian music broadcasts on radio stations KHL and KFWB. Over the course of the 1930s, Ho’opi’s playing would evolve to include more jazz and blues influences on songs performed in the English language, earning him distinction as “the main synthesizer of traditional Hawaiian music and American jazz.” In 1928 though, Ho’opi’, backed by guitar and ukelele, was still playing and singing in the Hawaiian idiom, his steady tenor “marked by control in both vibrato and falsetto transitions,” as he plucked away at his Martin hollow-body guitar in performances cut to record for Columbia’s Hawaiian catalog.

A month earlier in March, a twelve-year-old Lydia Mendoza and her family crammed into a Dodge Brothers car traveling from Kingsville, Texas to San Antonio. Lydia’s father, Francisco Mendoza, had spotted an ad in the back of La Prensa, a Spanish-language newspaper in Texas, announcing a two-week long residency by the OKeh Recording Co. to record Spanish-language songs and dances. After convincing a driver in Kingsville to escort Francisco and family to San Antonio, Lydia was en route to a recording career that would span seven decades, catapulting her to critical, cultural, and national prominence as the first female star of Tejano music and a working-class icon to Mexicans and Mexican-Americans on both sides of the border.

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45 Troutman, 132.


47 Kanahele, 144.

The road to that first recording session was not easy, but hard traveling was nothing new to the young Mendoza. Born in Houston in 1916, Lydia spent her earliest years moving back and forth across the US-Mexico border, her father Francisco chasing work and attempting to manage a drinking habit. The family band, though, brought the Mendozas to San Antonio that day in March 1928 with Francisco on tambourine and vocals, Lydia’s mother Leonor on guitar and vocals, sister Francisca on triangle, and Lydia singing harmony and playing mandolin. Branding themselves El Cuarteto Carta Blanca, the group cut twenty sides for OKeh of corridos and cancioneros in the Norteño tradition. Before the family could even hear the fruits of that first session, though, they had moved on from San Antonio, enlisted to work the Midwestern beet fields outside Detroit, Michigan alongside other Mexican migrant farmworkers.

The 1928 sessions for Papagika, Stoch, Ho’opi’i, and Mendoza overlap during a particularly fruitful period in the commercial recording business in the United States. Over the opening three decades of the twentieth century, US recording companies—like their European counterparts—rapidly expanded production of shellac discs, progressively redirecting attention away from the trained musicians of major cities and onto vernacular performers representative of a variety of working-class, racial, ethnic, immigrant, and migrant groups the globe over—what Michael Denning calls the “vernacular musical revolution.” In port cities and industrial centers near and far, US and European-based recording outfits set up makeshift studios to record for commercial profit the many and varied vernacular musical styles performed in those areas. A


50 Ibid, 11-34.
colonizing act in conception, the “vernacular musical revolution” in practice upended the primacy of European “serious” musics to, what Denning calls, the “colonial ear.”

Within the borders of the US, however, the stakes of the “vernacular musical revolution” differed significantly. The recordings of Papagika, Stoch, Ho’opi’i, and Mendoza offer an incomplete, but representative sample of the various strains of vernacular musical performance lining domestic record company catalogues under “foreign” or “foreign-language” distinction. These series—including Serbo-Croatian, West Indian, Jewish, Trinidadian, Hungarian, Italian, Hawaiian, Russian, Slovene, Ukrainian, Armenian, and Turkish, to name just a few—were designed to turn immigrant and ethnic populations into phonograph patrons.

Histories of the prewar recording period generally bracket “foreign-language” recordings as marginalia, cordoning off particular ethnicized forms to their attendant immigrant or ethnic communities. But like Denning has argued, the “foreign-language” catalogs of the acoustic and early electrical recording period were anything but a marginal project. To hear the “foreign-language” catalogs as part of a wider vernacular canon demands attention to the broader contexts of these recordings, their odd position as “foreign” within the US nation, and the cultural anxieties stoked by such contradictions. This chapter recuperates “foreign-language” recordings, not as vestiges of an “old world” past, but as active players in, what David Suisman calls, the musical soundscape of the early twentieth-century US.

I argue that the audiopolitics (to borrow


another term from Denning) of prewar “foreign language” recordings reverberated beyond intended audiences, traveling to broader US publics, and upsetting a “national ear” tuned to nativism and ethnonationalism.

The Audiopolitics of “Foreign-Language” Recordings

Popular memory of prewar “foreign-language” or “ethnic series” catalogs tends to tether these recordings to the immigrant and ethnic home. Phonography in the early twentieth century lends itself to such contained readings. The phonograph, after all, was largely a domestic technology. As Emily Thompson argues, the cultural significance of the phonograph rests largely in its ability to move the experience of hearing music performed in public spaces into the private home. No longer was privatized listening only the provenance of the rich who could afford to hire musicians for home performance. The phonograph democratized private listening, making home audition possible across the broad swath of the record-buying public. ⁵⁴

However significant home listening was to early phonography, emphasis on private audition can contribute to a perception of sonic order in the histories that archival recordings grant access. Certainly, “foreign-language” discs and cylinders were played in the home, but the musics captured on that media circulated beyond the private parlor. These recordings were not only played at appropriate levels in approved spaces within the immigrant or ethnic family home, nor were the musics contained therein only accessible through a phonograph. The “foreign-language” offerings in Columbia, Victor, OKeh, and Bluebird catalogs, and the immigrant and ethnic musicians who increasing became the source material for those recordings, were part of a much broader, more audible musical soundscape in the opening decades of the twentieth century.

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As David Suisman states, “The creation of the musical soundscape was more than an indoor, domestic phenomenon.” Not only was music heard in “concert and dance halls, vaudeville, and musical theater,” but also in “restaurants, department stores, hotels, and cafés, and in public spaces such as schools and parks.”

Ethnicized sound was part of that public clamor. “Foreign-language” recordings, much like the bodies that produced them, can and did travel. Phonograph dealers not only marketed these recordings for sample in private in-store listening booths, but also broadcasted “foreign-language” selections out opened front doors onto busy city sidewalks, a ploy to bridge the language divide between retailers and non-English speaking pedestrians they hoped to turn into patrons.

The musicians that filled these catalogs also toured, performing their vernacular musics in both private venues and public squares. Karol Stoch alone was said to have played “over 700 weddings” in cities across multiple states. In her autobiography, Lydia Mendoza describes her itinerant family band tours “hit[ing] the little towns where the pickers gathered,” performing for Mexican migrant farmworkers on both sides of the border, and as far north as the upper midwest. Marika Papagika had an international presence, recording for the British Grammaphone Co. in Egypt, presumably while working the international port city circuit of “Smyrna, Constantinople, Athens, [and] Aleppo.”

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55 Suisman, 250.


57 The Karol Stoch Band, *Fire in the Mountains: Polish Mountain Fiddle Music, Vol 1*.

58 Broyles-Gonzalez, 6-14, quote from 14.

59 Dave Soffa makes the specific claim that Marika Papagika and her husband Gus likely toured the port city circuit in the liner notes for his self-released compilation of Papagika recordings, which Ian Nagoski echoes in his liner notes to *The Further the Flame, The Worse Its Burns Me: Greek Folk Music in New York City, 1919-1928*, Marika Papagika, 1.
The ethnic musical landscape of the prewar era also existed less formally than the public performance of established musicians. Midcentury polka sensation Frankie Yankovic recalled in telling, sounded language his youth growing up in a “lively” mixed Slovene and Italian neighborhood in Cleveland. Describing the neighborhood as “just like Europe” where “no one ever spoke English,” Slovene brass bands were central to civic life, leading funeral processions and lodge parades. The “fierce shouts” of Italian bocce games could be heard up and down the streets. The Slovene boarders taking up residence in the Yankovic family home would “holler for wine” from his mother while they “sang and drank” with his father.60 The sounds of Yankovic’s mixed-ethnic neighborhood resonate outward to a broader Cleveland populace.

As evidence of an active musical, and otherwise audible, soundscape in the opening decades of the twentieth century, “foreign-language” recordings carry with them an audiopolitics beyond that of private audition. Whereas Denning’s work concerns the audiopolitical power of global prewar vernacular recordings to challenge the hegemony of European art music, leading to what the cultural historian characterizes quite literally as a “noise uprising,” this chapter focuses on how the sonics of ethnicity and nationality as heard in domestic “foreign-language” recordings antagonize a politics of nativism and ethnonationalism in broader US publics.61 Therefore, the following sections of the chapter map out a useable past for “foreign-language” recordings market and the ways in which that market reverberated outwards into the politics of citizenship and nation in the opening decades of the twentieth-century US.


61 Denning, 1-14.
The history of “ethnic” sound on record in the United States is as old as the nation’s commercial industry. In the early years of acoustic recording, major players like Victor, Edison, and Columbia all featured recordings of “foreign” distinction. The Victor Recording Company’s interest in “foreign-language” recordings actually predates its founding in 1901; the Berliner imprint, a precursor to the parent company, began pressing “foreign-language” discs in the 1890s and Zonophone, originally a bootleg label made legal when it was absorbed into the Victor fold, also issued ethnic recordings as early as 1899. Columbia was perhaps the most aggressive in its pursuit of an “ethnic” market. Discographer Richard Spottswood reports that “ethnic” records on the Columbia label are “traceable from the 1890s onward.” By 1908, the label established a “general ethnic series,” a line of recordings demarcated by the prefix “E” in their cataloging system; a similar, but notably segregated series was also developed for Spanish-language recordings using the “C” prefix.62

Although Columbia and Victor were quick to add “foreign” records into their catalogs, the early market for ethnicized sound differed from the “vernacular musical revolution” years of the Papagika, Stoch, Ho’opi’i, and Mendoza sessions detailed earlier in two significant ways. First, ethnic issues from the early acoustic period of commercial recording tended to be produced from matrices imported from overseas affiliates as opposed to sourcing the material from ethnic and immigrant musicians residing domestically. Second, these recordings were made of professionally trained musicians, as opposed the “amateur” performers of Denning’s “revolution.” William Howland Kenney explains the industry interest in importing recordings of professionally trained musicians as evidence of a bias towards European forms of high art and

musical composition in the US at turn-of-the-century. Kenney states, “Just as Victorian tradition considered females particularly musical... so it taught that Europeans had invented and most skillfully developed the traditions of concert hall music that had been grafted onto the artistic life of the United States.”

In this way, acoustic-era “foreign-language” series issues did not necessarily imply the sense “authenticity” that ethnic distinction would accrue particularly in the postwar decades. Instead, these discs and cylinders reflected artistic and cultural merit. In line with the broader mission of the commercial industry to market recorded sound as means of cultural uplift, the “foreign” distinction of early acoustic-era discs and cylinders implied a sense of value otherwise unattainable from domestic sources.

With the onset of war in Europe in 1914, the importation of the recorded materials from across the Atlantic became a non-possibility for US recording companies. This rupture in the circulatory practices of commercial recording companies ramped up the shift from importing “foreign-language” releases to cutting “foreign” discs domestically. Columbia had already begun recording “most of the languages which compromise [the label]’s ‘foreign’ offerings” in its New York City studio by 1911, but, as Kenney states, “the war ‘systematized and intensified’ an ongoing project into a national policy that extended well beyond New York.” By 1915, the label extended this “national policy” to the Midwest, opening its first recording studio in Chicago to account for the wartime shortage of “foreign-language” issues. Trade publication coverage of the event highlighted the first recordings of Elvira Lenora Galentine, a “charming little Spanish girl” from the north of Mexico and The Filiarchi, a Polish vocal group cutting records of Polish

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63 Ibid, 65.

64 Ibid, 78-79.
folk and patriotic songs well as ethnic Christmas carols known as Koledy.⁶⁵ Like Columbia, Victor made the trip west at the onset of the war, also setting up a permanent studio in Chicago to complement their established facilities in New York and New Jersey.⁶⁶

The switch towards domestic “foreign-language” production during the second decade of the twentieth century also accompanied an expansion in the size and scope of commercial “foreign-language” catalogs. By 1925, Columbia had established discrete lines in their “foreign-language” catalog for Serbo-Croatian, Danish, West Indian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Jewish, Hungarian, Italian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Scandinavian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovene, Swedish, Ukrainian, Armenian, Rumanian, Turkish, Irish, French Canadian, Scottish, Arcadian French, Persian, Bohemian, Syrian-Arabic, and Portuguese. Smaller imprints like the OKeh and Odeon labels of the General Phonograph Co. produced series of Italian, German, Polish, Hungarian, Rumanian, Jewish, Russian, Bohemian, Slovak, Scandinavian, Irish, Serbo-Croatian, Croatian, Slovene, Norwegian, Lithuanian, Greek, Mexican and West Indian recordings. By decades end, Victor would revamp its general “foreign-language” line to include specific series for Bohemian, Serbo-Croatian, Finnish, German, Greek, Jewish, Hungarian, Italian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Polish, Rumanian, Scandinavian, Russian-Ukrainian, Slovak, Slovene, Swedish, Turkish, Albanian, Irish, and Serbian ten and twelve-inch shellac discs.⁶⁷

Additionally, the expanse in discrete lines of “foreign-language” catalogs also accompanied a turn away from professionally trained musicians and a turn towards vernacular performance. Abandoning a top-down approach to cultural uplift, the growth in “foreign-

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⁶⁵ *TMW* XI, 8 (August 1915): 67.


⁶⁷ Spottswood, xxxiii-xivi.
language” catalogs in the post-WWI era resulted in the search for new markets. As Karl Hagstrom Miller notes, the shift toward vernacular performance in “foreign-language” catalogs “insisted that consumers—not talking machine dealers—were in the best position to recognize musical quality.” The celebration of cultural democracy notwithstanding, the vernacular shift in “foreign-language” recordings also meant that releases under “foreign” distinction no longer implied the broader artistic and cultural values of the early acoustic era. Instead, these recordings resonated with the musical tastes of the immigrant and ethnic communities as their target demographic. As such, the audiopolitics of “foreign-language” recordings swung dramatically from a perception of cultural refinement to the sonification of ethnic particularity.

The Foreign Recordings Retail Market

As recording companies expanded their ethnic series offerings to reach local and regional immigrant communities in the 1920s, phonograph dealers became increasingly adept at marketing “foreign-language” recordings to their respective demographics. *Talking Machine World*, the chief trade organ of the phonograph industry in the opening decades of the twentieth century, routinely ran editorial features extolling the profit virtue in the “foreign” recordings trade. The *World* implored retail concerns to “hire linguists” and other speakers of foreign languages. In a July 1919 dispatch, *World* writers profiled Constantine Xides, a Greek immigrant hired by the W.W. Kimball Co. of Chicago to “sell pianos and musical goods to his own people” as well as “speak[] on the advantages of music in the home” offered by phonograph records. The *World* noted, “The foreign element in Chicago has always been one of the biggest programs for Chicago talking machine retailers. How to reach them, inspire confidence and

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68 Miller, 183.

69 *TMW* XIX, 10 (Oct 15, 1923): 22.
create favor for a concern’s goods has been the object of almost every large merchant. A number of Chicago concerns have representatives travelling among these people, but the present instance of a piano salesman carrying on active musical propaganda among the foreign-speaking element is not only novel, but effective.”

Aside from hiring ethnic representatives to conduct “active musical propaganda” on immigrant populations, the *World* recommended retailers study local demographics and amend their stock accordingly. It was “profitable” the *World* suggested to “pay attention to ‘lookers’” and others who pass by storefronts, and design marketing strategies to turn those passersby into patrons. The ethnic series market was described as “an almost untouched record selling field with millions of prospective customers.” One article detailed the successes of an unnamed New York City retailer that increased sales for “$15,000 annually to $25,000 monthly” after restructuring its stock to court business from the “settlements of Russians, Italians, Germans, Spanish, and other foreign-born and foreign-language-speaking peoples” in its locality. With such profit potential in reach, another article plainly asked, “Why overlook a good bet?”

Part of “good bet” wagered by phonograph retailers and recording companies on immigrant and ethnic communities in the 1920s rested on the notion that “foreign-born” persons were liberal spenders. A Toledo retail owner proclaimed that “Italian, Mexican, Polish and

70 “From Our Headquarters,” ibid XV, 7 (July 1919): 111-112.


72 “An Almost Untouched Record Selling Field With Millions of Prospective Customers,” ibid XVIII, 6 (July 15, 1922): 4.


74 “Mid-West Point of View”, ibid XVIII, 10 (Oct 15, 1922): 90.
Jewish record buyers do not follow the American policy and jam every penny they earn into the bank, but consistently buy records.”

To court what the industry assured was a profit windfall in their “foreign” record catalogs, retailers ran advertisements in foreign-language newspapers to attract new brick-and-mortar customers as well as court mail-order sales. The New York-based Aeolion Co., for instance, bought advertising space in German-language papers the New York Staats-Zeitung and New York Herald, Jewish periodicals The Forward and The Day, Italian-language papers Il Progresso Italo-Americano, Corriere D’America and Bollettino Della Sera, the Hungarian-language Amerikai Magya Nepszava, and Russian-language Novoye Russkoy Slovenia to spread awareness of its line of Vocalion ethnic series issues.

Local retail merchants utilized available window-space to hang decorative, street-facing display to catch the eye of foreign-speaking pedestrians. These displays, either made in-house or mass distributed by labels for their specific foreign-language series, often depicted the range of “foreign records” available with images of national flags “in connection” with those immigrant and ethnic identities. As stated earlier, this strategy extended to the aural realm, with dealers setting phonographs at the opened entrance to stores, playing specific “foreign-language” recordings to grab the ears of immigrant and ethnic passersby. The New York Band Instrument Co. in Manhattan once claimed to sell fifteen-thousand copies of a Victor Russian series disc through a targeted public address of the record at a specific times of day when Russian

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75 Views attributed to Harry L. Wasserman of United Music Store are sourced from the article “Improvement in Industrial and Building Situation in Toledo Presages Busy Names” (ibid XX, 8 (Aug 15, 1924): 76).


immigrants were known to walk by the front of the store. A year later, the same store also bragged in the trade press to using the same strategy to sell copies of the Italian series issue “Poverty Valentino” at the more reasonable figure of one thousand units. The discrepancy between the two figures suggests the efficacy of the practice probably fell somewhere in between at best.

Logging sales and maintaining lists of customers and their purchase preferences became key to the foreign-language record market. Common to retail practice in the opening decades of the twentieth century, phonograph merchants opened accounts for each new patron to make purchase at their location. Savvy record dealers filed “foreign-language” purchasers separately by their attendant “ethnic series” purchase history, easily generating mailing lists informing these populations of new holdings in their series of preference. Certain merchants looked beyond simply the individuals making purchase in their stores, inquiring with ethnic and immigrant leaders for information on their communities. Sales advice in the trade publication Talking Machine World included reaching out to industrial management and religious leaders. “The factory foreman can give valuable information,” an October 1920 article stated, “The priests and the other heads of churches can very often be induced to give names of members of their congregation.” In one instance, The Schuster Music Store in Milwaukee, Wisconsin entered the ethnic series market in 1925 after securing the “names and addresses of 5,000 recently

78 “Pushing the Records that Fit Your Trade,” ibid XXI, 6 (June 15, 1925): 24.


80 “Making Foreign Record Department Pay,” ibid XXI, 12 (Dec 15, 1925): 40.

81 “The Mid West Point of View,” ibid XVI, 10 (Oct 15, 1920): 137.
naturalized citizens of all nationalities.” The Schuster concern then segregated the list by each nationality “for the purpose of mailing record supplements.”

As the recording and sales industries grew more adept at courting an immigrant and otherwise “foreign-speaking” audiences, special retail locations became known as centers for the foreign-language record market. In Pittsburgh, the sound recordings section of Kaufman’s department store reported “foreign speaking patrons” as “liberal buyers” from the foreign record aisles. Tilman Bros. in La Crosse, Wisconsin made “a specialty of caring for the musical wants of the foreign-born citizens” of the area, catering specifically to the “Italian, Greek, Polish, Norwegian, Swedish, Assyrian, and German” populations of the upper midwest. In September 1920, J. Goldberg, a Columbia dealer, opened a new retail location on Gratiot Ave. in Detroit with six of its fourteen listening booths dedicated to recordings in languages other than English. The Lind-Marks Co., also in Detroit, reported “a big demand” for Polish and German issues on the OKeh and Odeon labels carried in the store. In Cleveland, Augusta Smirda opened a location on Broadway and 58th St. carrying Victor and Columbia “foreign” issues “for the especial benefit of the people who want music and entertainment in their native languages.” In Kansas City, Kansas, a jewelry store operated by Jon Munich began “pushing foreign records” in 1921; Munich was noted for being Croatian born and therefore “prominent in all matters in

82 “Planning Drive to Secure Foreign Record Business ,” ibid XXI, 2 (Feb 15, 1925): 34.


87 “Trade Activity in Cleveland,” ibid XVI, 12 (Dec 15, 1920): 84
which foreign-born citizens are concerned."88 The People’s Talking Machine Co. in Philadelphia was known as the largest retailer in Hebrew recordings in the city.89 United Music Store in Toledo, Ohio opened in 1923 carrying all Victor ethnic series issues after a city survey placed the Polish, Spanish, Hungarian, German, Italian, Hebrew and French populations at 40,000.90 Similar specialty shops opened in Los Angeles, Dallas, Youngstown, Ohio and elsewhere across the US.91 The development of the “foreign-language” record trade into a coherent, stratified system with retail outlets catering to specific populations in their localities displays economic purchasing power of immigrant and ethnic communities and the sizable, public imprints made on both major and minor cities across the nation.

“Foreign-Language” Recordings and Ethnonationalism in the 1920s

The development of the “foreign-language” recording market on both industrial and retail fronts lends itself to rather spurious assumptions about the acculturation of US society to the European, Latino, and Asian immigrant populations over the opening three decades of the twentieth century. But the political, economic, and social reality for the nation’s Great Wave immigrants offers a much harsher indictment of the “melting pot” ideology than a more narrow study of US recording companies might provide. In order to understand the stakes of the “foreign-language” market for both the immigrant and ethnic musicians cutting these recordings

88 “Promising Trade Outlook in the Kansas City Territory,” ibid XVII, 6 (June 15, 1921): 142.


domestically and the immigrant and ethnic populations those recordings served, a broader framework must be established factoring in immigration patterns and policy of the period as well as the rising tide of US nativism and ethnonationalism that crested in 1920s.  

The history that foregrounds the “foreign-language” recordings market in the US—that made the sale of musics to ethnic and immigrant populations in the US profitable and made their production within the domestic interior possible—was the period of the peak immigration in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. Beginning in the 1880s and ending with the passage implementation of codified immigration restriction in the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, millions of new bodies entered the US, populating urban spaces in the industrial northeast and Midwest as well as responding to the need for agricultural labor in the southwest and along the Pacific seaboard of the nation’s west coast. This forty-odd year period altered the racial, cultural, and religious dynamics of the nation like no moment prior or since. Between 1901 and 1914 alone, at the peak of this migratory moment, nearly thirteen million immigrants entered the US, the vast majority taking up permanent residence in cities and towns across the contiguous states.

Once in the US, the experiences of Great Wave immigrants also differed depending on port of entry as well as racial classification, a particularly nebulous taxonomy at the turn of the twentieth century. Though a clear hierarchy existed between “old stock” Anglo-Saxon whites and the formerly enslaved, black West Africans and their descendants, as well as persons of

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93 Daniels, 30.
Asian descent and the indigenous populations of North America, the racial status for eastern and southern European immigrants upon arrival was more uncertain. As David Roediger describes, “the racial landscape discovered gradually by new immigrants to the United States was a mess.” Messiness, Roediger argues, is key to understanding racial stratification in the US during the Great Wave immigration period. With imprecision and fluidity, Sicilian immigrants in the US might find themselves classified as “Latin, mixed (with Africans), new immigrant[s], Southern European, Mediterranean, Italian, south Italian, Catholic, non-English speaking, Caucasian, white, and dark white.” Likewise, eastern European émigrés might be “Polish, Slavic, (semi) oriental, Asiatic, Catholic, new immigrant[s], non-English speaking, Caucasian, and white.” The ever-changing lexicon of racial identification for eastern and southern European immigrants, what Matthew Frye Jacobson famously characterized as “whiteness of a different color,” distinguished new arrivals from Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian settlers of decade’s prior.

Beyond the development of an imprecise yet consequential racial literacy for new arrivals, the Great Wave of immigration also reinvigorated a politics of nativism with a deep history in the US. Early forms of nativism and ethnonationalism in the US centered on anti-Catholicism and anti-radicalism. Anti-Catholic sentiment dates back to the colonial era when British America shared continental space with French and Spanish Catholic empires. 

94 Roediger, 35.
95 Ibid, 35-36.
97 Higham, 1-11.
98 Ibid, 6.
radical fervor often emerged in response to external events. The rise of Marxism and the Paris Commune of 1871 stoked fears of domestic revolution.\textsuperscript{99} John Higham argues in his classic 1963 history of US nativism \textit{Strangers in the Land} that anti-Catholic and anti-radical nativisms coalesced around common beliefs of what the US is not: anti-Catholicism was rooted in the idea that the US state is not beholden to the papacy (however irrational that idea might be) and anti-radicalism centered on maintaining free enterprise and capitalist order. The nativism that came into maturation at the turn-of-the-twentieth century, however, drew more distinct borders around what is “American.” Higham argues that twentieth-century nativism became explicitly an Anglo-Saxonist ethnonationalism.\textsuperscript{100} Though earlier instantiations of anti-black, anti-Asian, and anti-indigenous nativisms rightfully complicate Higham’s assessment, the racial nativism that comes into stark relief during the Great Wave migration period positions Anglo-Saxon whiteness as central to the nation in ways only assumed in nativisms prior.

Early twentieth-century nativism not only produced social movements to denigrate newcomers, it also shaped federal policy, chiefly in the construction of the Johnson-Reed Act, the landmark 1924 immigration restriction bill. The passage of the bill, named for Congressman Albert Johnson of Washington and Senator David Reed of Pennsylvania, officially ended the era of open immigration policy informed more by economics rather than politics. As Mae Ngai argues, immigration to the US was “encouraged and virtually unfettered” up until the late-nineteen century when regulatory policies paved the way for restrictionist politics of the 1924 act. Immigration, and the “freedom of movement” in general, was a right of capitalism. Industrialization required “labor mobility,” a ready supply of skilled and unskilled workers to fill

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid, 30-33.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, 1-11.
new occupational markets. The nation’s lax approach to immigration policy reflected these needs.  

By 1920, however, the needs of industry had shifted. Capital interests no longer required the mass immigration of decades prior to grow and prosper. As Ngai states, “Industrial capitalism had matured to the point where economic growth could come more from technological advances in mass production than from a continued expansion of the manufacturing workforce.” By 1924, restriction was a foregone conclusion. Most historians of US immigration agree the influx of new arrivals had eclipsed the economic benefits that made earlier waves favorable. The tragedy of the Johnson-Reed Act was not in its necessity but in the racism that informed, shaped, and propelled its execution. Senator Reed and Congressman Johnson turned to their nativist impulses to craft a bill complying with economic needs but structured by “Americanist” aims.

Of course, the racial logics of the Johnson-Reed Act have their antecedents in immigration law. The first step the US congress took to ending the unmitigated flow of immigrants into the nation arrived towards the end of the nineteenth century with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Like many white migrants, Chinese immigrants began flocking to California in the 1850s in search of gold. To nativists, Asian presence in the

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102 Ibid, 19.
103 Both Mae M. Ngai and Roger Daniels, to varying degrees, agree that the maturation of US industry makes a compelling argument for the need to regulate immigration in a more robust manner than in periods prior; Daniels, 56-58.
104 Ngai, 18; Daniels, 18-21.
105 Ibid, 12.
western US complicated racist visions of a white-controlled region promised under Manifest Destiny. Under the shadow of bunk eugenicist science that deemed “Asiatic race” inferior, congress barred Chinese nationals from entry into the US and excluded from naturalization all Chinese immigrants already in the US. Though the act successfully barred entry into the US for Chinese persons until 1943, the law also resulted in increased migration from Japan and other Asians nations to fill the labor left with loss of Chinese workers to the west coast. The US worked diplomatically the government of Japan to curb the flow of Japanese migrants in 1908, later expanding the parameters of Chinese Exclusion Act to include “Asian Indians and other native inhabitants of a ‘barred Asiatic zone’ that ran from Afghanistan to the Pacific” with passage of the Immigration Act of 1917. As Ngai argues, these acts combined to ensure that the US Asian population remained a small minority for the next century.106

Excepting the obvious racial motivations of the Chinese Exclusion Act and its subsequent expansions, the era of immigration regulation tended to mask cultural biases in execution if not aim. As such, late-nineteenth century regulations restricted Asians from entry but also targeted “idiots,” “lunatics” and others likely to become a “public charge.”107 These aspects addressed ability with the goal of mitigating strains on state and federal resources as well as supplying industry an exploitable workforce. Literacy tests established by the Immigration Act of 1917 held similar motives in requiring the ability to read in “any recognizable language.” Though nativists had pushed hard for an “English only” ordinance, Congress opted for a more flexible option, which more so demonstrated level of education than any willingness to bend to nativist

106 Ngai, 18.

107 Daniels, 27-28.
Somewhat less covert immigration regulation came in the form of an anti-polygamy statute in 1891, which clearly targeted Mormons but the tactic was to address behavior as opposed to faith or religion. The genesis of the Johnson-Reed Act, therefore, extended the racial restrictions of Asian exclusion outward to include migrations from southern and eastern Europe. The regulatory system that began with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and grew to include additional provisions over the first two decades of the twentieth century, expanded by targeting the “national origins” of Great Wave migrants, capitalizing on the racialization of heritage indicative of the period.

The crux of Johnson-Reed Act’s racism not just in its limiting of entrant quotas to two percent of the national origin of the total population, but in the strategic assignment of the 1890 US census to calculate those percentages. In 1924, the 1920 census had yet to be fully processed (though by 1929, when the quotas were officially certified this argument loses some weight), but the censuses of 1910 and 1900 certainly were available. Nativists zeroed in on the 1890 census—sometimes referred to as the “Anglo-Saxon census”—because it represented a period before the Great Wave immigration period shifted from mostly northern and western European entrants to the influx of southern and eastern European migrants indicative of the era. The 1890 census effectively drew a line through Europe favoring the immigration of earlier arrivals more acculturated to “Americanism.” As Daniels points out, had the original 1921 emergency restriction act been made permanent, with 335,000 total immigrants at three percent of the total population, and updated to the 1920 census, roughly 42,000 Italians and 31,000 Poles would

108 Ibid, 46.
110 Daniels, 3-58.
have been granted entry annually. Under the Johnson-Reed Act, only 4,000 Italian and 6,000 Polish immigrants entered the US each year.\footnote{111} The 1890 census effectively set back the clock on acculturation, allowing in a diminished level of “swarthy” southern and eastern European immigrants and reaffirming a particular type of whiteness to the US polity.

The significance of national origins in categorizing immigrant populations worked as a kind of nativist index establishing the relative distance of certain groups of newcomers to “Americanism.” To nativists in the 1920s, the 1890 census represented a population closer to their ethnonationalist vision than found contemporaneously in cities and towns across the US. Nativist fear, of course, was always more psychic than material. Immigration of those “undesirable races” from southern and eastern Europe after World War I never peaked at prewar levels. Yet still, worries over “innumerable hordes of ignorant, penniless Europeans…about to descend upon America” compelled the federal government to “numerate” those “hordes” with preference given to those assumed less “ignorant” and “penniless.”\footnote{112}

**The Phonograph in Americanization**

Anti-immigrant sentiment extended beyond both the political and the legal, infecting social and cultural workings in the US as well. US recording labels—the same companies that promoted the “foreign” musical cultures of immigrant communities for profit—were not immune to Americanist concerns over acculturation and assimilation. In ways both direct and indirect, commercial outfits like Victor, Columbia, and OKeh, as well as their retail affiliates, engaged with the politics of nativism in complex and often contradictory manners, presenting an industry divided between the logics of capital and the ethos of the nation.

\footnote{111}{Ibid, 52.}

\footnote{112}{Ibid, 47.}
Recorded sound and Americanization have a long history of intermingling. Industry professionals and retail merchants alike promoted the efficacy of recorded sound in acquainting the newcomer with domestic customs and proper usage in the English language.\(^{113}\) Recordings of patriotic songs and marches quickly made their way into classrooms across the US during the movement to education both “native” and “foreign-born” students on national ideals.\(^{114}\) When Warren G. Harding declared his candidacy for the US presidency in 1920, the Ohio senator included his platform on Americanization in an announcement speech recorded and distributed on shellac discs to regional Republican offices and phonograph dealers.\(^{115}\) Phonograph recordings also aided in the naturalization process with discs available in a variety of languages instructing listeners on various competencies required for citizenship.\(^{116}\) In 1920, a New York City Victor dealer gifted the Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island with two Victrolas for port of entry use; In one rather jingoistic account, *Talking Machine World* reported that the playing of “The Star-Spangled Banner” occasioned the “reverence” of “20,000 immigrants,” who “arose and stood at attention…for the country that is so democratic as to being at its very doors to welcome the strangers who desire to make America their home.”\(^{117}\)

As profiteers in the Great Wave immigration that enabled a domestic “foreign-language” field to develop, commercial recording companies took great lengths to ensure the patriotic and nationalist bona fides of their capital endeavors. In 1922, Marie Finney of the Victor Records

\(^{113}\) “Propagating English Literature Through the Records,” *TMW* XV, 12 (Dec 15, 1919): 3.

\(^{114}\) “War Service Committee Reports on Priorities,” ibid XIV, 11 (Nov 15, 1918): 96.

\(^{115}\) “Harding Records First Speech,” ibid XVI, 7 (July 15, 1920): 175.


The educational department stood before a group of phonograph dealers at the Convention of the Central Ohio Victor Retailers and asked the crowd,

What is our big social and economic problem to-day [sic]? Isn’t it the problem of the foreigner? Isn’t our failure in the past to provide for the Americanization of the foreigner the cause of most of our labor, our industrial and our social problems of to-day [sic]? Has not our failure in the past to provide this means been because we have not known enough about the foreigner and what he has brought to us in exchange for what we have to offer him?118

The question posed by Finney on the social and economic problem of the immigrant was not new to the educational department. Two years earlier, Victor Records marked the most sustained engagement in the relationship between recorded sound and the acculturation and assimilation of US immigrant populations with the publication of “The Victrola in Americanization.”119 The thirty-nine page booklet outlines how recordings could “serve in winning the foreign-born to American ideals.”120 Equal parts promotional and propagandistic, “The Victrola in Americanization” makes the case for how “foreign-language” recordings, like those offered in the Victor catalog, can be used as stepping stone to welcome in the wary newcomer on a path to national and cultural allegiance.

In the forward to booklet, Frances James Clark, director of the educational department, describes four avenues for the use of recorded sound in the Americanization of immigrant populations, a detailed in Table I below:

Table I – *The Victrola in Americanization’s* Four Avenues, 1920

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Hearing much music of other lands, forming a basis of contact and understanding</td>
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As laid out in the four avenues and their attendant sub-avenues, Clark and the educational department conceived of Americanization through recorded sound as process-oriented. Each avenue describes a practice that, when enacted, will acclimate immigrant listeners to US culture and national ideals. Basic audition of music forms a common ground between recent arrivals and established citizens. The audition of music representative of an immigrant’s “birthland” works as kind of audile olive branch, extended to the newcomer as a courtesy, a manner of welcoming new sounds into the national fold. Americanization, according to the booklet, “should be a reciprocal process whereby the American gives much to his alien neighbor and in return receives much of great worth.”  This “reciprocal process” echoes the doctrine of “immigrant gifts” as promoted by the settlement house movement at the turn-of-the-century. Jane Addams and other settlement house founders sought to include the cultural practices of the many different immigrant residents into the daily life of group houses. The idea of sharing “immigrant gifts” was intended to provide the newcomer with a sense of self-respect and the opportunity to have something of value to offer the community at the residence. In the booklet, however, the shared experience of listening to one another’s national and regional musics is not pure altruism, but rather a method for “winning the attention, confidence, and respect” of immigrants, keeping

121 “The Victrola in Americanization,” 1.

122 Ibid, 5-6.

123 Higham, 121.
newcomers “happy and satisfied,” while also inviting them to engage as active participants in their own Americanization.124

Community singing and folk dancing, the booklet’s second and third avenues for recorded sound in the assimilation of US immigrant populations, mimic the olive branch courtesies of the first, followed by more assertive steps to shift and shape the newcomer to Americanized cultural ideals. The descriptions of collective singing and corporeal movement in the booklet suggest almost spiritual benefits to participants. Portrayed as “inspirational,” holding a “potent force,” and resulting in “devotion,” community singing and folk dancing are useful tools in the process of assimilation.125 The religion here, of course, is patriotism. A goal gained first through the celebratory singing and dancing of immigrant folk material, before turning attention to vernacular and patriotic songs and dances of the US. For community singing, this includes a midway step of translating “foreign” songs to English, a means of honoring an immigrant’s past but in a tongue palatable to US nativism. English translations of immigrant and ethnic folk songs are portrayed as a transitional step in the booklet, with the goal clearly defined as the singing and dancing to US folk and patriotic music recordings.126

Beyond introductory comments, little real estate is partitioned to the discussion of songs and dances representative of immigrant nationalities; Instead, the booklet devotes much of its space to offering suggestions of US songs and dances for group singing and dancing. Options include cultural portrayals of idealized American life like “My Old Kentucky Home” and “Old Folks at Home” by John Foster and John Howard Payne’s “Home, Sweet Home.” More directly

124 “The Victrola in Americanization,” 5-6.

125 Ibid, 8, 17.

126 Ibid, 8-18.
patriotic tunes also occupy a healthy portion of the suggestions including well-known standards like “America the Beautiful,” “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “Hail Columbia,” and Frances Scott Key’s “The Star-Spangled Banner” (described in the accompanying notes as “becoming more and more recognized as our National Song.”). The “inspiration,” “devotion,” and “potent force” in the singing and dancing to tunes clearly demarcated as national and patriotic was the processional end-goal of for the community singing and folk dancing avenues of the booklet as well as the larger project of cultural Americanization. As performative, embodied citizenship, the group singing and collective dancing aspects of “The Victrola in Americanization” present the efficacy of recorded sound as a means to instruct and encourage the listener to adopt the patriotism and nationalism of its audio content.

The final section of “The Victrola in Americanization” places instruction front and center, advocating for the use of recorded discs in the study of US history. The educational department at Victor points potential educators in the history of the US to recordings of songs and poems referencing major historical moments in the development of the nation. Songs to use in the teaching of the US Civil War included “The Bonnie Blue Flag” and “Dixie.” The Spanish-American War can be told in part by playing “There’s a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night” featuring a ragtime melody popular with soldiers of the period. Also key to the final avenue is the particular type of history the booklet wishes to tell. Clark frames US history as the study of the “foreign-born.” “With the exception of about a quarter million native descendants of North American Indians,” Clark writes, “the one hundred million people of the United States are either foreign born or descendants of foreign-born

127 Ibid, 8-15; quote from ibid, 12.

ancestors.” Striking a “nation of immigrants”-style rhetoric decades before John F. Kennedy would make popular use of the phrase, the booklet posits a similar political efficacy in such implications. The history provided by the booklet attempts to envelope the contemporaneous immigrant populations into the broader cultural make-up of the nation. Much like prior avenues, the booklet frames its history in an inclusive manner to attract the interest of immigrant communities in learning more about the nation’s foundations and principles. As such, the history presented opens with Viking exploration of North America and moves on to include Spanish expeditions, French and Canadian missionaries, Puritan settlements, and Moravian emigrations, as well as a brief and entirely insufficient account of the indigenous populations on the continent. The account of enslaved West Africans in the US is given a similarly facile treatment, diverting much attention from the problematic notion of equating their voyage to the US with that of other migrations to “power of music” over their lives. This nominally more pluralistic account of US history does work to interrupt a more Anglo-Saxon nativist vision of the nation, but does so at the service of the broader project of the Americanization of US immigrant and ethnic populations.

It should be noted that “The Victrola in Americanization” was not written for immigrant populations as kind of self-help manual on the process of assimilation into the United States, but rather as a promotional tool intended for educators and others involved in the broader Americanization movement. The commercial aims of the booklet should not be discounted. A catalog number accompanies each reference to a particular song or dance for the available Victor

129 Ibid, 19.
131 “The Victrola in Americanization,” 19-32; quote from ibid, 27.
recording of that material. Likewise, an index is included in the back of the booklet repeating the catalog information available in the text in a more ordered fashion as well as brief advertisements for other literature produced by the educational department.\textsuperscript{132}

With US elites as the intended audience, “The Victrola in Americanization” also satisfies a political objective, positioning Victor as a commercial entity whose practices line up with the aims of assimilation and national unity. “The Victrola in Americanization” suggests an awareness of concern around the production and promotion of “foreign-language” recordings, issuing the booklet to guard against anti-American claims. By positioning “foreign language” releases as part of the process in guiding new arrivals to an eventual adoption of more “American” forms of music, the booklet makes the case for the industry’s role in the assimilation and acculturation of US immigration populations in the 1920s.

**The Retail Recordings Market in Americanization**

Though the retail phonograph market by and large encouraged the growth of “foreign-language” catalogs in the 1920s, phonograph dealers and trade journalists echoed many of the claims and politics espoused by the Victor educational department. Retailers expressed bigotry towards customers who speak in “foreign” languages.\textsuperscript{133} Certain dealers felt it was “unpatriotic” to sell immigrants “foreign-language” recordings, because “the foreigner should learn our language and listen to our music.”\textsuperscript{134} As such, English-language acquisition became a major selling point for marketing to “foreign-language” demographics. As early as 1919, *Talking Machine World* ran articles promoting the positive effects of English-language recordings on

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, 33-37.

\textsuperscript{133} “Point of View,” *TMW* XVI, 4 (Apr 15, 1920): 133.

\textsuperscript{134} “From Our Chicago Headquarters,” ibid XVI, 11 (Nov 15, 1920): 145, emphasis added.
immigrant and ethnic communities. “It is not difficult to realize tremendous cultural advantage of having good English properly spoken and listened to by those growing up in the home,” *Talking Machine World* proclaimed, “From a standpoint of Americanization no other factor could be more fruitful.”

Beyond rote retention and use of the English language, *Talking Machine World* also promoted phonograph discs as means of a more cultural Americanization for Great Wave immigrants. Much like Frances John Clarke proselytized at the opening of “The Victrola in Americanization,” *World* editors understood music to have a universal quality that paradoxically transcended as well as shaped culture. Music was the way into the immigrant’s heart, according to the *World*, and the more “American” music newcomers were exposed to the more likely they were to adopt the nation’s values and beliefs. Speaking of phonograph recordings, the *World* opined, “We can offer the foreigner an unsurpassed means for acquiring an understanding of American ideas, in a way which no other agency can match. The records that he can take home and play over and over are weapons of surprising power.”

Of course, much of the hyperbolic talk about the unique efficacy of music, and particularly recorded music, was self-serving on the part of the main of organ of the phonograph industry. The *World* had a vested interest in the success of the recordings market and promoted the industry’s wares accordingly. All the same, the politics compelling the *World*’s take on the “surprising power” of recorded music are still revelatory. Framing music recordings as a “weapon” in the culture war between nativists and the many and varied immigrant populations in

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the US suggests both an awareness to issue of Americanization on the part of the industry as well as a value in positioning their trade in allegiance to the movement’s aims.

In legitimizing “foreign-language” lines carried in recordings outlets, many phonograph retailers also adopted a “cultural gifts” model, framing “foreign-language” offerings as a way to both celebrate and placate recent arrivals to the US. *Talking Machine World* pleaded with retailers to take stock in the great “music, art, and culture” that Great Wave immigrants have brought with them to share with an established US citizenry. Like the “The Victrola in Americanization,” though, the celebration of immigrant gifts accompanied political objectives beyond the acculturation of valuable, worthy art and music into the nation.

The celebration of cultural gifts was less a proper gift economy and more of standard exchange of goods and services. The *World* instructed phonograph retailers to celebrate the cultural gifts of the immigrants as a kind of bargaining chip in the larger project to make immigrant populations “see that the great democratic problems…can be brought solution only when every element in the population, native and foreign-born alike, co-operates in harmonious effort.”137 Though it is uncertain how the celebration of cultural gifts will bring to light the “great democratic problems” of the immigrant and a fractured national populace, the *World* still found the argument sound enough to extend it to retailers wary of the politics of the “foreign-language” trade.

In large part, phonograph dealers bought into the argument that the promotion and sale of “foreign-language” recordings to foreign-born customers worked as a stepping-stone to the more substantive cultural Americanization achieved when those same consumers incorporated English-language recordings into the purchasing and listening habits. Retailers celebrated when

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137 Ibid, 133.
“foreign-language” speaking customers added domestic genres to their purchase order. During a visit to the McCormick Music House in Portland, Maine in 1920, World writers noted a group of Greek immigrants in the retail store speaking “broken English,” but buying a variety of Greek series issues as well as jazz recordings. The World noted that the Greek customers were “satisfied, pleased and good nature[d]” with the Greek material, but “were ready to listen to American records and buy them, not as a poor substitute…but as an additional pleasure.”

Though primary interest often stayed with the “foreign-language” series associated with the particular immigrant listener, the adoption of nominally “American” genres always received highlight. Harry L. Wassermen, proprietor of the “foreign-language” market-focused Untied Music Store in Toledo, Ohio reported in 1925 that Italian customers tended to buy opera discs, German patrons held interest in Germanic sacred recordings, and clients of Spanish or Mexican descent maintained a preference for “native” recordings of their heritage. “Gradually,” Wassermen was sure to note, “American records…are being introduced to the foreign groups, with the result that a greater variety of music is finding its way into these homes.”

The incorporation of “American” records into the listening practices of the immigrant or ethnic consumer was “the big idea” behind “foreign-language” recordings according to the World. “American records are doing a wonderful work in Americanizing the foreign element,” the World reported. “Good songs in the English or American language…will educate not only the musical taste, but will make the love of America, American ideals, and American citizenship a part of the like of these strangers within our gates.” Of course, no matter the level of

138 “Portland Continues A Lively Talking Machine Center,” ibid XVI, 6 (June 15, 1920): 129.
139 “New Year Opens With Continuation of Good Business in the Toledo Territory,” ibid XXI, 1 (Jan 15, 1925): 92.
140 “Portland Continues A Lively Talking Machine Center,” ibid XVI, 6 (June 15, 1920): 129.
“Americanizing” jazz and other English-language records had on immigrant and ethnic listeners over the opening decades of the twentieth century, Americanization was never the primary driver in the development of a “foreign-language” recordings market. Retailers and the recordings industry took great steps to amplify the net positives of their commercial engagement with “foreign-language” audiences in the Americanization Movement, but this was fundamentally an economic relationship shaped to suit the political needs of 1920s nativism.

Other Voices in Americanization and Sound Recording

Much like the broader politics of assimilation and acculturation during the Great Wave period, the whole of the US recordings industry—from recording companies to phonograph retailers—did not march in lockstep with the more ethnonationalist ends of the Americanization movement. The recordings market espoused a continuum of responses to the “immigrant problem” from those retailers who resisted trafficking in “foreign-language” catalog releases to those who embraced not only the profit virtue in marketing to immigrant and ethnic communities, but also the right for their attendant cultures, values, and lifeways to proliferate in the US. These other voices beyond the Victor educational department and the editorializing of *Talking Machine Word* provide further evidence of the contested politics of “foreign-language” recordings during the Americanization era.

Certain retailers diverted attention away from the cultural aims of the Americanization effort, focusing instead on the economic acculturation provided in marketing phonograph discs and cylinders to recent immigrants to US. In 1921, The Inter-Racial Council highlighted the “progressive Talking Machine dealers…who have fully realized the opportunities that lie in catering to the foreign-born element “ in the US in a bulletin produced on the broader Americanization project. The council commended these phonograph retailers for making an
effort to appeal to recent immigrants “in their own language.” The council believed that when immigrants “secure good homes, furnish them attractively, enjoy books, music, good clothes” and other amenities “less rumblings of discontent and revolution” will be heard in their communities. Spending money earned from the industrial jobs that compelled migration to the US also aided in the pacification of newer immigrants. Money “tucked away…in the toe of an old sock” was better served in circulation, an act of making home in the US for the recent arrival. Economic arguments like those offered by the Inter-Racial Council obfuscate the cultural concern animating nativists in the Americanization movement. As such, concerns over the “foreign” aspects of “foreign-language” recordings were obscured to the benefit of both the “ethnic series” market and those “progressive talking machine dealers” profiting off it.

Others in the recording industry rejected wholesale the more nativist aims of the Americanization movement, not only celebrating the cultural pluralism of the opening decades of the twentieth century, but also advocating for the rights of immigrant populations to maintain ethnic particularity in the face of the era’s ethnonationalist impulses. Aligning with All-American Exposition at the Chicago Coliseum in the summer of 1919, phonograph retailers and other industry professionals met to promote “All-Americanism,” or “America for all and all for America.” The purpose of the confab was to make public display of the many cultural and economic contributions immigrants have made to the US. Representatives of the music and recording industries including Otto Schultz of the Magnolia Talking Machine Company and Chicago’s Wurlitzer branch manager E.H. Uhl joined Anne Faulkner Oberndorer of the Bureau for the Advancement of Music and William Brad White, a technical editor for Talking Machine World to highlight music “which has been produced or influenced by the various racial groups

141 “The Opportunities That Lie in Cultivating the Trade of the Foreign Born,” ibid XVII, 6 (June 15, 1921): 11.
which have been or are in the process of being fused into the American mass.” Several time slots
during the convention were dedicated to the performance of “foreign-language” musics for
enjoyment of and exposure to broader US publics.  

One of the more vocal proponents of “ethnic series” issues, not just in their profitability
but in their legitimacy in the broader musical soundscape of the US was L.L. Sebok, “foreign-
language” division manager for Columbia Records and later for General Phonograph Co., the
parent concern of the OKeh and Odeon labels. An immigrant himself, Sebok was born in
Hungary, receiving a university degree in Europe and working internationally as a civil engineer
before immigrating to the US. Sebok’s professional biography prior to his work in the US
recording industry was quite accomplished. His civil engineer resume included stops in
Constantinople where he built power plants and Bolivia, designing one hundred-and-fifty miles
of railroad. Known at the time as an extensive “linguist,” Sebok spoke between six and twelve
languages depending on the source. Despite his foreign birth and multilingual faculties, Sebok
was known a “good American” in the US recording industry, whose value was only “broadened
by [his] contact with the world.”

In his public commentary, Sebok railed against the “wholly wrong and stupid idea” in the
retail and recording industry that immigrants to the US, specifically eastern and southern
European transplants, were “inferior” to US-born demographics. He argued that immigrant

144 “From Our Chicago Headquarters,” ibid XVIII, 10 (Oct 15, 1922): 10; “The Mid West Point of View,” ibid
XVIII (Oct 15, 1922): 137.
146 Ibid 137.
patrons held the right to listen to recordings of their own choosing, in their own languages, especially in the home. He called retailers who refused to carry “foreign-language” recordings over nativist concerns hypocrites. Sebok also made emotional appeals to treat immigrant populations like “human beings.” Sympathizing with newcomers’ impulse to adhere closely to their immigrant or ethnic community, Sebok stated, “We despise and ridicule them and never appreciate that from far distances they brought their own music, their own culture… Can we really blame the foreigners, if, disappointed by our indifference, they continue to dream their own dreams, follow their own ideas, and speak their own language?” In turning the tables on Americanization, by putting the onus on phonograph retailers to acclimate to newer demographics and not the other way around, Sebok offered the most stern rhetoric on record in defense of “foreign-language” recordings and their attendant audiences.

Even with his adamant defense of “foreign-speaking” populations in the US, Sebok still projected biases towards newcomers that echoed those held by Anglo-Saxon nativists. “I wonder if dealers realize how much easier it is to satisfy a foreigner than a native American?,” Sebok once asked in an article on the “foreign-language” trade in *Talking Machine World*. Sebok added, “The Americans are intelligent buyers, and as a rule have definitely in their minds what they want to purchase. The foreigner is not particular in his selection of foreign music; simply he desires music which reminds him of his old folks and old home. There is hardly any of the foreign records which will not do this.” Sebok’s condescending attitude about the “simplicity”


of the “foreigner” and the superior, discerning tastes of “native Americans” is particularly perplexing because in a separate article published in the same issue of the *World*, Columbia’s “foreign-language” division manager is quoted saying, “A foreign-language clientele is intelligent and discriminating.”¹⁵¹ Some of Sebok’s paradoxical opinions of immigrant and “foreign-language” speaking populations may relate to prejudicial views he held related to class and immigration. Sebok’s biography portrays a man of clear social and economic privilege. The average newcomer during the Great Wave era arrived in the US with considerably less education and income-earning potential. This was not lost on Sebok. In the October 1920 article complimenting the intelligence and discernment of immigrant market, Sebok qualifies his praise noting “the persons who comprise it are individually poor, humble, and, to indifferent native eyes, queer in the extreme.”¹⁵² Sebok’s own biases, and the way he channels them through the racisms of ethnonationalism, speaks to the hurdles “foreign-language” record buying publics faced in the prewar era, even from their ostensible allies.

**The Overwhelming Whiteness of Americanization**

Of course, the aims of Americanization and even the profit motives of commercial industry held racial limits. Although recording companies and retailers developed and routinely promoted “foreign-language” markets, these efforts appear to be more or less coded to southern and eastern European immigrant populations. Mae Ngai argues that the era of immigration restriction epitomized by the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 divided Europe between northwestern and southeastern nations, but more concretely, the project drew “the color line around Europe”


¹⁵² Ibid, 137.
separating European immigration from the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{153} As Ngai notes, immigration restrictions and exclusions ensured the minoritization of Asians in the US as well as cemented in legal authority the anti-Asian racisms commonly held in the US polity.\textsuperscript{154}

The sinophobia, Japanophobia, and general anti-Asian sentiment that guided immigration policy from the eighteen-eighties through the mid-twentieth century resonates in the prewar recording industry and “foreign-language” catalogs. Columbia, Victor, Edison, and a host of other commercial outfits did make catalog space for Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian discs and cylinders, these recordings remained mostly imports long after the industry adopted the more cost-efficient model of sourcing “foreign-language” performances from musicians and vocalists in immigrant and ethnic communities in the US around World War I.\textsuperscript{155} The earliest documented recordings of Chinese musicians within US borders occurred in late 1902, near simultaneously on both the east and west coast. The Cantonese Orchestra recorded a solitary side for Victor Records in a New York City studio in mid-November.\textsuperscript{156} At or around that date in San Francisco, Edison Records also recorded a number of sides, including the four-part “Hoo Su Sung Do [To Celebrate Long Life and Present A Son],” by a group credited only as Chinese Band.\textsuperscript{157} That same late 1902 period also produced Edison sessions in San Francisco by a Chinese comedian

\textsuperscript{153} Ngai, 17.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, 17-18.

\textsuperscript{155} This claim is substantiated by the scant number of documented Chinese, Japanese, and East Indian recordings produced in the US by commercial recording labels prior to 1942 as relayed in Richard K. Spottswood’s \textit{Ethnic Music on Records: A Discography of Ethnic Recordings Produced in the United States, 1893-1942, Volume 5} (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 2533-2552.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid, 2535; A disclaimer at the end of the Chinese recordings section of Spottswood’s \textit{Ethnic Music on Records, Vol. 5} states the impartial records suggest additional Chinese sides were produced in the US between 1902 and 1903, but the evidence remains inconclusive, see Ibid, 2539.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid, 2525.
named Sher Doy Wong and thirty-one sides, including a the twelve-part “Jom Se Moan [To Destroy The Four Gates]” and the six-part “Sa Hon Ti Wy [Assembly On A Sand Bank]” by an uncredited Chinese vocalist. After the relatively small flurry of sessions at the opening the century, the recording of Chinese musicians and musics fell to a veritable silence with no sessions on record until Columbia cut two sides with Chinese Novelty Orchestra in October 1919. Through the 1920s, Chinese sessions were sparsely held with most years hosting no output until a small uptick of Victor sessions with Cantonese vocalist Lee Fee Fung in March and October of 1929.

The history of Japanese recordings in the United States tells a remarkably similar story. Edison cut a dozen cylinders in New York City with baritone Kudzuoka Sokichi in early 1903 (replicating his performances two years later “probably to remake one of these titles”) and added two selections by vocalist Tanaka Otake in April 1905 before abandoning the project of recording Japanese musicians in the US entirely. Columbia and Victor entered the domestic market for Japanese recordings in 1917. In New York, Tamaki Miura, a soprano, cut a number of opera discs for Columbia in both Japanese and Italian over several sessions staged in September through November of that year. Also in New York, Victor hosted sessions on three days in late July 1917 with Yoshida Naramaru, which saw the release of thirty-six sides included a six-part paean to Japanese-US immigration, “America Miyage [From Japan To America],” and the two-part “Biography of Lincoln.” After these brief forays into the Japanese recording market in 1917,

158 Ibid, 2536-2538.
159 Ibid, 2536.
160 Ibid, 2547, 2550.
both Victor and Columbia ceased operations for domestic recording sessions with Japanese musicians, not regularly staging new sessions until the 1930s.\textsuperscript{161}

The lack of effort and interest in developing domestic recording operations for local and regional Chinese and Japanese markets displayed by US record companies appears racially distinct compared to their documented outreach into southern and eastern European immigrant and ethnic populations during the same period. This pattern is mirrored at the retail level with scant evidence to suggest phonograph retailers engaged directly with neighboring Asian communities. As documented earlier, the recording industry pushed hard for local dealers to carry “foreign-language” series offerings for the particular “foreign-born” populations in their commercial territories. Likewise, retailers developed advanced strategies for marketing to ethnic and immigrant demographics. The “foreign-born” descriptor so often used to designate the object of these efforts appears to have largely been code for eastern and southern European immigrant populations. “Chinese” or “Japanese” rarely appears in the lists of “foreign-born” demographics targeted in these outreach campaigns.\textsuperscript{162}

In June 1928, \textit{Talking Machine World} did include a small anecdote in the retail advice column “Profit Winning Sales Wrinkles” on the modest efforts of a phonograph retailer in St. Louis, Missouri to court Chinese patrons. Under the subheading “A Chinese Circular,” the column details how Helen Moore, manager of the Kieselhorst Piano Co., convinced a customer of Chinese descent, who the author is quick to point out works in the laundry services industry, to layout an advertisement in Chinese characters to be distributed widely to the Chinese

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Spottswood, \textit{Ethnic Music on Record}, Vol. 5, 2545-2552.
\item I substantiate this claim after reviewing every issue of \textit{TMW} between 1918 and 1929 which revealed a significant push on the part of recording companies and their retail affiliates to expand business into immigrant and ethnic communities in the US, but with relatively little emphasis on groups outside of eastern and southern European heritage.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
population in St. Louis. The flier was such a novelty to the World, the blurb not only included a full translation of its text, which read simply “Come here for your Chinese records and Victrolas. Time payments. Complete stock carried here. Kieselhorst Piano Co. Ask for Miss Moore,” the trade magazine also included an image of the circular to accompany the blurb. Over the course of the 1920s, the periodical reported on countless catalogs and stock holdings of “foreign” recordings written in languages other than English, but printing images of those materials was not common practice. The exceptional treatment of the Kieselhorst Piano Co.’s Chinese outreach effort speaks to the relative infrequency of similar projects.

Conclusion

In the 1920s, the sonification of ethnic difference carried a fraught audiopolitics. In both audition and absence, this chapter outlines the intermingled forces of consumer demand and ethnonational ethos bound up in “foreign-language” market of the prewar era. Commercial recording companies and their retail affiliates grew “foreign-language” departments catering to neighboring ethnic populations representative of the Great Wave of immigration, threatening Anglo-Saxon supremacy at a moment of perceived weakness. “Foreign-language” catalogs continued to expand over the course of the decade until the worst of the Great Depression slowed production of most “small market” lines precipitously. By the time recording companies returned to full swing, the restrictions of the Johnson-Reed Act were clearly evident, relegating “foreign-language” markets out of the purview national recording companies like Columbia and Victor and on to smaller regional outfits with smaller distribution prospects. Prewar “foreign-language” series recordings may have fallen off the national radar, but they continued to


circulate, first informally in record collector circles and then more significantly in reissue economy of the 1970s. Unlike the recordings, which remain relatively static, the audiopolitics that shape audition continuously bend to reach new ears across the twentieth century.
CHAPTER 2: CANONS, CONSENSUS, & COLLECTING AT MIDCENTURY

Introduction

Buried deep into Harry Smith’s venerable *Anthology of American Folk Music*, the three volume, six disc compendium of commercially-sourced, prewar vernacular recordings, sits “Moonshiner’s Dance (Part I),” a hodgepodge dance band medley by Frank Cloutier and the Victoria Café Orchestra. Released by the Gennett label in 1927, the “Moonshiner’s Dance” was a product of the Richmond, Indiana company’s “field trip” to Minnesota. In St. Paul, Gennett talent scouts made contact with Cloutier, a pianist for several area ensembles, including the Tom Gates Orchestra who also cut a record for the label during the visit.165

By most any estimation, “Moonshiner’s Dance” is an anomaly on Smith’s set. For a compilation predicated on rurality, where acts like Uncle Dave Macon, Uncle Eck Dunford, and Cannon’s Jug Stompers feel right at home, Frank Cloutier & The Victoria Café Orchestra are decidedly urban. Sandwiched between the guitar and fiddle of early blues and hillbilly recordings that dominate the *Anthology*, “Moonshiner’s Dance” is driven by the pomp of tuba, trumpet, and clarinet. The composition itself, a pastiche of Tin Pan Alley, gospel, and children’s songs,

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occupies a rhythmic space somewhere between jazz and polka, with touches of klezmer thrown in for good measure.\textsuperscript{166}

The orchestra’s performance opens with a blustering “Hey! Hey!” before the orator trails off into an indecipherable mumble after which the band kicks in. A boisterous “One! Two! Three! Four!” shouted in unison by the whole ensemble precipitates the shifts in rhythm and melody. Hoots and hollers are heard at random through each stanza. “Moonshiner’s Dance” sounds like a party. And not just any party, but one staged in a multi-ethnic city neighborhood, set during Prohibition with the tune’s titular drink animating the illicit good time.\textsuperscript{167

As detailed in the introduction to this dissertation, the \textit{Anthology of American Folk Music}, released by Folkways in 1952, was central to the genesis of the folk revival in the US The eighty-four-track compilation served as a kind of cultural recovery project for many of its artists during the midcentury decades. With the set’s growing popularity, “lost” musicians from Mississippi John Hurt to The Carter Family found new audiences, had additional archival recordings reissued and new recordings commissioned. Surviving \textit{Anthology} artists toured on the domestic and international folk festival circuit.\textsuperscript{168


Despite “Moonshiner’s Dance” status as one of the eighty-four tracks on Smith’s *Anthology*, Frank Cloutier and the Victoria Café Orchestra remain relatively obscure. Of the extensive academic and popular writings published on the *Anthology*, Cloutier fails to make even a cameo appearance. Even on the deluxe 1997 reissue of the *Anthology* on Smithsonian Folkways, additional biographical annotations provided by label archivist Jeff Place reveal the band members to still be unknown, only suggesting they were “assumed to have been from the Minnesota area.”

The absence of cultural memory of Frank Cloutier and his orchestra echoes the omission of the other vernacular grammars of the US prewar recording period not featured on Smith’s *Anthology*, several of which informed the multi-ethnic construction of “Moonshiner’s Dance.” Smith famously assembled his anthology from commercial recordings produced between 1927 and 1934. To Smith, this seven-year stretch represented a time when “American music still retained some of the regional qualities evident in the days before the phonograph, radio and talking picture tended to integrate local types.”

The *Anthology*, therefore, was a project to recuperate a national vernacular imaginary lost to midcentury mass culture.

In Smith’s sonification of the nation, the “local types” he heard as “American” were, foremost, the early country recordings culled from “hillbilly” lines and the acoustic or acoustic blues of commercial “race” series, as well as, to a lesser extent, Cajun recordings made by French Louisianans from “Arcadian” catalogs; All genres more or less representative of the southeastern region of the US. Absent from Smith’s national vernacular imaginary were the

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waltzes, polkas, and obereks of southern and eastern European immigrant musicians of the urban northeast and Midwest and the cancions and corridos of Mexican American musicians in the US southwest, as well as the Asian American musics of the northwest and west coast that the prewar commercial recording industry ignored almost entirely.\(^{171}\) In effect, Smith’s “national ear” favored the racially distinguished genres of white country and black blues and ignored the ethnically delineated musics of the domestic “foreign-language” series.

The significance of the recordings Smith chose to reissue notwithstanding, the erasure of “foreign-language” series recordings from the *Anthology*’s prewar vernacular soundscape reveals much about the boundaries that guarded the national vernacular imaginary at midcentury. Three decades after Johnson-Reed Act dramatically altered the ethnic demographics of the US, the market impulses that drove “foreign-language” series had fractured as many of the ethnic distinctions that delineated those demographics became less severe. The racial dualism of the *Anthology*, Smith’s sonification of a white and black America, is a legacy of this broader racialization project. The “national ear,” then, largely defined by racialized sounds, with ethnicized sounds of the US’s other vernacular grammars bear the sonic markings of foreign origin, where the “moan” of Sleepy John Estes and the “holler” of Dock Boggs sounds at home within the nation, while the polka rhythms of Frank Cloutier and the Victoria Café Orchestra sound positively eastern European.

In this chapter, I examine the rise of the *Anthology of American Folk Music* and interrogate the racial dualism that undergirds it. The *Anthology* ushered in an economy for prewar vernacular recordings in the postwar reissue market. Applying postwar listening practices to these now “historical” preward recordings, Smith made use of modern audio playback

technologies to project a sense of the nation’s vernacular past across the Anthology’s six long-playing discs. After first examining the commercial and collector practices that informed the value of prewar vernacular sound to the postwar reissue economy, I move to critique how midcentury notions of racial dualism mapped onto cultural memory of the nation’s vernacular past. Through discursive, material, and archival analysis I argues that elevation of early blues and country recordings as national vernacular grammars as heard on the Harry Smith’s Anthology of American Folk Music reaffirmed the racial dualism endemic to national identity during the period, projecting midcentury racial stratification onto a more variegated vernacular past.

Elevating the Vernacular

The question of how Harry Smith’s Anthology of American Folk Music came to occupy such a canonical position in vernacular and popular American music is one with, empirically at least, murky answers. The Folkways Records and Service Corporation, the label that first released the Anthology, never held broad commercial appeal and the documentation of its market impact leaves much to be desired.\textsuperscript{172} Available sales records for Smith’s set reveal it was never a major seller for Folkways. As a pseudo-bootleg (Asch never legally attained the rights for much of the material before releasing the set), the Anthology’s early years were riddled with legal troubles that forced the label to pull it from their catalog.\textsuperscript{173} The history that can be patched together for the Anthology and Folkways, more broadly, reveals a compilation and a record label with limited commercial reach but maximal cultural significance.


\textsuperscript{173} Skinner, 62-64.
Founded in 1948 by Moses Asch and his business partner Marian Distler, the New York City-based label operated for almost four decades before being absorbed into the Smithsonian Institute and rebranded as Smithsonian Folkways in 1987, a year after Asch’s death. During its thirty-nine year independent run, Folkways produced a varied, far-reaching catalog including early jazz anthologies, ethnographic regional and international field recordings of its Ethnic Folkways series, agit-balladeers like Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Phil Ochs, the folk blues of Lead Belly and Elizabeth Cotten, and the “found sound” of Tony Schwartz’s New York City street recordings and Michael Siegal’s *The Sounds of the Office* and *The Sounds of the Junk Yard*.174

Asch also periodically created subsidiary labels curtailed to specific strains of the Folkways oeuvre. Broadside Records focused on explicitly political material releasing recordings include the first album by proto-hippie bohemian folk rock group the Fugs (then known as The Village Fugs). The RBF imprint (meaning Record, Book, Film) reissued prewar commercial vernacular recordings, specifically early hillbilly, “country” blues, and ragtime; the initials of its name said to express a desire to produce book- and film-length accompaniments with each sound recording issued, though this only ever materialized with RBF’s first release *The Country Blues* (RF 1, 1959) released alongside the book of the same name by Samuel B. Charters (Rhinehart and Company, Inc., 1959).175

In style Folkways cast a wide net, offering what Asch would proudly proclaim as an “encyclopedia of sound,” but the financial archives left behind of the label’s big tent ideology are comparatively scant. Tony Olmsted’s book-length study the label, *Folkways Records: Moses*  

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175 Swiatlowski, 32-33; Olmsted, 66.
Asch and His Encyclopedia of Sound—what the anthropologist refers to a “biography of the label”—describe the Folkways ledgers as “spotty,” “fragmented,” and “confusing,” suggesting the label’s financial history “perhaps raises more questions than it answers.” Olmsted is ultimately able to piece together a business biography from the pieces left behind by Asch but the obstacles to a complete financial history were both systemic in the Folkways business model and a byproduct of its founder’s laissez-faire attitude towards proper accounting.

Folkways was always a small operation even though it produced numerous titles and, for most of its history, claimed all titles were “always in print.” The “always in print” guarantee was a bit misleading, at least in terms of standard record label production practices. Whereas most commercial labels at the time pressed a substantial initial run of a release, only repressing if the title sold out steadily (but more often waiting for market interest in the release to decline before pulling the title to be wholesaled at a discount), Folkways only ever pressed limited runs of its releases. Leaving every title “in print” in the catalog with a commitment to press more on demand.

Like the small-runs of its releases, Folkways adopted a similar commercial distribution model. Because each title run was limited, it made more financial sense Folkways to allocate sales to retailers independent of a major distributor. This strategy limited Folkways reach but allowed the label to focus on major cities in the US where its recordings were most welcomed. Even Folkways targeted retailers to major cities like New York, Boston, and Chicago was conducted in a bracketed sense. Because most retailers would be hesitant to stock the entirety of the Folkways catalog, the label would promote a few, select titles in brick and mortar stores,

176 Ibid, 125-126.

177 Ibid, 65.
hoping customers would in turn inquire directly with the label about other releases in the catalog tucked inside the sleeve of each release. The culmination of all these small moves, working in concert with a proprietor like Asch with relaxed accounting standards, leads to considerable ambiguity in actual sales figures for the company. Whereas other labels could track sales in aggregate more readily through larger sum shipments to distributors, the piecemeal sales strategy adopted by Folkways left room for considerable error.178

Folkway’s Cultural Capital

If market metrics alone fail to explain why the Anthology of American Folk Music mattered in the postwar decades, a broader approach that accounts for the cultural resonances of both the set itself and Folkways in general helps shed light on such a question. The label’s market share may have been small, but the cultural space it occupied was significant. Tapping into a postwar interest in folk, blues, and ethnic musics by predominantly urban middle-class intellectuals, educators, and collectors, Folkways presented its releases as pseudo-academic, edifying objects—adding an air of historical significance and folkloric authenticity to its catalog. Releases were titled in manners similar to doctoral dissertations or scholarly journal articles (The Rural Blues: A Study of the Vocal and Instrumental Resources, Sounds of the Sea, Vol 1: Underwater Sounds of Biological Origin, Traditional Music of Grayson and Carroll Counties, etc.).179 Folkways releases were, in effect, studies, often on rurality, sold to an urban, upwardly mobile, middle-class customer base. As objects of Asch targeted the institutions that served them with sales to elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and public and university

178 Ibid, 65, 84.

libraries accounting for nearly half of Folkways total sales for most years.  

Folkways positioned its market commerce as separate from the mass commercialism of the postwar record industry. Although Asch was responding to forces particular to the postwar economy which transformed the US into what Lisbeth Cohen describes as a “Consumers’ Republic,” Folkways moreso tapped into a longer history of capitalist consumption that posited the buying practices of middle-class consumers as moral, beneficial, and distinct from the empty commodity fetishism of their working-class counterparts. Nan Enstad argues that in the late-nineteenth century, middle-class consumers “used notions of character and taste to make a distinction between commodities with values and those without values.” Commodities with values nourished the soul and upheld the moral character of the middle class. Commodities without values were materialistic and held no social benefit. The middle class feared that the increased purchasing power of working-class consumers towards the turn-of-the-century made them susceptible to the sway of the market without the proper moral guidance provided by middle-class taste and character. Folkways’ business model effectively exploited the same middle-class preference towards commodities perceived to hold values—in Folkways’ case these were record albums that were edifying, sober, and serious—in direct opposition to the mass-marketed popular musics perceived to not. In this case of the *Anthology*, this phenomenon is doubly significant because Smith and Asch essentially repackaged the values-less popular musics of prewar working-class blacks and whites as values-ful historical recordings by virtue of design and taxonomy.

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180 Olmsted, 91-93.

Folkways was by no means the first label to distinguish the significance of its releases to capture the attention of a middle-class market considered discerning or refined. In 1902, the Victor Talking Machine Co. launched its much-lauded Red Seal series, designed to promote to a US audience the recordings of what the label saw serious European musical traditions. Differentiating Red Seal issues with the use of a red disc label as opposed to their standard black, Victor made stateside success of orchestral conductors and opera singers like Italian tenor Enrico Caruso. Advertisements cast Red Seal recordings a kind of education campaign purporting to enhance the “spiritual well-being” of an emergent middlebrow listening public. In effect, Red Seal recordings created what David Suisman characterizes as a “kind of cultural legitimacy” for phonographic records writ large. Red Seal made shellac discs valuable as a vessel for the musical arts.

The “cultural legitimacy” of Red Seal Recordings came at an inflated cost requisite to the elevated artistic value Victor claimed of them. At a time when the average commercial shellac disc ranged from around thirty-five cents to one dollar, Red Seals retailed at two dollars for a single-sided disc. Despite a hefty price tag, Red Series releases still sold relatively well suggested that the retail mark up translated to a perceived increased value of the recording by consumers. Anecdotally, this trend is perhaps best illustrated by the famous oral historian Studs Terkel who recounted the anger of his mother following the occasion of his father bringing home a shellac disc that cost two whole dollars, to which his reticent father calmly replied,

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182 Kenney, 61.

183 Suisman, 140.
“Caruso.”

Though the Red Seal series never sold as well as the Tin Pan Alley, popular, and vernacular discs of Victor’s black label issues, “boosted sales for all phonograph products” by making the phonograph record an object of cultual value. “Far from aiming just to preserve art for the ages,” Suisman claims, “the point of [the Red Seal] strategy was to use the prestige of high culture to appeal to a broad, heterogeneous market.” Suisman’s “rising tide” argument accounts for an economic value to Red Seal not directly reflected in their own market performance. Red Seal discs sold to a specific demographic of middlebrow consumers interested in the enrichment promised in advertisements, but their impact extended outward by making the commercial phonograph disc a legitimate vehicle for the dissemination of serious art.

In many ways, Folkways followed the model caste by Victor’s Red Seal series, updating it to suit postwar sensibilities. Asch may not have been interested in pedaling the arias and cantatas of middlebrow opera sensations, but he did cater to the same discerning sense of conspicuous consumption that fueled Victor’s commercial appropriation of high culture. Folkways’ conspicuity, however, was aimed at a postwar intellectual interest in the vernacular practices of the “folk” in all their many and varied groupings. Folkways dressed their catalog of ethnic, folk, and other vernacular forms with colon-rich titles and stuffed inserts with historically rigorous liner notes—always written by experts, often by Ph.D. holding academics—separating the label’s recordings from common stock commercial LPs.

184 Turkel anecdote from And They All Sang: Adventures of an Eclectic Disc Jockey (New York, 2005), xvii, quoted in Suisman, 113-114.

185 Suisman 122; Kenney, 59-61.

186 Ibid.
The Material Culture of Folkways

The nexus of Folkways’ high culture interest in low or folk cultures was made material in its much-ballyhooed album design strategy. For fans, the particularities of Folkways’ signature LP jacket construction became part of the label’s mystique. “The physical presence of a Folkways album—which looked totally unlike a commercial LP—was itself a source of wonder,” Richard Carlin opines in his 2008 history of the label, Worlds of Sound: The Story of Smithsonian Folkways. Carlin describes in rich detail the physical markings of a Folkways release:

The front “cover” consisted of a paper wrapper glued over a plain sleeve, the black cardboard textured like aged leather. The wrapper only reached about one-third of the ways around the back of the album, and a list of the tracks to be heard within sometimes was printed on the back to give you a clue of what you were buying. Inside the sleeve, a heavy piece of cardboard was inserted to create two pockets. In one, booklet of notes, sometimes as little as four pages but more often expanding to thirty of more pages of background notes, photographs, and song lyrics; in the other pocket, the record was placed, somewhat heavier than a typical vinyl album.187

The peculiarities of Folkways releases—the “wrapper” that “only reached one-third of the ways around” a black cardboard sleeve often “textured like aged leather,” that awkward and mostly unnecessary “heavy piece of cardboard...inserted to create two pockets”—became enmeshed in the romance of the label. Even the physical deficiencies of Folkways releases became part of the allure. “Sometimes the pressings were noisy… or the photos in the booklet were printed too dark,” Carlin says, “...sometimes the central hole in the record was miscalibrated so the recording sounded wobbly and distorted.” The production defects endemic to Folkways albums

187 Carlin xv-xvi.
only endeared fans to their releases. Or, as Carlin puts it, “You had to try hard to listen to a Folkways record; it wasn’t something that you just slap on the turntable without a second thought.”

The perception of Folkways as a thinking person’s record label was aided by the locales where fans most often found releases. “You’d find these odd records first in libraries,” Carlin says, “They’d have them stacked up, sounds of steam locomotives, Shakespeare plays and Latin language instruction discs, the expected Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger albums, and the unexpected music of carousels, insects and computers…. They offered enticing glimpses into new aural worlds.” The exploratory nature of a listener’s encounter with Folkways LPs and ten-inch EPs in public and academic libraries, at liberty to sample from the wide variety of sonic offerings at no cost, lends credence to the Folkways image as an edifying enterprise, one that exists outside the commercial marketplace.

Of course, Folkways releases were distributed to more than just the lending library system, but the retail stores that carried the label were decidedly smaller in scale and limited in their market reach. “You’d hear rumors, almost like sightings of meteors or far-off stars,” says Carlin of the word-of-mouth advertisements one Folkways aficionado would afford to another. “There was this store on 43rd Street in New York where you buy Folkways records for as little as ninety-nine cents. It was an odd record shop, hidden down a half-flight of steps, below street level, that few found without first hearing about it in whispers from other true-believers, who

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188 Carlin xv-xvi.

189 Ibid, xvi.
didn’t want the secret spread too far for fear that the supply would be exhausted.”

The selectivity of Folkways fandom, or perhaps more accurately, its romanticization as a kind of exclusive fraternal order of a certain set of record collectors in many ways fueled the cultural capital that allowed the label, and its idiosyncratic catalogue of releases, to flourish in urban centers and college towns in the US and abroad.

The mystique Folkways developed also obscured its position as a commercial venture. The particulars of a Folkways record’s material construction may have come to signify an elevated, intellectual, conspicuous music album, but at its core, it was an economical design. The practice of affixing labels to plain black record jackets allowed Folkways to press and repress releases on the cheap. Generic outer sleeves, after all, are considerably less expensive than printed outers. Furthermore, the label could order them en masse, particularizing them with individual labels in accordance with the pressing quantity of a specific release.

This economical design strategy would only later accrue the cultural reverence Carlin speaks of when it was copied by other small archival reissue imprints beginning in the late-1950s, chief among them the influential prewar blues label Origin Jazz Library (OJL). Marketing to roughly the same audience of record collectors and vernacular music aficionados, these reissue labels like OJL, Blues Classics, and Old Timey, developed alongside Folkways a design aesthetic for the archival reissue genre of the midcentury decades, which in turn, worked to ascribe its material construction with the historical and cultural significance imparted onto their

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190 Ibid, xvi.

191 Olmstead, 65-65.
reissued recordings.\textsuperscript{192}

This is to say, the design strategy had commercial effects. However small in scale it may have been relative to the major label industry developing in the postwar period, Folkways still carved out a niche market within which to sell its catalog. From its exhaustive, informative liner notes that filled its album booklets to the academic framing of its musics and sound recordings, to the exploratory fashion most fans encountered the label’s releases, Folkways did not invite casual listening, but instead, encouraged the kind of focused, attuned listenership that Carlin described. Never conceived to produce big sales, the Folkways model promoted a devotion limited enough to maintain its prestige but significant enough to sustain the label independently for over forty years.

**Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music***

Folkways’ commercial demographic—marketing to the collector, the curious, the learned—was the world Harry Smith’s *Anthology* was born into, circulating in the same networks and listened to through similar ears. But the construction of the set under the direction of Smith himself, as opposed to Asch, is distinguished from a more prototypical Folkways release in several meaningful ways.\textsuperscript{193} Housed in a red fabric or matte black box with a green, red, or blue label affixed to the cover, a sober Helvetica font reads “American Folk Music” at the label’s header, two columns framing each side with song titles on the left and performers on the right, overlaid over a mysterious, mystical Thomas de Bry etching Smith dubbed “The Celestial Monochord,” the cover of the *Anthology* “conceal[ed] as much as document” its musical

\textsuperscript{192} Swiatlowski, 28-50.

\textsuperscript{193} Cantwell, 191.
Whereas a standard Folkways LP featured an extended title clearly identifying the genre and style, as well as performer for single-artist releases (see Elizabeth Cotten – *Folksongs and Instrumentals with Guitar* [FG 3526]) with additional notes on the recordings along the backside of the jacket, Smith left the *Anthology*’s box decidedly bare.¹⁹⁵

**Table II – *Anthology of American Folk Music*, Folkways Records, 1952**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOL</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>THEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Ballads</em></td>
<td>Green (Water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Social Music</em></td>
<td>Red (Fire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● LP1 – Dances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● LP2 – Religious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Songs</em></td>
<td>Blue (Air)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Divided into three volumes, Smith organized the set thematically under categories of his design: volume one, carrying a green label (said to represent “water”), known as “Ballads”; volume two, with a red label (said to represent “fire”), called “Social Music,” features one disc dedicated to “dances” and the other to “religious” recordings; and, finally, volume three, identified by a blue label (said to represent “air”) titled “Songs.”¹⁹⁶ Within these three, relatively broad categories, Smith effectively reorganizes eighty-four selections released across a number of commercial recording companies to a variety of different market demographics from several decades prior into a panoply of prewar vernacular sound for the postwar Folkways crowd and other collectors like himself. The nostalgic odes of hillbilly groups intermingled with the cautionary tales of acoustic blues, Cajun one-steps shared space with old-time fiddle tunes, and

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¹⁹⁵ Elizabeth Cotten, *Folksongs and Instrumentals with Guitar*. Folkways FG 3526, 1958, LP.

¹⁹⁶ Marcus, 92.
Pentecostal gospel sermons followed Sacred Heart singing. In title and design, the *Anthology of American Folk Music* purported to be a representation of the nation, an effective distillation of the national vernacular imaginary.

To Smith, the contents of the *Anthology* originate as ten-inch discs of relatively uniform construction: made of a shellac composite, double-sided, with a playback rate at seventy-eight revolutions-per-minute. At the center of each disc was a label identifying the record company, catalog listing, artist or group name, performance title, and one of several generic descriptions of the performance (“Fiddlin’ solo with banjo,” “Vocal with guitar,” “Sermon with singing,” etc.). He acquired them fairly anonymously from junk shops and thrift stores, and at industry warehouses during the World War II shellac drive wherein record companies sold off their backstock of 78s at cut-rate prices before shipping off the remainders to be melted down in aid of the war effort. Smith was a collector. He took possession of these objects, collected and cataloged them, and then reordered them into schema intelligible to postwar sensibilities of a vernacular past.

Walter Benjamin once wrote, “Ownership is the most intimate relationship one can have to objects.” To Benjamin, “…the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner.” The Baudrillardian idea that meaning is made not in the production of objects, but in the consumption of those objects, what Benjamin describes as the “intimate relationship” between the object and its owner, is echoed by Susan Stewart’s theories on collecting. Stewart writes,

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197 Carlin, 73.

The collection is a form of art as play, a form involving the reframing of objects within a world of attention and manipulation of context. Like other forms of art, its function is not the restoration of context of origin but rather the creation of a new context, a context standing in the metaphorical, rather than contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life. \[199\]

The collection, in this sense, is the meaning made from the ordering and reordering of objects. The “new context” for the prewar vernacular recordings selected by Harry Smith is the *Anthology of American Folk Music*, arranged through the “manipulation” of former means of ordering them (as “race,” “hillbilly,” “Arcadian,” etc.) into new “metaphorical” meanings (quite literally, “air,” “fire,” and “water,” as well as “American folk music”).

Benjamin’s, Baudrillard’s, and Stewart’s arguments on consumption, collecting, collections, and contexts resound in both academic and popular discourses on the *Anthology*. Kevin M. Moist frames the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the *Anthology* as part collage and part alchemy. The visual/material suggestion of collage and the spiritual/scientific notion of alchemy both involve the combining of different elements to form a new singular entity, a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. In alchemical terms, this process is called “transmutation,” or “removing or dissolving an element’s initial context or status, and… re-coalescing it at a higher order of being.” The act of collage, the visual/material equivalent to alchemy, essentially holds a similar function, to create a new, singular visual/material medium out of the combination a various other visual/material media. \[200\]

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200. Moist, 118.
In Moist’s estimation, the majesty in Smith’s set is the ability to collage various prewar vernacular recordings into a singular, alchemical unit, one of a “higher order of being.” The Anthology’s “aesthetic strategy of collage” and “philosophy of alchemy” work in tandem to “transmute” the set’s “fragmentary pieces of culture,” unifying their focus and advancing the set’s “conceptual meaning.” These “fragmentary pieces of culture” and the “conceptual meaning” of the Anthology were both of Smith’s making, though. Smith was a generation or two removed from the performances captured on the discs in his collection and separated by both culture and region the early country and acoustic blues recordings that comprise the majority of the Anthology. Smith made sense of his records in ways both novel and contrarian. “Collaged” together in part through history, through ethnography, through folklore, and through artistic imagination, Smith made the Anthology’s meaning.

Nowhere is collage, collecting, and the strong-arm of the collector more evident than in the handbook Smith assembled to accompany the Anthology. Twenty-eight-pages in length including a foreword, listing and supplemental information for each selection, index, bibliography and afterword penned by Moses Asch, the general contents mimic the anthropological and folkloric layout of traditional Folkways releases while also slyly satirizing them. Utilizing a Fluxus cut-and-paste design, the layout is considerably busier than most Folkways supplement notes inserts. The cover, for instance, features a dizzying array of fonts and small illustrations originating from “early phonograph advertisements, catalog clippings, and a mélange of medieval- and Renaissance-style wood-block art” arranged from horizontally and

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201 Ibid.

202 Ibid, 112.
vertically about the page.\textsuperscript{203} These clippings include patriotic overtures like a bald eagle and the Liberty Bell and affectations of the “old West” like the silhouettes of a horse and a bull, alongside the decidedly more modern advertising slogans culled from prewar commercial recording catalogs (“All Please Sound” and “The tone—without the scratch”). The cover design, quite literally a collage, affects a sense of the past that is one hand ahistorical, pulling together symbols and images from a variety of different eras and media, but also decidedly “American” in its implications.\textsuperscript{204}

The visual and textual disarray continues in the catalogue entries for each of the eighty-four selections on the Anthology. In ways ordered and messy, academic and asinine, the catalogue entries communicate a variety of information about the Anthology’s recordings. Guided by an oversized block-face number for recording’s track-listing (indicative of the importance of sequence to the Anthology), the catalogue entries list information ranging from disc label information culled directly the sourced 78s, to historical and musicological information pertaining the composition performed on the recording, to a discography of other prewar commercial renditions of the tune, to a bibliography citing other folksong collections featuring the particular entry.

Most famously, each catalogue entry excepting the instrumentals (and the Cajun recordings sung in French, of which, no attempt at translation is provided), includes Smith’s “condensation of lyrics.” These brief, often whimsical “condensations,” distill the lyrical content of the tune into a curt, sometimes humorous summation of the song’s narrative, such as the oft-cited entry for the children’s song “King Kong Kitchi Ki-Me-O”: “Zooologic misccegeny achieved

\textsuperscript{203} Carlin, 28.

\textsuperscript{204} Smith, liner notes to Anthology of American Folk Music, Folkways FA 2951/3, 1.
in mouse frog nuptuals, relatives approve.” Other “condensations” both mimic and mock the dry nature of academic folklore field notes. “Peg and Awl” by the Carolina Tar Heels, a song about an out-of-work cobbler at the turn-of-the-century, is detailed as “Technological unemployment hits show industry in the year of 18 and 4.” G.B. Grayson’s “Ommie Wise,” a chilling song about the drowning death of the female lead is transcribed as “Greedy girl goes to Adams Spring with liar; Lives just long enough to regret it.”

Cantwell argues that Smith’s “condensations” and general handbook arrangement “effaced” an earlier romanticization of folksongs that distinguished their forms along the “[social] distinctions of race and class and emphatically, in the New Deal period, of the distinction between the industrial and preindustrial ages.” For Cantwell, the levity, humor, and idiosyncrasy of Smith’s sequence and graphic design offers “implications of poetic form.”

Indicative of the playful nature Smith approached and arranged the recordings on the set, the condensations also represent a willful revisionism at the core of the Anthology. Smith’s projection of the past is rooted in the practice of collecting, presenting a historical national vernacular imaginary crafted through a collector epistemology.

The Anthology as Postwar Sound Object

Although the Anthology is cloaked in a perception of the past, in 1952 Smith was effectively utilizing the latest in audio playback technologies to transform his piecemeal 78 collection into a more elaborate, extended work. The Columbia Broadcasting System introduced

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205 Smith, liner notes to Anthology of American Folk Music, Folkways FA 2951/3, 3; This particular “condensation” quoted in Marcus, 95.

206 Smith, liner notes to Anthology of American Folk Music, Folkways FA 2951/3, 4.

207 Cantwell, 193.
microgroove technology and the twelve-inch long-playing disc to the commercial market in 1948. The technological advancement and physical dimensions of the LP stretched past the diminutive limits of ten-inch shellac disc. The LP’s smaller grooves, lower revolution rate, and larger platter allowed for a most sustained listening experience.\textsuperscript{208} For Smith, this meant the ability to stitch together sides of disparate 78s, creating a unified sonic narrative out of formerly separate parts. “Microgroove technology,” Cantwell states, “made possible the anthologization” of Smith’s source material.\textsuperscript{209} Smith may have lionized the prewar recordings he collected as “retain[ing] some of the regional qualities evident in the days before” modern mass media “tended to integrate local types,” but the efficacy of his set depended on the “anthologizing” properties of long-playing phonograph technology.\textsuperscript{210}

The development of the long-playing phonograph record as a popular technology coincides with the development of the music album as a cultural form. Like Raymond Williams famously argued about the duality of television as both a technology and a cultural form, it can be useful to frame the LP as a site of similar convergence.\textsuperscript{211} The introduction of microgroove technology and the twelve-inch LP did not, alone, revolutionize the recording industry. Initials sales of the new technology were slow, taking a full decade for the LP to become leading format for the sale of recorded music and sound.\textsuperscript{212} The increased circulation of LPs in the commercial


\textsuperscript{209} Cantwell, 190.

\textsuperscript{210} Smith, liner notes to \textit{Anthology of American Folk Music}, Folkways FA 2951/3, 1.

\textsuperscript{211} Raymond Williams, \textit{Television: Technology and Cultural Form} (New York: Routledge, 2003).

\textsuperscript{212} Morton, 38-9.
marketplace aided and informed the development of the technology as a site for meaningful cultural transmission. As a format that allowed for extended sequences of a score to be broadcast without interruption, the LP was developed with classical performance in mind. But the adaptation of popular and vernacular musical forms to this newly elongated playback technology is where the record album was born.

Although it is often framed as a kind of compositional advancement in popular music, the development of the music album was aided significantly by achievements in recording technology and their attendant cultural affects. The invention of multi-track tape recording and other studio “tricks” like splicing, editing, layering, and overdubbing performance takes transformed both the process and goal of studio recording. Whereas initially the aim of recorded sound was fidelity—either adherence to the score in the compositional sense or the performance for vernacular forms—the possibilities afforded by multi-track recording shifted focus away from recorded sounds’ “origins” and towards its broadcast. Though the industry still marketed these advancements under the parlance of fidelity (i.e. “hi-fi” sound), the aim clearly was a “subjectively pleasing final product” to the listener’s ear. As David Suisman notes, “With increasingly inventive techniques and technologies, the mimetic character of sound recording—the notion of documenting a live, aural event—was overshadowed by sound recording as artificial creation.” Though the notion of artifice carries negative connotations, the move from the record-as-document to document-onto-itself produced meaningful cultural consequences that transformed the listener’s relationship to recorded sound.

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213 Ibid, 38.
214 Ibid 35-43, quote from 41.
215 Suisman, 282.
This transformation from the record as recording of sound into sound itself is the end result of what Tim J. Anderson calls the “historical schism” in popular music beginning in 1946 after the conclusion of the Second World War and ending in mid-1960s with the development of the record album as discreet cultural form. To Anderson, the postwar period in US sound history is characterized by a debate between the performer of music and the record of music in which the record emerged as the dominant form of listening experience in the US. The victory on the part of the record crystallized the legitimacy of recorded sound in US cultural life. The rise of the record as a significant site of cultural transmission had vast impacts not only on the performance of music but also on broader social systems in the US. In Anderson’s description, “As the family piano became less and less a common sight, in its stead the hi-fi system became the dominant space for musical audition. And as Americans lost their collective touch across the black and white ivories, they developed a greater interest in listening and record collecting.”\(^\text{216}\) This shift from the performance of music via acoustic instrumentation to the projection of music via the electric loudspeaker as the “dominant space for musical audition” altered the listener’s relationship to the record itself, but of sound in general.

The ascent of the record from recording to music, or “the shift from performance to playback” as Anderson describes, defines the postwar era of recorded sound in relation to the prewar era before it.\(^\text{217}\) This is not to suggest that antecedents to postwar relations to recorded sound did not exist in the prewar era. Collectors, even a decade before Smith, displayed an interest in jazz recordings as early as the 1930s, suggesting a value in recorded sound above and

\(^\text{216}\) Tim J. Anderson, Making Easy Listening: Material Culture and Postwar American Recording (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xv-xxii; quote from ibid, xix.

\(^\text{217}\) Ibid, xix.
beyond the casual listener of the era. The genesis of the jazz connoisseur as particular type of
listenership coalesces around familiar details. Described as “affluent,” “white,” and
“intellectual,” 1930s jazz record collectors zeroed in on records produced “purely for Negro
consumption,” as Steve Smith, a collector put it, going door-to-door in urban neighborhoods with
significant African American populations. Disregarding the popular swing discs of their day,
collectors like Steve Smith were interested in smaller market, black “hot” jazz recordings of a
decade prior for a variety of reasons including “[a]esthetic appreciation, historical preservation,
and the fetish of possession.” The details of hot jazz collector Steve Smith sound much like
the collecting practices of Harry Smith suggesting that jazz record collectors were progenitors of
a postwar relationship to recorded sound in the prewar era. However accurate the
characterization, jazz as a genre of both performed and recorded music presents significant
exceptions. With performed jazz’s emphasis on improvisation, musicianship, and interplay, the
“liveness” of jazz as a genre is mirrored the listener’s conception of its recorded counterpart.
Though splicing, overdubs, and general studio editing exists on jazz records from the outset of
these recording techniques, the perception of the jazz recording as an “organic” capture of a jazz
performance is still paramount. When attention is paid to studio edits present on a recording,
éthical questions are raised around the authenticity of the performance on the recording.219

218 Alex Cummings, “Collectors, Bootleggers, and the Value of Jazz, 1930-1952,” Sound in the Age of Mechanical
Reproduction, ed. David Suisman and Susan Strasser (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 95-
114; Smith quote appears, ibid, 97; quote from ibid, 99.

219 I offer up as evidence of this phenomenon of recorded jazz needing to present as performed jazz a paper given by
Ed Berger at the 2016 Association for Recorded Sound Collections Annual Conference in Bloomington, Indiana.
The paper entitled “Studio Editing: Moral Dilemmas and Implications for Discographers” as part of a panel on Legal
and Ethnic Issues in Recorded Sound. Berger well-researched and superbly presented paper presents much of the
evidence I reference here. In addition, Berger played clips of famous jazz recording, mostly from the 1950s, with
obvious studio edits. The crowd on hand—a mix of academics, discographers, audiophiles, and sound librarians—
responded with great disdain the noticeable edits. In particular, the framing of these techniques as hold “moral”
Casual listeners even prior to the emergence of the collector as particularized form of listenership were also interested in the possibilities of recorded sound as evidenced by participation in the Edison Company’s famous “tone tests.” Between 1915 and 1926, Edison hosted events in amphitheaters and concert halls nationwide inviting audience participants to test the audile quality of an Edison disc in comparison to a live performance of the artist on the record. Tone test attendees bore sonic witness to advances made in audio playback technology with the expressed goal of proving the disc indistinguishable from live musical performance. By most accounts, the tests were exceedingly popular with over four thousand phonograph demonstration recitals performed during the first five years of the tone test era. The proliferation of tone tests suggests audiences were both entertained with and engaged at the prospect of phonographic playback equaling the sound quality of live performance, it is unclear how many participants left the tests fully convinced of Edison’s claims. Emily Thompson argues, “Opinions may have varied as to whether or not the Diamond Disc re-creation was truly indistinguishable from the original, but more important, Tone Test audiences universally accepted the premise of the comparison.” Though Thompson is right that accepting the premise of the tone test suggests that audiences could potentially conceive of the “re-creation” as holding a similar, if not same value as the “original,” the need for the test itself more so implies that such a conception had not yet been met. Tone tests invited both the amazement and

quandaries suggest a continued emphasis on “performance” over “playback,” to crib Anderson’s language, in jazz recording; Ed Berger, “Studio Editing: Moral Dilemmas and Implications for Discographers” (paper presented at the Association for Recorded Sound Collections Meeting, Bloomington, Indiana, May 13, 2016).


skepticism of their audiences, an opportunity for the individual listener to gauge the merits of the phonograph’s playback quality at a time with then worth of that quality had was not settled. Furthermore, the experience being sold at the tone tests concerned the value of the phonograph as a technology—its ability to reproduce sound—as opposed to the significance of the phonograph disc as a discreet cultural form. The goal, after all, was the “re-creation” of live sound, not the production of a new or distinct sound of equal value. In the tone test era, the phonograph was celebrated for its mimetic qualities, as opposed to postwar notions of the record as a distinct musical object with its own, original sonic palette.

The source material for the *Anthology* originates in the prewar era of recorded sound but it circulated during the postwar period, first gaining prominence during the US folk revival of the midcentury decades at a moment of recorded sound’s cultural and technological maturation. Of course, sonically, Smith’s set does not carry with it postwar recording sensibilities. The *Anthology*’s recordings retain the diminished frequency range of their source technology as well as surface noise endemic to the format. The compilation, though, does benefit from the modern relationship to recorded sound that develops in the postwar period. Cantwell argues that the move from 78 shellac discs to long-playing discs for the recordings on the Smith’s set was transformation, “releasing them from their own contexts and reconstituting them in the milieu represented by long-playing records, whose affinities at that period…were mainly with classical performances, highbrow record clubs, and high-fidelity buff.” To Cantwell, the LP “invested” the *Anthology*’s recordings “with the cultural authority both of its advanced technology and its rarefied sociopolitical connections.”

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222 Cantwell, 190.
The *Anthology’s* Mid-Century Ethos

As the cultural value for hillbilly and acoustic blues musics rose with their presence on long-playing discs, the idiosyncrasies of early electrical recordings began to take on new meaning. The tics, pops, scratches, and hiss of prewar recordings transferred onto microgroove discs became audible signifiers of a pre- or anti-modern authenticity. Though the music on the *Anthology* originates in the commercial marketplace, recorded and produced by professional recording companies, and sold at a profit, fans of the collection heard them as more “genuine” or “real” than contemporary recordings. For the 1997 reissue of the *Anthology* on Smithsonian Folkways, writer and folk revivalist Jon Pankake characterized *Anthology* fans as “post-Eisenhower seekers after an America somehow more authentic than the plastic version they saw being offered to them in the mass media.” Pankake labeled the group the “Brotherhood of the *Anthology*” (the casual, untroubled gendering should not go unnoticed). “For that generation of urban youth,” the prewar vernacular recordings of Smith’s collection became their “truer America.”

Pankake is not alone in suggesting that the “Brotherhood” ascribed authenticity to the prewar sonic palette of the *Anthology* and early electrical-era recordings more generally. Summations and analyses from *Anthology* aficionados like Greil Marcus, Robert Cantwell, John Fahey, and Peter Stampfel all evoke a sense of recovered authenticity in the set’s listening experience. Likewise, the “Brotherhood” was not the only group interested in identifying and

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224 Here I am specifically referencing Robert Cantwell’s “Smith’s Memory Theater” from *When Were Good* and Greil Marcus’s “The Old, Weird America” from *Invisible Republic*, both cited prior, as well as the anecdotes and
celebrating “Americanness” in the postwar era. Wendy Wall argues that the midcentury decades are defined by search for a unified national culture she labels “consensus politics.” The product of several interrelated phenomena, Wall cites the impetus for a postwar consensus politics in the economic fallout from the Great Depression and fears around internal divisions that led to the rise of fascism and totalitarianism in Europe.225

Of course, the Depression did not occasion the first fractious polity in US history. As detailed in the first chapter, waves of immigration from eastern and southern Europe in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and first quarter of the twentieth century initiated similar concerns about “Americanism.” This on top of a legacy of the racial segregation beginning at European “first contact” with indigenous populations of North America and continued on through the enslavement of West Africans and exclusion and disenfranchisement disenfranchisement of Asian immigrants to the west coast of the US.226 The Depression’s economic unsettling of the nation held the potential to make actionable social, cultural, and political divisions already at play. Taking the events in Europe as a cautionary tale, Wall argues that national unification in the wake of Second World War was not an organic process, but an

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intentional political project to secure a sense of unified identity within the nation’s polity.\textsuperscript{227}

As a countercultural document, the \textit{Anthology} presents as an alternative consensus politics for folk revivalists and other fellow travellers. Conceived at the height of McCarthyism and the Cold War, the collection offered a rebuke to more conservative approximations of the nation, nationhood, and national unity. The \textit{Anthology} celebrated the common and the downtrodden as well as the odd and idiosyncratic. It also celebrated the past; or rather, a past, one in part constructed in the mind of Smith and his “Brotherhood” of devotees. This imagined past Greil Marcus, one of the \textit{Anthology}’s most vocal supporters, famously dubbed “The Old, Weird America.” Marcus, describing Smith’s set, writes “The whole bizarre package made the familiar strange, the never known into the forgotten, and the forgotten into a collective memory that teased any single listener’s conscious mind.”\textsuperscript{228} In making the “familiar strange” and the “never known” into a “collective memory” of the “forgotten,” Marcus articulates several mutually reinforcing aspects of the \textit{Anthology}’s lore. Smith’s collection projects a past that is, on one hand, knowable and, on the other, unusual or even unexpected – a dialectic between an “unknown” that is “familiar” enough to give its listeners a sense that they remember it. In this sense, the \textit{Anthology} offers a representation of the nation heretofore unheard to its listeners that at the same time is readily identifiable as “American.”

So, what consensus did Smith’s “national ear” hear? As noted, much of the discourse on the \textit{Anthology} is predicated on its power as a collage, a kind of pastiche of sounds that some have

\textsuperscript{227} Wall, 5.

\textsuperscript{228} Marcus, 95.
even equated as “alchemical.”²²⁹ Whereas the phenomenology of the Anthology may rest upon is collagist design, a reordering of its constituent parts along different axes reveals distinct insights into its makeup.

The constitution of the Anthology includes eighty-four sides released by commercial recording labels between March 1926 and October 1934. Though this eight year period is bracketed enough in its own right, the vast majority of the set’s recordings took place over the course of just two years beginning in January 1928 and ending in December 1929. The Victor Talking Machine Company, a flagship in the emergence of the commercial industry in the US, was host to over a third of the recordings on Smith’s set, with Columbia, Brunswick, Vocalion, OKeh, and Paramount also making substantial contributions.

Data on location of recordings on the Anthology reveals that around a third of the selections were the product of studios in New York City and nearby Camden, NJ. Thirty-seven tracks on the set were recorded in cities in the southeastern US. When Texas is factored in, that number rises to forty-one, nearly half the total tracks on the Anthology. There are eighteen tracks recorded in the Midwest, but only three of those hail from studios outside of Chicago. The west coast of the US is represented by one solitary recording, Ken Maynard’s “The Lone Star Trail,” cut in Los Angeles, CA. In terms of genre distribution, over half the tracks were culled from the “hillbilly” series of these prewar labels, with slightly more than a third originating from their “race” lines. A total of seven recordings carry the Cajun distinction—then known as “Arcadian French”—with the anomalous track by Frank Cloutier and the Victoria Café Orchestra rounding out the set’s eighty-four selections.²³⁰

²²⁹ See Moist.

Though the entirety of Smith’s selections could be described as bracketed, from the brief range of recording dates to the heavy reliance on the Victor Records label foremost and Columbia secondarily to the preponderance of recordings from northeastern and southeastern states, the most striking axis along which to reorder the Anthology is racial demarcation. Just under two-thirds of the Anthology contains genres racialized as white, with overwhelming majority of those recordings classified by the Anglo-Saxon “hillbilly” descriptor. Genres racialized black—mostly “rural” blues and gospel—occupy just over a third of sonic space on the Anthology.

A major component of Smith’s ordering, one that resounds in both the set’s listening experience as well as its discursive history, is the intermingling of racialized black and white sounds. The conceit of the Anthology, of course, is that Smith integrated these cultural forms without regard to informing the listener, an affective progressive provocation during a period of intense cultural, spatial and corporeal segregation. As Robert Cantwell suggests, the set “confuses the classifying impulse” associated with race and cultural formation, making possible “a complete breakdown of the old cultural geography.”

Smith, himself, even boasted how “horribly…certain jazz critics did on [his] blindfold test.” “It took years,” Smith said, “before anybody discovered that Mississippi John Hurt wasn’t a hillbilly.”

Though Smith’s claim may be true in the particular, history suggests the stratification of race and genre in popular as well as vernacular musics had long been established before Smith

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Cantwell, 194.

Cohen, “A Rare Interview with Harry Smith,” 10.
got around to compiling his anthology. As Karl Hagstrom Miller argues, the phenomenon of racialized sound in US cultural formations has origins on the minstrel stage of the early-nineteenth century before being legitimated by academic folklore and enforced by a commercial recording industry emerging under the auspices of Jim Crow. In this sense, the Anthology antagonizes the “old cultural geography” while at the same time reaffirming the centrality of racial dualism in the midcentury national imaginary.

But in another sense, the “old cultural geography” is not even all that old. Smith’s sonic mapping of a historical vernacular America makes static the racial dynamics of its midcentury present. As historians of US racialization like David Roediger and Matthew Frye Jacobson argue, the racial dualism cemented by midcentury was anything but consistent throughout the nation’s history. The “Great Wave” of immigration beginning the mid-nineteenth century detailed in chapter one occasioned more variegated stratification systems, moments when ethnic distinctions within and between immigrant and migrant communities functioned more closely to a contemporary construction of race. These histories are supplanted by the projected fixity of racial dualism on Smith’s anthology. Through the Anthology’s constituent parts is heard a midcentury conception of the nation predicated on identifiable racial forms

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233 It should be noted that even Cantwell couches his claim for the possible breakdown of the “old cultural geography” but stating that however “hopelessly irregula[r]” and “inconsisten[t],” “music does observe such boundaries” like race, class, region and occupation. See Cantwell, 192.


235 The inter-ethnic and racial relations suggested here are informed by the historical work of immigration and whiteness studies scholars David R. Roediger and Matthew Frye Jacobson. For more on the specifics of inter-ethnic and racial relations in the early twentieth century, Roediger’s Working Towards Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White. For more on the development of a Caucasian identity and the racial unification of eastern and southern European immigrants, see chapter three “Becoming Caucasian, 1924-1965” in Jacobson’s Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race.
Racial Dualism and Collector Practice at Midcentury

The mutually reinforcing concepts of consensus politics and racial dualism in midcentury conceptions of US national identity were not the products of Harry Smith’s making alone, of course. Even within the relatively small word of prewar 78rpm record collectors, Smith’s conception of “American” vernacular sound as either white or black found much common ground. Building off a century’s worth of academic scholarship in folklore, midcentury collectors of US-based, prewar recordings rebranded early blues and country recordings issued by commercial labels under an “American folk” moniker. The nationalization of black “race” and white “hillbilly” vernacular forms reflect both the consensus culture and racial dualism of the US at midcentury. The black/white dynamic that defines the nation’s vernacular ear, one that would emerge decades later in the genre of Americana, has its own “roots” – so to say – in the midcentury collector economy.

The curious case of John Edwards, the Australian hillbilly collector who died in 1960 in a car crash at the age of the twenty-eight, provides significant insight into the racialized listening practices of collector culture at the midcentury point. That the life and death of this young Australian would have such lasting impact on the preservation and historicization of prewar white vernacular music from thirty to forty years before his passing is an unlikely story indeed. Despite being far removed both geographically and culturally from the southern United States, Edwards accumulated an impressive compendium of original 78rpm recordings, song folios, and transcripts of correspondence with other collectors in his twenty-eight short years.

Whereas the inventories of most midcentury collectors are either lost to the resale market or still maintained privately, Edwards made arrangements for his collection to be archived after his death. In his will, Edwards stated that his collection only be used “for the furtherance of
serious study, recognition, appreciation, and preservation of genuine country or hillbilly music especially as regards to the artists and discs of the ‘Golden Age’ recording era.”

From Edwards’s will grew the John Edwards Memorial Foundation (JEMF), a non-profit organization working in partnership with the University of California at Los Angeles, dedicated to the preservation and promotion of prewar country music.

Before the JEMF, though, there was John Edwards, the record collector. Meticulously organized, Edwards kept receipt and dispatch of all the recordings he received or deleted from his collection. Dated between 1949 and 1960, Edwards’s record inventories detail significant fluctuation both in the types of records Edwards collected and how the young collector categorized them. Edwards honed his collection by purging certain sounds and reclassifying others, often along racial, ethic, or national lines.

Although Edwards is best known as a collector of hillbilly material (and as his inventories attest, over three quarters of his holdings were of the white vernacular variety), he also acquired and maintained an impressive selection of jazz and blues discs. At peak, Edwards’s black vernacular holdings consisted of over five hundred pieces. Although Edwards consistently build his blues and jazz collection throughout the 1950s, his filing system for these recordings vacillated wildly over the decade. For most of Edwards’s collecting life, he maintained separate lists, segregating his holdings by white and black vernacular styles, often in a master “FOLK” or “HILLBILLY” catalog and a master “JAZZ” or “RACE” catalog. In February of 1957, Edwards generated a supplemental list called “Blues Records,” annotating that the discs were “[s]elected from ‘JAZZ’ catalog, comprising all folk and blues material not included in the ‘FOLK’

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This supplement, which includes recordings by African American artists like Lonnie Johnson, Ma Rainey, and Jelly Roll Morton, reflect an American folk genre in transition. These record are filed most authoritatively in Edwards’s “JAZZ” catalog but are ascribed a secondary folk affiliation.

Less than a year later in January of 1958, Edwards integrated his blues records into a master list of “all hillbilly, folk, and ‘country’ material.” Sides by Ishman Bracey, Blind Blake, Furry Lewis, Mississippi John Hurt, Henry Thomas, and Sleepy John Estes are included in Edwards’ estimation of American folk music with the disclaimer noted in parenthesis next to each performer’s name, “(Negro blues singer).” Other parenthetical disclaimers included in the 1958 American folk list include discs by “(Negro gospel singers)” like Mahalia Jackson, Blind Willie Johnson and Sister Rosetta Thorpe, “(Cajun)” artists like Joseph Fallon and Didier Herbert, “(Australian)” hillbilly performers Gil Harris and the Hawkins Brothers, and “(English)” hillbilly acts like The Hill Billies, The Rocky Mountaineers, and Gary Van Dusen.

The 1958 list may be Edwards’ most inclusive, but even within this comprehensive account of American folk music, deviations from the white vernacular standard, be they racial, ethnic or national, are considered significant enough to warrant disclaimer.

By 1959, Edwards’s inventory would again be segregated between black and white vernacular varieties. Edwards’ “Disc and Tape Collection,” a sixty-nine page document representing the collector’s holdings a year before his untimely death, is separated into two sections: “Part 1 – Hillbilly – Folk – Country” and “Part 2 – Race – Blues – Jazz.” Absent are the

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237 “Blues Records,” February 1957, series 2.5, folder 86, John Edwards Memorial Foundation, Southern Folklife Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

238 “Record and Tape Collection,” January 1958, series 2.5, folder 87, John Edwards Memorial Foundation, Southern Folklife Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
integrationist impulses of a year prior, here Edwards reconfigures his list largely along the lines of commercial record companies would have marketed their recordings when they circulated in the primary economy of the prewar years. Notably, the recordings by the “Cajun,” “English,” and “Australian” artists noted in the inclusive 1958 list are enveloped into Part 1 with their parenthetical disclaimers intact. The “Negro gospel” and “Negro blues” performers, of course, are now located in Part 2 of the inventory.239

As an outsider from Australia looking in on an already historical US culture, John Edwards’s evolving classificatory practices mirror the formulation of a unitary but racially bifurcated national vernacular imaginary at midcentury. It should be noted that these inventories were not necessarily for Edwards’s personal use, but rather, had a more public facing utility. Explanatory text featured either at the beginning or end of each master and supplementary inventories includes Edwards’ invitation to readers, “I can supply, on an exchange basis, all selections in this catalog, on tape.”240 Lists such as the ones Edwards created in the late 1950s were circulated freely amongst collectors and other fans of prewar recordings. In this way, the arranging of records into specific genres like “blues” and “hillbilly,” and the more fluid and less defined genres like “folk,” reflect both Edwards’ own relationship to these records as well as a broader cultural understanding of such genre formations among record collectors of the period. As such, Edward’s 1958 inventory, his integrated master list of “all hillbilly, folk, and ‘country’ records” is clearly in conversation with Smith’ Anthology in the way it presents a similar cohesive, racially integrated American folk taxonomy.

239 “Record and Tape Collection,” January 1959, series 2.5, folder 88, John Edwards Memorial Foundation, Southern Folklife Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

240 Ibid.
Likewise, Edwards’s racially segregated inventories not only reflect the primary markets in which these records initially circulated but also the practices within reissue and collector economies. By the 1960s, reissue labels like Origin Jazz Library would be established catering to prewar black vernacular fans and labels like County Records for white vernacular enthusiasts. Regardless of their integration or segregation in particular instances, the overarching centrality of race – that the Americanness of a vernacular form is predicated on its intelligible blackness or whiteness – is consistent throughout Edwards’s inventories and the broader collector economy of the period.

**The Anthology’s Muted “Foreign” Origins**

Even though John Edward’s inventories and the construction of the Smith collection both display a preoccupation with the racial categorization of prewar vernacular musics related to US national identity, the *Anthology* is not without “foreign” influence. The first ten selections of volume one are ballads sourced to British or Scottish origin.\(^\text{241}\) The decision to begin the *Anthology* with Anglo-Saxon ballads was intentional. The set’s opening selection, “Henry Lee” as performed by Dick Justice, a Brunswick recording first issued on the label’s “hillbilly” line in 1932, received pole position precisely because it was the earliest “Child Ballad” in Smith’s record collection.\(^\text{242}\) Frances James Child, a Harvard professor and “song-collector” of English-speaking folksongs, published the canonical eight-volume *English & Scottish Ballads* between 1857 and 1859. Known colloquially as the “Child Ballads,” *English & Scottish Ballads* became a foundational text of the American folksong movement.\(^\text{243}\)

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\(^\text{241}\) Smith, liner notes to *Anthology of American Folk Music*, Folkways 2951/3.

\(^\text{242}\) Smith, liner notes to *Anthology of American Folk Music*, Folkways 2951/3, 2.

entry in *English & Scottish Ballads*—Smith would later admit, “It’s not a good record, but I had to put it first in the set because it was the lowest numbered Child Ballad.” Smith’s deference to Child not only indicates an appreciation for the work of previous folksong enthusiasts but also displays a belief in the primacy of “Anglo-Saxonism” in US national identity.

The inclusion of British and Scottish ballads and folksongs on the *Anthology* is taken as self-evident. Nowhere in the accompanying notes does Smith author a justification for featuring British or Scottish material on the *Anthology*, and—given the absence of contest in the subsequent discourse—nor did he need to. The close relation between “Anglo-Saxonism” and “Americanism” on the Smith collection is understood as organic, a natural result of the nation’s British origins.

Annotations for the handful of Cajun recordings of French Louisianans on the *Anthology*—the one distinctly “ethnic,” as opposed to “racial,” genre on the compilation—are relatively thin. Smith, presumably not fluent in French, does not offer title translations or his celebrated lyrical “condensations” for selections like “Saut-Crapaud” by Columbus Fruge, “Le Vieux Soulard Et Sa Femme” by Cleoma Breaux and Joseph Falcon. Instead, Smith fills his notes with commentary on the particularities of Arcadian (spelled “Arcadian” in the handbook) melodies, “regular unison rhythms,” and vocal inflections, as well as making erroneous claims like, “The accordion, one of the most basic Arcadian instruments, is seldom heard in the states.

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244 Cohen, “A Rare Interview with Harry Smith,” 2.

245 In surveying both academic and popular publications on Smith’s *Anthology*, little attention is paid to annotations found in the set’s handbook citing the British and Scottish lineages in the performances on *Anthology* recordings. That said, I will qualify my claim in stating that Neil V. Rosenberg does explicitly question why other eastern and southern European song and dance traditions recorded in the US northeast and midwest during the prewar period were not included in Smith’s conception of a US national vernacular imaginary in his excellent article, “The *Anthology of American Folk Music* and Working-Class Music” in *Labour/ Le Travail* 42 (Fall 1998), 327-332.
north of Louisiana.” Other than including an entry for “French, songs sung in” in the handbook’s index, linguistic distinction is mostly ignored by Smith.

Then, of course, there is the aforementioned “Moonshiner’s Dance” by Frank Cloutier and the Victoria Café Orchestra. For more than fifty years after the Anthology’s initial release, “Moonshiner’s Dance” remained largely a mystery until Kurt Gegenhuber, a Minneapolis-based blogger for the Anthology-themed website The Celestial Monochord, published the first in a series of posts dedicated to Frank Cloutier in the summer of 2006. Recorded in neighboring St. Paul, Gegenhuber’s interest in “Moonshiner’s Dance” stemmed from a geographical affinity for the offbeat dance medley and the lack of attention it received from fellow Anthology devotees over the years. “Harry Smith’s Anthology is surely the most influential anthology of sounds in history,” Gugenhuber writes, “Many of those on the Anthology were sought out and found in the 1960’s [sic], had a second career, and have been written about seemingly endlessly. Why was NOTHING known about Frank Cloutier and his orchestra until May 13, 2006 when I looked him up in the phone book?”

To his question, Gegenhuber offers some hypotheses: First, the genre-hopping construction of “Moonshiner’s Dance” makes it hard to categorize. As such, the dance tune was omitted from several key discographies of US prewar recordings including Brian Rust’s Jazz Records, 1897 to 1942 and Richard K. Spottswood’s Ethnic Music on Records. Second, Gegenhuber suggests that the midwestern origins of the Cloutier recording are in part why it’s

246 Smith, liner notes to Anthology of American Folk Music, Folkways 2951/3, 8, 12-13.


248 Ibid, emphasis in original.
received so little interest, because “it doesn’t fit the story we usually tell ourselves about American ‘roots music’”\(^{249}\).

Between the diverse influences and styles of “Moonshiner’s Dance” and its conceptual anomaly as a Midwestern recording, Gegenhuber rationalizes the relative silence about the recording. In defense of Cloutier and hoping to recuperate the recording’s value to vernacular music in the US, more generally, Gegenhuber writes,

> But what I hear in "The Moonshiner's Dance" is the arrival of the Jazz Age in St. Paul, and the adaptation of jazz to that city's "always-already" multiethnic musical environment. A Klezmerized, French-Canadian, red-hot Scanda-jazzian, beer-garden polka, the recording deserves the prominence given to it by its inclusion in the Harry Smith Anthology — even if Smith was roughly the last person to understand its role in the Anthology’s argument.\(^{250}\)

As Gegenhuber states, little evidence exists to suggest Smith heard “Moonshiner’s Dance” as a Midwestern city’s “adaptation to jazz” or the “multiethnic musical environment” that already established in St. Paul. According to annotations in the Anthology’s handbook, Smith heard the Cloutier ensemble as “one of the musical ancestors of Spike Jones,” the idiosyncratic composer of satirical jazz tunes favored by midcentury collectors, noting the “surprising” incorporation of “jazz phrasings” into popular and gospel tunes in the medley.\(^{251}\)

That Smith ignores or fails to hear the “multiethnic musical environment” that materializes in the Cloutier track, in favor of framing it as an antecedent of a contemporary artist of his favor, suggests his interest in the track weighed heavily on its status as a rarity, a single-known disc of a virtually unknown group whose recorded performance seems to anticipates postwar developments in popular music. This combined with the ambiguous taxonomical

\(^{249}\) Ibid.

\(^{250}\) Ibid.

\(^{251}\) Smith, liner notes to *Anthology of American Folk Music*, Folkways 2951/3, 9.
classifier “Old-Time Dance Band” on the original Gennett disc label and, perhaps, the specious impression of moonshine as a specifically Appalachian phenomenon were enough to massage the multiethnic and urban Victoria Café Orchestra into Smith’s projection of “American folk music” as regionally southern and spatially rural.\textsuperscript{252}

**Conclusion**

The primacy of racial identification in American vernacular sound crystalized in the midcentury decades in part due to the practices and productions of record collectors interested in two, often mutually reinforcing projects: 78rpm records from the early electrical recording period and the identification, celebration, and lionization of “authentic” national culture. Collectors and compilers like Harry Smith and John Edwards utilized both formal and informal channels to convey a unified national vernacular imaginary. Edwards’ inventories represent intra-communications within collecting culture during the period that mirrored its public face, Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music*.

As the US folk revival’s “enabling document,” the *Anthology* entered the commercial music marketplace targeted at an emerging demographic of largely middle class, educated, conspicuous consumers interested in folk culture, broadly conceived.\textsuperscript{253} Released on a label, Folkways, with a growing reputation for the serious study of folkloric musical forms and wrapped in pseudo-mystical, countercultural affectations, the *Anthology* slowly circulated within fifties folk revivalism and sixties psychedelia, eventually achieving its status as the canon of vernacular Americana.


\textsuperscript{253} Quote from Canwell, 189.
Songs like “Moonshiner’s Dance” by Frank Cloutier and the Victoria Café Orchestra had stories to tell very much significant to US history and culture, broadly conceived. For the Cloutier recording, it is the story of multiple migrations, of northern, southern, and eastern Europeans to the US midwest after arriving in ports east, of Mexican farm workers following the seasonal harvest cycle north to that same midwest, and of African Americans escaping Jim Crow, hoping for better lives in the urban northeast and midwest. It seems unlikely many ears in the postwar decades heard that in “Moonshiner’s Dance” or other jazz, waltz, and polka-inflected performances, or at least not in the context of Americana.

The “truer America” sought by the collectors, listeners, and other members of the “Brotherhood of the Anthology” was one that evinced a past long before the arrival of Cloutier’s “newcomers” when a more defined and rugged whiteness was rooted in the land and before blackness and urbanity became synonyms. The merits of the recordings and performances recuperated by the US folk and blues revivals are not at question here. Having artists like Charley Patton, The Carter Family, and Dock Boggs brought into the national conversation was an incalculable contribution. But the brackets placed around their interests, both distinct and significant, speak to greater ideological forces extending well beyond the reach of a small group of mostly white men and their hobby of listening to scratchy old records. After three decades of immigration restriction, the distinction of “national origins” diminished, and the nation looked and listened back on a past imagined through the racial stratification of its contemporary present. The lasting significance of vernacular Americana defined by intelligible whiteness and blackness speaks to the enduring legacy of racial dualism in the national imaginary as the expense of the nation’s other prewar vernacular grammars.
CHAPTER 3: FOLK MUSIC IN AMERICA, HYPHENATED AMERICANISM, AND THE TURN TOWARD ETHNICITY IN THE 1970S

Introduction

On January 24, 1977, around one-hundred fifty people convened at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. on behalf of the American Folklife Center to attend a three-day conference on this history of “ethnic” music recordings in the United States. The conference, and subsequent book published by the Library commemorating the event, was titled Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected History. Conferees included Barry Jean Andler of the Center for Arcadian and Creole Folklore Studies, Stanley Balzekas of the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago, Victor Cooley from Voice of America, David E. Whisnant representing American Studies at the University of Maryland’s Baltimore campus, Arhoolie Records founder Chris Strachwitz, the Smithsonian’s Ralph Rinzler, Alan Lomax’s daughter, and public folklorist in her own rite, Anna Lomax, and feminist bluegrass legend Hazel Dickens.

This group along with other academics, folklorists, archivists, record collectors, “roots music” industry types and musicians bore witness to presentations on the artistry, musicology, and cultural history of US-based “ethnic” music recordings. Finnish ethnomusicologist Pekka Gronow provided a primer on “ethnic” music recordings with more detailed histories of both “ethnic” music field recordings and commercial “ethnic series” discs were given respectively by

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the folklife center’s own Joseph C. Hickerson and collector Richard K. Spottswood, respectively. James C. Griffith offered biography of the famous Mexican-American singer Lydia Mendoza followed by a talk by Mendoza herself. During opening remarks delivered by Daniel J. Boorstin, the Librarian of Congress described the goal of the conference was to “celebrat[e] the multiplicity of American life, the manyness of it, the subtlety of it” through the study of ethnic musics. “We are interested in this pluralism of American life,” Boorstin told the crowd.

The conference came on the heels of a recording project launched by the American Folklife Center a few years prior celebrating not only the ethnic recordings of the conference focus but of “pluralism” in US vernacular musical life more broadly. *Folk Music in America* (*FMiA*), a fifteen-LP compilation series produced by the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress to commemorate the 1976 US Bicentennial, intermingled the many and varied ethnic forms of vernacular musical performance as contemporaries of more established American “folk” forms like blues and country into a usable national musical soundscape. Assembled by conference presenter and adjunct employee of the folklife center, Richard Spottswood, *FMiA* the first substantial attempt to produce a cohesive compilation of US vernacular musics since Harry Smith’s famed *Anthology of American Music*, then nearly a quarter century old.

The ethnic vernacular musics celebrated at the American Folklife Center conference and at the center of Spottswood’s *FMiA* were, of course, the “foreign-language” recordings of prewar commercial recording company catalogs. In the intervening years since the seventy-eight disc

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255 Jabbour et al.


had fallen out of fashion and national recording outfits retooled for the mass distribution of US popular music on forty-fives and LPs, “foreign-language” recordings became the purview of a select, but influential group of collectors, among them Richard Spottswood. Under Spottswood and company, these recordings, chiefly those attributed to eastern and southern European origins, dropped their “foreign” classifications in favor of “ethnic” distinction. Polish series recordings no longer meant “of Poland,” but rather, “of Polish heritage,” or even more ostentatiously, “Polish-American,” enveloping these “foreign” musics, continentally at least, into the nation.

In addition to FMiA, Spottswood had his hand in another major recording project aimed at capturing the pluralism of US musical identity. New World Records’ Recording Anthology of American Music (RAAM), a mammoth one hundred disc set conceived and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation also a project of the Bicentennial celebration, aimed to “tell the history of America’s people through their music.”258 Featuring a cross-section of serious, popular, and vernacular musics recorded in the US, RAAM ran the gambit of musical diversity, celebrating the many peoples involved in the production and proliferation of the nation’s many musics. Spottswood, in particular, served as program consultant on two volumes in the series, drawing contents exclusively from prewar “foreign-language” catalogs recast as commercial ethnic vernacular musics.259


259 The two LPs Spottswood produced for RAAM were Old-Country Music in a New Land: Folk Music of Immigrants from Europe and the Near East, New World Records NW 246, 1977, LP and ‘Spiew Juchasa/Song of the Shepherd: Songs of the Slavic Americans, New World Records NW 283, 1977, LP.
The Library of Congress and the Rockefeller Foundation were not alone in their celebration of pluralism but, rather, part of a broader cultural turn toward ethnicity in last quarter of the twentieth century in the US. Matthew Frye Jacobson argues that by the mid-1970s ethnic identity emerged beyond just “interior, psychic identities” amongst groups of people in the US, morphing into a manner of conceiving of the nation itself. “The mid-1970s represented the consolidation of this new ethnicity,” Jacobson states, “the heritage fest of the nation’s bicentennial, followed immediately by the broadcast of Alex Haley’s blockbuster Roots, denoted Americans’ heightened self-consciousness about their own roots and about the new, pluralized idioms of national membership.” These “pluralized idioms of national membership” manifested linguistically in parlance of the hyphenated American. African-American and Asian-American became taxonomies alongside the newly reclaimed ethnic distinctions of German-American, Italian-American, and and other peoples racialized as white within the US, creating what Jacobson calls a “hyphen nation.”

The return to particularity within white racial identity manifested in the development of heritage organizations and activities like the Moravian Folklore Circle in Chicago and Norwegian-American Folk Music Festival in Decatur, Iowa as well as ethnic pride campaigns like “Proud to be Polish.”


261 The liners notes accompanying the undated music album Vzpomináme Písni: Remembering in Song (Houby Records ZEM-LP-180, n.d., LP) state that the Moravian Folklore Circle formed fifteen years prior to the release of the LP with the singing group beginning in 1973; The record album Folk Music of the Norwegians in America (United Audio Corporation 254-26518, n.d., LP) was recorded live at the Norwegian-American Folk Music Festival in Decatur, Iowa on July 27, 1968; The liner notes for Larry Chesky and His Orchestra, I Want to Play in Your Band (Rex Records LP-285, 1984, LP) provide a bio of Chesky which states the band leader and Rex Records head founded Modern Mail International in 1974 “to promote Polish heritage through the distribution of “Polish to be Proud” products.” Faski Collection, Faski Collection, Connecticut Polish American Collection, Elihu Burritt Library, Central Connecticut State University.
Black, Brown, and Red Power movements of the early 1970s, and newly liberalized immigration policy bringing new arrivals from Latin America and South Asia, the “white ethnic” revival as served a reaction to perceived “special rights” granted to people of color during the period. White identity, which had long celebrated individuality, reconfigured as ethnically delineated collectivites. On one hand a recuperation of familial and group heritage and, on the other, a kind of white racial grievance politics, the new “white ethnic” identities of the 1970s reshaped concepts of racial and ethnic distinction in the nation, which Jacobson argues afforded the nation the ability to celebrate diversity while maintaining “white primacy” in the national character.  

Centennial celebrations are, at their core, reflections of national identity. In this chapter, I examine how the production and projection of both the Library of Congress’s *Folk Music in America* and New World Records’ *Recorded Anthology of American Music* participate in the turn toward ethnicity in 1970s, updating Smith’s white and black construction of the national vernacular imaginary to include the rediscovered particularity of white ethnicity. Under the ethos of liberal accommodation, these “Bicentennial collages” present a national imaginary predicated on cultural pluralism, complicating the more defined parameters of midcentury Americana. However, the pluralism in their representations is mostly historical, recuperating ethnic distinction for turn-of-the-century immigrants fully incorporated into whiteness by the Bicentennial moment, while sidelining migrants of color in both historical and contemporary contexts. In curatorial bias and the material constraints of the LP format, *Folk Music in America*

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and the *Recorded Anthology of American Music* make audible the limitations of pluralism and accommodationism as political projects.

**The 1965 Immigration Act and a Changing Racial Landscape**

*Folk Music in America* (*FMiA*) and the *Recorded Anthology of American Music* (*RAAM*) were conceived under the backdrop of a changing racial landscape in the US during the 1970s. Eleven years prior to the Bicentennial celebration, the US Congress, with the approval of President Lyndon Johnson, dramatically restructured immigration policy with the passage and signing of the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965 (alternately known as the Immigration Act of 1965 or the Hart-Cellar Act).\(^{264}\) The expressed aim of the Hart-Cellar Act was to undo the racist National Origins Quota System put in place following the passage of the Johnson Reed Act in 1924. The amendments only nominally increased the total number of visas but dolled them out based on skill, education level, and a broad-based emphasis on family unification. A maximum of 290,000 visas were to be distributed annually with 170,000 visas available for the Eastern Hemisphere and 120,000 for the Western Hemisphere.\(^{265}\)

Understood in tandem with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Immigration Act of 1965 was part of a broader Civil Rights agenda undertaken by the federal government in response to the tireless activism of African Americans and the US Left

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since at least the early 1950s. In both rhetoric and action, the US Congress and President Johnson were invested in addressing, if only incrementally, racial injustice and the ethos of white supremacy guiding both domestic and international policy. The Immigration Act of 1965 upended the nativism of the Johnson-Reed Act, crafting a federal immigration policy that would, in part, influence the cultural pluralism of the following decade.

Though the 1965 Immigration Act espoused an ethic of nondiscrimination, the effect of the amendments did not result in an even-keel of migration to the United States from all areas of the globe. By the 1960s, the quota system had become untenable largely because it was viewed as discriminatory to eastern and southern Europeans. But the lifting of those restrictions did not occasion widespread emigrations from either area of Europe. Economic possibility in southern Europe has increased significantly since the close of the Second World War, tamping the need or want to migrate across the Atlantic. Conversely, much of eastern Europe, under state control, had no option to emigrate west. The areas of the world where people did envision an improved quality of life and economic opportunity in the US were in the nations of Central and South America and Asia. The liberalization of immigration policy afforded Asians and Latino/a/xs the ability to emigrate to the US. At peak immigration for the period, people of color from Asia and the Americas accounted for roughly 86% of the total number of immigrants in 1976.

The 1965 Immigration Act was designed to right a past wrong enacted against eastern and southern Europeans, but it resulted in a mass migration of persons of color precisely at the

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time of the nation’s Bicentennial commemoration. The turn toward ethnicity in the 1970s—
itself an acknowledgment of difference within the US polity—was, in part, due to the influx of
new differences in the nation’s population. The changing racial landscape of the US
accompanied a return to ethnic particularity within the nation’s white population. Differentiation
became a kind of currency to so-called “white ethnics.” As the nation became increasingly less
white, the descendents of turn-of-the-century European immigrants displayed renewed interest in
their foreign heritage, now revamped under the umbrella of ethnicity in the 1970s.

**Inventing Ethnicity**

As Werner Sollors famously proclaimed, ethnicity is an invention. Although thought of
as a stable, if not static, category of group identification, ethnicity is a modern phenomenon. The
term itself has very little history prior to midcentury, not becoming part of the quotidian lexicon
until at least 1970. Even though the histories of US immigration (this one included) are told
with ethnicity as a central taxonomy, the word itself has been retroactively applied to immigrant
groups by subsequent generations. David Roediger remarks of his research into the history of
eastern and southern immigration to the US that the “massive Cornell University Library Making
of America database contains over a million pages,” with “ethnicity” not appearing once during
the period of peak migration between 1870 and 1926. Similarly, the archives of *Talking
Machine World*, the chief trade organ of the prewar commercial recording industry make ample

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268 Ibid.

269 Werner Sollors, “Introduction: The Invention of Ethnicity,” *The Invention of Ethnicity* edited by Werner Sollers

270 Werner Sollers states that the word first appeared in print in 1941 in a book by W. Lloyd Warner (ibid, xxi).
David Roediger, citing anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo, makes perhaps the more significant claim that ethnicity
did not become common in the US until late-century in *Working Towards Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants

271 Ibid.
reference to Polish, Greek, Italian, Finnish, Armenian, and German musicians and populations in the US, but “ethnic” never accompanies as a descriptor. Instead, the magazine and its many advertisers opt for “foreign” or “foreign-born.”

In the US, the transformation from immigrant to ethnic occurred slowly, if inconsistently, over the course of the twentieth century. As southern and eastern European immigrants folded into whiteness in the latter half of the century, the significance of national origins or heritage waned as these groups assimilated into full US citizenship. Immigrants racialized as other than white, and for people of color in general, were subject to white supremacy, demarcating them outside the social, cultural, and political power structure of the US and reifying their racial distinction as both biological and cultural. Ethnic identity for Asians, Latino/a/xs, and blacks in the US was not optional. By the 1970s, however, ethnicity would emerge as a defining fact in self-presentation and group identity. The efficacy of identity-base political organizing during the Civil Rights Movement, the American Indian Movement, the Chicano Movement met with the discovery of ancestry by the descendents of Great Wave migrants from eastern and southern Europe refashioned as “white ethnics.”

The ethnicity craze of the 1970s went as far as for Jewish historian Jonathan Sarna to suggest in 1978 that the pejorative “WASP” might itself be an ethnic identity for “formally” majoritarian white Protestants in the US.

Underneath the relatively benign celebration of familial heritage, a particularly potent style of grievance politics took shape among certain white ethnics. The emphasis on particularity within white racial identity—that experiences, circumstances, and socialization of white US citizens of Irish, Italian, or Slavic ancestry different significantly from those of English, Scottish, and others—


or Scandanavian descent—fomenting in resentment towards elite whites as well as people of color, of which white ethnics perceived as receiving special attention from the political establishment not afforded to them. Michael Novak articulated the politics of the aggrieved white ethnic to no greater effect than in his 1972 popular nonfiction book *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies.* In the book, Novak describes himself as a multiethnic descendent of eastern European immigrants. More specifically, Novak states, “I am born of PIGS—those Poles, Italians, Greeks, and Slavs, those non-English speaking immigrants so heavily among the working men of this nation.” Novak’s self-presentation as a culturally working-class, masculine (“working men”) other (“non-English speaking”) captures the tone and tenor of his politics. By all accounts a white man, Novak expresses anxiety over the loss of Slavic identity in the US and anguish over the sympathy—and presumably, services—offered to people of color by the liberal social welfare state. As Matthew Frye Jacobson states, Novak considered himself to the left of the liberal-conservative divide when *Unmeltable Ethnics* was published. As such, much of Novak’s venom is spent lambasting the “educated” Left for, as he perceived it, ignoring the plight of working-class white ethnics. Novak wanted Democrats to “extend to [white ethnics] the same cross-cultural understanding as one does to blacks.” Novak admits that African Americans fare worse in the US, but was vehement in his contention that “black gain shouldn’t come at ethnic expense.” The nexus of contempt for the liberal establishment and resentment towards people of color formed the reactionary politics of the


276 Novak, 13-14.
white ethnic revival of the 1970s, an antagonism with resonances in the broader cultural pluralism of the period.\footnote{277}

The emergence of Novak’s white ethnic aggrievement in tandem the success of identity-based political organizing by Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Chicanos and other Latina/o/x peoples, alongside an increasingly diverse polity created a kind of crisis within the social, cultural, and political establishments in the US. Writing in the Harvard Educational Review in 1974, William Greenbaum describes the incertitude of moral leadership in US institutions entering the last quarter of the twentieth century. Greenbaum, who describes himself in the Review as a US citizen of Russian ancestry, expresses concern over the loss of assimilation as an “American ideal.” Ethnic diversity among both recent immigrants US and the descendents of Great Wave migrants had disproven the “melting pot” as an end-goal of naturalization. Greenbaum argues that “the Anglo-American ideal gave direction and force to the nation’s assimilation process, and the decline of the ideal has severely interrupted that fundamental process.”\footnote{278}

Greenbaum’s solution to the social and moral panic of a discontiguous populace is to embrace pluralism as a unifying concept. “The present period is the first in American history in which the nation’s major institutions are reinforcing difference as a way of increasingly similarity,” Greenbaum states. “Humane pluralistic institutions and communities must be built and supported...we must all work to create a more broadly-based, universal ideal” in the wake of assimilation’s collapse, Greenbaum concludes.\footnote{279} In the Greenbaum essay, cultural pluralism is

\footnote{277} For a more thorough, sustained analysis of Michael Novak’s *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*, see Jacobson’s *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America*, 209-213.


\footnote{279} Ibid, 432-434.
revealed as a political project necessitated by both a changing national polity and the
development of discrete forms of white ethnicity. National institutions and the political
establishment were faltering on the efficacy of assimilation and beginning to “take pluralism
seriously,” to borrow more of Greenbaum’s language.\textsuperscript{280} Pluralism became the new ideal of the
nation and the nation’s cultural institutions were charged with celebrating it.

\textbf{Inventing \textit{Folk Music in America}}

The origins of \textit{Folk Music in America} begin, not with Richard Spottswood, but as a
project developed by Allan Jabbour, head of the Archive of Folk Song at the American Folklife
Center. In 1973, Jabbour proposed an idea to create a “comprehensive” study of US-based folk
song recordings as a way of synthesizing the many strains of folk song practice into one, usable
series of long-playing albums. Having taught at the university-level in addition to his
responsibilities at the Library of Congress, Jabbour was keenly aware of a gap in the commercial
recording industry in regards to what he considered a “genuine” or “authentic” study of the US’s
diverse folk musics available to students, libraries, and other interested listeners at an affordable
price. Jabbour envisioned a compilation series, broad enough to capture the demographic
diversity of the US but compact enough to serve its documentary purpose, developed by the
Library of Congress in commemoration of the Bicentennial.\textsuperscript{281}

Whereas large companies “had written off documentary folk-music issues as
unprofitable,” the small pockets of the recording industry producing the kinds of folksong
albums of interest to Jabbour veered into areas of what he called “specialization,” or deep studies
of defined or narrow fields of folksong practice. This theme of “specialization” was found across

\textsuperscript{280} Ibid, 434.

\textsuperscript{281} Alan Jabbour, National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Grant Application: Bicentennial LP Project, n.d., First
Year Applications & Acceptance, 09/73 - 03/74, Bicentennial LP Project, AFC, quote from 3.
both “roots-oriented” original issue labels like Folkways and Arhoolie as well as the many small-market reissue labels that emerged in the 1960s like Origin Jazz Library, Document, Biograph, and County Records. Folkways and Arhoolie produced many rich and detailed releases, but tended to focus their purview on a clearly defined set of genre practices, producing individual albums catering to individual styles of performances. The 1960s reissue labels developed identities around specific genres and eras of commercial recordings. For instance, Origin Jazz Library became the premiere label for the reissue of early electoral recording-era blues or “race” recordings. County served the same purpose but for the reissue of hillbilly recordings. Jabbour felt these “small labels are too specialized, both in the interests of their owners and in their marketing and distribution networks,” catering the “buffs and enthusiasts” who “usually concentrate on one subject area.”

Jabbour also lumped the Library of Congress LBC recording series into the “specialization” phenomenon. Founded in 1946, the series had produced sixty-four different titles by the time Jabbour began the Bicentennial project. Though he considered LBC releases to be “pioneering,” heralding them as models for noncommercial study of folksong styles and performance, Jabbour found the detail and precision of individual releases an impediment to a workable holistic study. In this regard, the LBC series may have provided the listening public with deep dives into everything from Chippewa Indian song styles to an LP-length collection consisting only of renditions of the British ballad “Barbara Allen,” but digesting these various studies across sixty-plus releases proved untenable. What it lacked, by Jabbour’s estimation, was

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a compilation that cut across the various small pockets of the roots and reissue recording industry to produce a unified, comprehensive study of US folk musics.  

The one extant study “with even pretentions to a comprehensive selection of American folk music” that Jabbour knew of was, of course, Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Music* released in 1952 on Folkways. Without contesting the significance of the Smith collection, Jabbour felt the compilation has “its limitations,” only culling recordings mostly from two different genres of the prewar recording era and “from a limited selection of them at that.” Jabbour also concluded that the “poor acoustical quality of the early recordings” featured on the *Anthology*, that same prewar sound that authenticating the recordings to many 78 collectors and early electrical recording enthusiasts, “put off many listeners” beyond those limited publics. In the intervening decades between the *Anthology*’s release and the upcoming Bicentennial, Jabbour argued that “research [into various folksong forms] have greatly swelled the available material” to construct a new anthology of American folk music, “in many cases uncovering thriving traditions unknown to the rest of the country twenty years ago.” Furthermore, Jabbour stated, “it is not possible with modern sound engineering to make LP’s [sic] with superb living presence in sound” with reach beyond the relatively minor demographics of prewar recordings collectors.  

Jabbour’s vision for this new anthology would be a fifteen-LP series covering every significant folksong style and genre produced by the various of demographics of the US. Each release would be accompanied by a booklet of notes and supplementary materials as custom for such “documentary” releases. “The essential idea,” Jabbour stated, “is to give representation to

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283 Jabbour, NEA Grant Application: Bicentennial LP Project; *Songs of the Chippewa from the Archive of American Folk Song*, Library of Congress Division of Music Recording Laboratory AAFS L22, 1950, LP; *Versions and Variants of Barbara Allen From the Archive of Folk Song*, ed. Charles Seeger, Library of Congress AAFS L54, 1966, LP.

284 Jabbour, NEA Grant Application: Bicentennial LP Project, 1-2.
each of the major cultural strains in the United States,” adding the caveat that “addition representation” be afforded to “those traditions…which have most influenced the development of American popular music,” to which Jabbour cited chiefly white Anglo-Saxon and African American musical contributions.\textsuperscript{285}

Due to the material realities of producing such a substantial anthology, Jabbour applied for support to assist the Archive of Folk Song from the National Endowment for the Arts which, like most governmental and philanthropic institutions at the time, had expressed interest in funding Bicentennial-inspired programming. The Archive ran on a revolving fund from the Recording Laboratory at the LOC, which only provided enough to produce a handful of releases a year, pressed in a limited-run. Jabbour’s goals for this project required a more robust funding source with the hope of continuing to press and distribute the collections for many years to come. On September 21, 1973, Jabbour submitted an application to the NEA on behalf of the Library of Congress to fund the Archive of Folk Song LP project, an expense Jabbour estimated at the time to total $50,000.\textsuperscript{286}

In making a case for the significance of the project, Jabbour echoed a theme of cultural pluralism so resonant in the moment. The proposal states, “This generation should make an effort to synthesize the available material [of recorded folk musics] into a beautiful and instructive anthology celebrating the nation’s many constituent cultures. Nothing could be more appropriate for the bicentennial appraisal of our national life and character.”\textsuperscript{287} Certainly, some of the language used in the grant proposal can be attributed to the audience it was written for, the NEA was clearly interested in reading applications that celebrate “national life and character” in

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid, 5.
\textsuperscript{286} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{287} Ibid, 4.
anticipation of the Bicentennial commemoration, but the construction of that “character,” in its “many constituent cultures” rings true with the cultural pluralism of Jacobson’s hyphen-nation.

Six months later, the Library of Congress would learn the good news that Jabbour’s conception of the project—and the larger nation it represented—held import to warrant an NEA grant. As is policy to only provide half the monies needed to complete a project, the NEA awarded Jabbour and the LOC a $25,000 grant beginning March 1, 1974, marking an effective start date for the material construction of Archive of Folk Song’s *Folk Music in America.*

Soon after the Library of Congress received word of the NEA matching grant, Allan Jabbour, architect of the Bicentennial LP series resigned his position as director of the Archive of Folk Song to begin work as the inaugural director of the Folk Arts Program at, of all places, the National Endowment of the Arts. The LOC’s Archive of Folk Song directorship was soon filled by Joseph C. Hickerson, but progress on the LP project stalled for several months. In an earlier conversation with Howard Klein at the Rockefeller Foundation, Jabbour stressed that the project, then only in its infancy prior to the NEA grant, was his idea alone and that anyone else in the position might conceive of its value and form in an entirely different manner. Perhaps the singularity of Jabbour’s vision for the project in combination with Hickerson’s recent arrival to the Library was cause to put the LP series on ice for the immediate future.

The pause in production ended on September 1, 1974 when Henderson hired Richard Spottswood to assume the role of project coordinator for what at the time was billed as a Bicentennial Album of American Folk Music. Spottswood, who was 37 at the time of hire, took

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288 Nancy Hanks to L. Quincy Mumford, March 1, 1974, First Year Applications & Acceptance, 09/73 - 03/74, Bicentennial LP Project, AFC.


290 Briefing for HK-Jabbour meeting, folder 42, box 7, series 925, RG3.2, RAC.
leave from his duties as a librarian and supervisor at the Montgomery County Public Libraries in Maryland to assume the role. In many respects, Spottswood was an odd choice for the role, an assessment he echoed later in life. “I don’t know why they wanted to hire me for that job,” Spottswood stated in a 2013 interview, “I wasn’t a folkie or an academic folklorist.”

292 Though Spottswood may lament his lack of credentials in academia as well as cultural affiliation—by “folkie” he reasonably meant “folk revivalist”—Spottswood was a contributing editor for two music collector periodicals, Bluegrass Unlimited and Jazz Digest. And even though Spottswood may have personally distanced himself from the folk revival, he also served as a field consultant for the Smithsonian’s American Folklife Festival as well as a consulted on the program for the National Folk Festival, both in 1971 and 1972. Perhaps Spottswood strongest credential for the position was his record collection, estimated at nearly 10,000 pieces at the time. Spottswood experience seeking out and assessing archival and historical recordings led him to a side career in the reissue music industry, founding both the Melodeon and Piedmont labels, as well as radio disc jockey for a nationally syndicated vernacular music program.

293 Spottswood put his skills in rare recordings acquisition and his ear for arcane vernacular performance to good use in the coordination of the LOC’s Bicentennial LP series he then dubbed

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293 Richard K. Spottswood Named Project Coordinator for Bicentennial Album of American Folk Music at Library of Congress,” September 30, 1974, First Year Applications & Acceptance, 09/73 - 03/74, Bicentennail LP Project, AFC.
Folk Music in America.

In a letter to the National Endowment for the Arts from Hickerson, who served as Spottswood’s supervisor for the project coordinator position, the head of the Archive of Folk Song reported that Spottswood spent his first year on the project assiduously “auditioning material in the Archive of Folk Song and Recorded Sound Section of the Library of Congress” while also taking great measures to visit record companies, gaining access to the archives and unreleased masters of several major commercial labels including RCA Victor and Columbia. Additionally, Spottswood visited field recordings archives and consorted with other collectors for particularly noteworthy discs, tape reels, and cylinders in their holdings as well as “best known copies” of recordings he had pegged for inclusion. Hickerson noted that through Spottswood’s leadership, the Archive of Folk Song “received from certain companies and publishers a degree of cooperation which far exceeded [their] expectations.”

Table III – Library of Congress, Bicentennial LP Project, Jabbour design

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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>British-American</td>
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<td>British-American</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Afro-American</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Other rural traditions</td>
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295 Joseph C. Hickerson to NEA, December 4, 1975, Bicentennial LP Project – third year, NEA, AFC.
Spottswood’s Thematics

Whereas Spottswood’s acquisition skills were noteworthy in the facilitation of *FMiA*, perhaps his most significant contribution was adopting a thematic organization structure for the project. In the proposal for the NEA grant, Alan Jabbour described the scope of the LP project to include “all major cultural strains in the United States, with additional representation for those traditions (British-American and Afro-American) which have most influenced the development of American popular music.” As detailed in Table III, Jabbour mapped his weighted distribution across the fifteen LPs in manner that the first five volumes of the anthology would be devoted to what he referred to as “British-American” recordings. One disc would feature British-American religious music. Another two discs were to include secular British-American recordings, tracing a chronology of development in secular style in British-American folk performance. The remaining two volumes in the British-American section of the anthology would feature instrumentals with one disc to document solo performance and the other to include ensembles. Three volumes of the compilation would compartmentalize the contributions of black vernacular musicians in the US, with the spread divided evenly between religious, historical secular and contemporary secular styles at one LP each.\(^{296}\)

The remaining LPs in Jabbour’s conception of the series would include one disc of American Indian musics, two volumes on what he classified as “Other rural traditions” including a disc split between both Louisianan and Canadian French as well as Pennsylvanian and Midwestern Dutch and a disc of Latino and Hispanic recordings he characterized as “Spanish and other.” Finally, four volumes would be devoted to “Urban ethnic traditions” with one disc

\(^{296}\) Jabbour, NEA Grant Application: Bicentennial LP Project, 5-6.
for Irish recordings, another disc for German, Slavic, and Jewish musics, a third disc for Italian and Greek styles, and the final disc in the series slotted to include all remaining “Other groups.”

While Spottswood embraced the pluralistic approach in styles of folk music in America, and, in effect, a weighted value assessed by both contribution and demographics, he rejected Jabbour’s “quota” system of distribution. Instead, Spottswood crafted a “topics”-based approach so that each volume in FMIA “could be represented by as great a variety of musics as possible.” The fifteen themes Spottswood determined to structure FMIA are listed in Table III as follows:

Table IV – *Folk Music in America, Library of Congress, Spottswood design*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOL</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Religious Music: Congregational and Ceremonial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Songs of Love, Courtship, and Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dance Music: Breakdowns and Waltzes</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dance Music: Reels, Polkas, and More</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dance Music: Ragtime, Jazz, and More</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Songs of Migration and Immigration</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Songs of Complaint and Protest</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Songs of Labor and Livelihood</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Songs of Death and Tragedy</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Songs of War and History</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Songs of Humor and Hilarity</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Songs of Local History and Events</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Songs of Childhood</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Solo and Display Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Religious Music: Solo and Performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

297 Jabbour, NEA Grant Application: Bicentennial LP Project, 5-6.

298 In the letter Joseph C. Hickerson authored to the NEA regarding progress on the LP project, the Archive of Folk Song head explicitly states that Spottswood created a thematic structure for the compilation to “avoid a ‘quota’ system.” Hickerson leads with this detail I suspect to explain to the NEA as a primary funding source for the project, why the proposed vision for the compilation has been altered (Joseph C. Hickerson to the National Endowment for the Arts).

The themes range from topical (Songs of… volumes) to the functional (Religious Music, Dance Music, and Solo and Display Music volumes) with the common purpose of cutting across racial, ethnic, and genre lines. Like he would do for *Old-Country Music in a New Land* two years later on *RAAM*, Spottswood integrated a variety of recordings from prewar “ethnic series” catalogs as well as ethnically distinguished field recordings and other sound archives, this time not just in relation to each other but rather interspersed within a broader framework of vernacular performance previously established as “American.”

**Revising Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music***

Spottswood’s thematic-structure for *Folk Music in America* clearly has an antecedent in Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music*. As discussed at length in chapter two, Smith’s three volume Folkways set of mostly early country blues and hillbilly recordings was ordered in accordance to his own internal logic: Ballads, Social Music (which Smith divided between “Religious” and “Dance Music”), and Songs. Like *FMiA*, Smith integrated his genres across racial lines—a progressive and provocative political decision at the height of racial segregation in the US that, as I argued in the previous chapter, nonetheless reaffirmed an existing racial stratification within the nation. Spottswood’s *FMiA* orders its recordings through a similarly self-imposed rubric, just decidedly more expansive than Smith’s set. Spottswood solidifies *FMiA*’s connection to the *Anthology* by insisting on receiving the same credits as Smith, both are characterized as “editors” of each set.

Like Jabbour’s original NEA proposal, Spottswood’s *FMiA* exhibits a comparable balance of reverence and critique of the *Anthology of American Folk Music*. In promoting *FMiA*, Spottswood authored an article on his compilation in the audiophile periodical *High Fidelity*, explicitly spelling out its connection to Smith’s set of twenty years prior. Spottswood describes
the *Anthology* as “the first successful attempt to give Americans as taste of their own musical heritage without the aid of professional interpreters and without tampering by Tin Pan Alley or academic composers.” Aside from throwing shade at professional composition of either the academic or commercial variety, Spottswood echoes the larger narrative of the *Anthology* that had developed in the twenty years since initial release. Calling it “enormously influential,” Spottswood notes the *Anthology* made “standbys” of “the Carter Family, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Mississippi John Hurt, and Uncle Dave Macon,” writing that “their songs and styles became the basis for much of the best of the folk revival of the late Fifties and early Sixties.”

Spottswood tempers his celebration of Smith’s *Anthology*, though, attending to its limitations in scope and scale. In comparing *FMiA* to the *Anthology*, Spottswood states,

Like the Folkways collection, *FMiA* contains a number of commercially recorded examples of music from the Southeast, which remains the heartland of traditional songs and styles, but there is much else of interest here. The peoples of the northern, midwestern, and far western states possess different songs and styles equally worth of documentation. A great fiddler like Pawlo Humeniuk from the Ukrainian mountains recorded as prolifically in New York as Fiddlin’ John Carson did in Atlanta during the Twenties and Thirties. His music is every bit as exciting and authentic as Carson’s but not nearly so well known (even though he was a mainstay of Columbia’s Ukrainian series). Lithuanian Miners’ Orchestra, the Polish groups of Karol Stoch or Franciszek Dukla, and the Irish fiddlers Packie Dolan, Michael Coleman, and Paddy Killoran who have recorded traditional music of their countries (and now of ours) with distinction.

Spottswood critique of the *Anthology* and defense of his own compilation echoes many of the major themes Matthew Frye Jacobson argues define the “hypen nation” of the 1970s in the US. The recuperation of Pawlo Humeniuk’s historical recordings as exemplary productions of a formerly distinct white ethnic identity for turn-of-the-century Ukrainian immigrants resonates with the broader cultural impulse for ethnic particularity within white racial identity during the

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300 Spottswood, 2.

301 Ibid.
period. Spottswood doubles down on this position by linking Humeniuk relative absence in US cultural memory to other historical white ethnic vernacular musicians like Stoch, Dukla, Dolan, Coleman, Killoran, and the entirety of the Lithuanian Miners’ Orchestra. As a Bicentennial project, Spottswood emphasizes ethnic diversity at the behest of the nation, projecting the national imaginary in a cultural plural image that is, nonetheless, largely centered in whiteness.\textsuperscript{302}

Spottswood’s emphasis on ethnic variety within American folk song practice held a notable saliency during the period, particularly among people in positions of considerable influence in major US cultural institutions. In reports to the NEA on the progress on the Archive of Folk Song’s LP project highlighted Spottswood’s “numerous contacts with specialists in various folk music areas, \textit{particularly ethnic}.\textsuperscript{303} As head of the Archive of Folk Song, Joseph C. Hickerson described Spottwood’s commitment to ethnic diversity on \textit{FMiA} as “herculean.” In a letter to the NEA, Hickerson expressed approval of Spottswood’s multietnic approach to American folk music by literally listing out the various identities present on the first five volumes alone of the compilation. “In addition to Afro- and Anglo-American folk music,” Hickerson wrote the volumes one through five also feature examples of “American Indian, Amish, Cajun, Czech, Hawaiian, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Polish, Swedish, Trinidadian, [and] Ukrainian” recordings. Tellingly, Hickerson also included the caveat “all residing in and recorded in the United States” to his list of ethnic recordings on \textit{FMiA}, assuring skeptics at the NEA of the bona fides of residency, if not citizenship, to the performers on the compilation.\textsuperscript{304}


\textsuperscript{303} NEA Cash Request and Fiscal Report, November 30, 1974, Bicentennial LP project – first year reports, AFC [emphasis added].

\textsuperscript{304} Joseph C. Hickerson to the National Endowment for the Arts.
Hickerson’s excitement in the multiethnic shape FMiA was taking and the value he assumed that aspect held with the NEA suggests an active engagement by Bicentennial-era cultural and governmental institutions like the NEA and the Library of Congress in the projection of cultural pluralism as a national ideal.

**Pekka Gronow’s “Musical Subcultures”**

Spottswood’s exuberance for “ethnic series” recordings would eventually lead to the publication of the seven-volume *Ethnic Music on Records: A Discography of Ethnic Recordings Produced in the United States, 1893-1942* through University of Illinois Press in 1990, but at the time of production for FMiA his knowledge of the field was only in its infancy. After all, Spottswood cut his teeth as a collector along the same general guidelines provided by Smith’s *Anthology* – collecting early blues and country recordings, later reissuing such recordings on his Piedmont and Melodeon imprints. Spottswood credits his expanded interest in “ethnic series” recordings to an article Finnish ethnomusicologist and collector Pekka Gronow, who published two articles on the matter in *JEMF Quarterly*, the publication of the John Edwards Memorial Foundation (JEMF), the UCLA-affiliated organization dedicated to the “serious study” of commercially recorded hillbilly music. In a 2013 interview, Spottswood recalled Gronow “making the case that people who enjoyed hearing backwoods hillbilly music were missing out on some things by not paying attention to early records in the foreign language series,” adding that he made a “mental note” of Gronow’s advice, acting on it when he visited the archives and vaults of commercial labels for the Library of Congress project.\(^\text{305}\)

In the two articles in the *JEMF Quarterly* published in the early 1970s, Gronow argues for increased attention to prewar “ethnic series” recordings. The first article, “Finnish-American

\(^{305}\) Nagoski, “Ian Nagoski talks to Dick Spottswood.”
Records,” appeared in the Winter 1971 supplement of the quarterly. The second, “A Preliminary Check-List of Foreign-Language 78’s [sic],” arrived less than two years later in the Spring 1973 addition. The 1971 article begins with a note ostensibly from JEMF editor Norm Cohen (though it is without credit) introducing the reader to the subject of “non-English language” recordings and offering credentials for the article’s author. Acknowledging that, to the average JEMF Quarterly reader, little is known about the subject, the notes that, “Functionally, [non-English language recordings] performed the same service as did hillbilly or race or cajun recordings: they were made by artists from the subculture for sale to consumers of the same subculture.”

Gronow appears to have taken to the general characterization of “ethnic series” recordings. In the 1973 article Gronow cumbs language from the editor’s 1971 note, describing the various series of “foreign-language” discs in early record catalogs as “musical subcultures.” Furthermore, Gronow suggests “many parallels” between “ethnic series” recordings and “race” and “hillbilly” series, citing chiefly “special numerical series and catalog supplements” as well as the practice of engineer “field trips” to record these “musical subcultures.” “That some blues records were cut in Texas,” Gronow states, “is probably due to the fact that the companies were there primarily to record Spanish music.”

Cohen and Gronow’s rhetorical strategy calling attention to equivalencies between “ethnic series” recordings and their more popular blues and country counterparts clearly resonated with Spottswood. Following their lead, Spottswood began sampling “foreign-language” recordings both in his own collecting practice and through his work with the LOC, stating, “The more I heard and learned about the East European, Oriental, Caribbean, and other


styles, the more they grew on me.”

Spottswood circuitous route to prewar “ethnic series” discs through both early blues and country recordings and the discourse in the *JEMF Quarterly* is typical of most collectors of the period. The route suggests a relation to “ethnic series” recordings primarily though a relationship with the 78 record itself. In this way, most 78 collectors of “ethnic series” recordings primarily encountered these ethnic forms as historical entities. Like the discovery process Spottswood engaged with in collecting blues and country records at a younger age, the same sense of detection guided his study of “foreign-language” sides in the vaults of Columbia, RCA Victor, and Decca/MCA in process of compiling *FMiA*.

**Experiencing *Folk Music in America***

The thematic approach Spottswood adopted to structure the fifteen-LPs of *FMiA* is more affective than it is material. From a material standpoint, Spottswood’s construction of *FMiA* does not differ much from Jabbour’s original pluralistic but weighted plan. Like Jabbour’s plan, which allotted five of the fifteen discs to “British-American” folk song varieties and three discs to “Afro-American” forms, Spottswood’s compilation gives primacy to white vernacular recordings of the southeastern US with secondary status afforded to black vernacular styles. From there, Spottswood divides “ethnic series” discs and “ethnic” field recordings roughly along the same proportions Jabbour had originally envisioned.

The distinction between Jabbour’s plan and Spottswood’s execution of *FMiA* is encountered affectively. The experience of listening to *FMiA* as it was produced disrupts the ordered manner of its initial proposal. The fifteen volumes were sold separately and released in five-disc increments, indicating that they were designed to be experienced as singular units in a

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308 Nagoski, “Ian Nagoski talks to Dick Spottswood.”

309 Jabbour, NEA Grant Application: Bicentennial LP Project, 6.
larger series.\textsuperscript{310} At any point across the fifteen volumes of \textit{FMiA} a listener encounters a variety of vernacular forms and their attendant racial, ethnic and linguistic distinctions. Given the weighted distribution, a listener is more likely to hear white non-ethnic vernacular performances but those recordings often precede or directly follow a Ukrainian waltz, Trinidadian calypso, or another racially, ethnically, and stylistically distinct recording.

The diversity in programming on \textit{FMiA} is mitigated by the thematic structure of each volume, linking the pluralism of performance styles by overlapping topical or functional distinctions. In the abstract, this design runs a risk of flattening distinction between different peoples and the special political, cultural, social and material realities that have shaped particular circumstances. But this structure can also be enlightening, shifting established paradigms to reveal more universal aspects of particular circumstances. Take for instance Vol. VI – \textit{Songs of Migration and Immigration}, a disc that seems tailor-made for prewar “ethnic series” recordings about the “New Immigrant” experience. Under Spottswood’s configuration, though, the volume is about both “Migration” and “Immigration,” making \textit{movement} the common theme and not simply the political experience emigrating out of and into different national affiliations. This results a recording like Otto Magnusson’s “Emigrantsvisa,” a song about Smaland, a province in Sweden from which many Swedes in the US emigrated, placed in conversation with Rose Thompson’s rendition of the Mormon folk anthem “Marching to Utah” and the Great Migration parlor tune of Cow Cow Davenport’s “Jim Crow Blues.”\textsuperscript{311}

Within each uniform volume, pluralism becomes the primary affective function of the listening experience. On \textit{Songs of Humor and Humility}, volume eleven of the series, The

\textsuperscript{310} “Library of Congress Releases First Tow Recordings in ‘Folk Music in America’ Series,” n.d., Bicentennial LP Project – third year NEA, AFC.

\textsuperscript{311} \textit{Folk Music in America, Volume 6 – Songs of Migration and Immigration}. Library of Congress LBC-6, 1976, LP.
Maddox Brothers and Rose’s “I’ll Make Sweet Love to You,” a postwar commercial honkytonk number precedes the prewar waltz of Ted Johnson and His Scandinavians’ “Nikolina,” which is followed by the prewar hillbilly of The Ozarker’s “Arkansas Hotel,” a John Lomax recording of the 1920s black vocal quartet Smith, Farley, Thomas, and Smith singing “Old Cold ‘Tater,” and the calypso of Trinidadian group Attila and the Lion singing the duet “Mamaguille” from 1934.312

At points, Spottswood’s diverse programming seems intentionally provocative. *Dance Music: Ragtime, Jazz & More*, the fifth volume of *FMiA*, begins with the “& More,” opening with three Ukrainian dances—“Dowbush Kozak” by Ukrainska Selska Orchestra, “Tanec pid werbamy” by Pawlo Humeniuk, and “Pidakmecka Kolomyjka” by Josef Pizio—and a early acoustic recording of an Italian bagpipe tune—“Tarantella” by Michiele Lentine and Antonio Papariello—before ears encounter the more recognizable ragtime of “California Cotillion” by the Bog Trotters. The sequencing of *Dance Music: Ragtime, Jazz & More* operates challenges listeners to hear parallels across a variety of ethnic distinctions and the more familiar forms of jazz and ragtime. The dynamic between the zampogna and the ciamarella, the two Italian bagpipes on “Tarantella,” with the ciamarella playing an accentuated and, at points, rhythmically syncopated melody over the drone of zampogna echoes the interplay between the lead and ensemble horns in a jazz group. Likewise, Spottswood describes violinist Josef Pizio as a “brilliant musician, though incapable of playing the same tune twice,” linking the Ukrainian vernacular musician’s performance style to the improvisation found in jazz performance.313


Like *Dance Music: Ragtime, Jazz & More*’s provocative sequence, *FMiA* emphasizes continuities across genre throughout the duration of the series. The first appearance of Native American recordings, Yaqui Indian Musician’s “Pascola Dance Music,” a field recording for 1940 in Scottsdale, Arizona found on the first volume of *FMiA*, may be bookended by two African American vocal groups (Banks, Bentley, Blake, and Vosburg’s “Travelin’ to That New Buryin’ Ground” and Austin Coleman, Joe Washington Brown and Group’s “My Soul Is a Witness,” respectively), but its violin lead echoes the Ernest Stoneman’s fiddle heard earlier on side one on the prewar hillbilly recording of The Dixie Mountaineer’s “I Know My Name is There.”

Likewise, Grajek Wiejski’s “Piesn Dziada,” a prewar Polish “begging song” on *Songs of Labor & Livelihood*, echoes both Pawlo Humeniuk through its violin and the bellowing vocals of Aulton Ray on “The Dixie Cowboy,” both heard earlier on the volume.

Given the twin values of pluralism and continuity, *FMiA*’s most striking recordings offer a hybridity, bridging the set’s various genres. The Bohemian-Texas Swing of Aldoph Hofner and Andy Iona’s Hawaiian Jazz resound with the possibility of a culturally plural national musical soundscape, combining the nation’s various musical idioms in new and generative formations.

Guitarist and bandleader Adolf Hofner was the son of two immigrants—a German father and Czech mother—and grew up speaking Czech in Moulton, a small Texas town in Lavaca County between San Antonio and Houston. Hofner’s youth was spent immersed in the German and Eastern European dance halls that proliferated in southern Texas in opening decades of the twentieth century, moving to the polkas, waltzes and obereks of local and touring ensembles. Hofner also developed a keen ear for Hawaiian music, not uncommon in the US as Hawaiian

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315 *Folk Music in America, Volume 8 – Songs of Labor and Livelihood*. Library of Congress LBC-8, 1976, LP.
musicians toured the continental states prolifically during the period. Though his performing career began playing the same Czech dances numbers from his childhood, Hofner’s recording career began in the late-1930s playing mostly straightforward Western Swing with ensembles like Adolph Hofner and His Texans, influenced by the popularity of Bob Wills. By the late-1940s, the US “polka craze” was well underway and Hofner adopted his “hillbilly jazz” sound to incorporate the dance music of his youth.\textsuperscript{316}

On “Green Meadow Waltz (Louka zelana),” a 1948 recording included on \textit{FMiA}’s third volume \textit{Dance Music: Breakdowns \& Waltzes}, Hofner backed by His Orchestra combine the various influences of his youth into a compact two minutes and forty-six seconds. The piece opens in a down-tempo waltz, the rhythm held down by bass, guitar, and drums with a melody carried by a pair of fiddles. Adolf and his brother Emil then take over melodic duties, delivering vocals entirely in Czech, sung in a crooning manner fashionable at midcentury. After a full verse, the melody is again handed off to the fiddles, this time with accents provided by Emil’s steel guitar.\textsuperscript{317}

Tony Russell describes Hofner as “sultan of swing, prince of polka, and erstwhile country Crosby.”\textsuperscript{318} “Green Meadow Waltz (Louka zelena)” delivers on all fronts with added emphasis on the Hawaiian origins of the steel guitar. Hofner claimed the tune “was brought over on the boat” with his Czech mother, but Spottswood notes that the song was “well known to Poles, Russians, Moravians, and Germans” both stateside and in Europe.” Adolf Hofner’s 1948


\textsuperscript{317} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{318} Quote from Russell, liner notes to \textit{South Texas Swing: Early Recordings, 1935-1955}.
rendition is effectively an eastern European waltz played, not on horns, but Western Swing strings, crooned in Czech, and accentuated by a slide guitar echoing the islands of Hawaii. Within the context of *FMA*, the song’s panoply of influences resonates with broader cultural impulses, celebrating particularity as well as pluralism in service of the nation. If the Bicentennial was a moment of national pluralism, “Green Meadow Waltz (Louka zelena)” could well be its soundtrack.

Like Adolph Hofner’s effortless combination of Western Swing and Hawaiian influences into a traditional eastern European waltz, Andy Iona’s “Minnehaha (Hawaiian Stomp)” merges the jazz techniques Iona accrued playing saxophone for tourists in Honolulu with Hawaiian melodies traditional to his birthplace of Waimea, Kaua’i. Born Andrew Aiona Long in 1902, the saxophonist and steel guitarist was a skilled musician and composer performing in many notable ensembles on the islands of Hawai’i. A major development in Iona’s style and technique came in 1920 when he was hired as the first saxophonist to perform in Johnny Noble’s Moana Hotel Orchestra. Noble, born to white parents in Honolulu in 1892, was known as the “Hawaiian Jazz King.” Hired to join the Moana Hotel Orchestra in 1919 under the direction of Dan Pokipala, Noble took over leadership a year later, adding a drummer and Iona on sax to an ensemble featuring “piano, violin, banjo, ‘ukulele, two guitars, and a double bass.” Noble believed “that the new jazz rhythm would blend beautifully with Hawaiian music.” The addition of percussion with Iona’s saxophone provided the means to shift the orchestra in a jazz direction, adding syncopation and “blue notes” without the addition of brass sounds Noble felt “unsuited to the ‘mellowness and fluidity’ he wanted in his Hawaiian music.” The combination was an

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unmitigated success, providing a model for Hawaiian dance bands for years to come. 

Iona’s tenure in the Moana Hotel Orchestra was short-lived, though; by 1921, the musician had relocated to the continental US, beginning a recording career by decade’s end, mostly in Los Angeles, California.

On “Minnehaha (Hawaiian Stomp),” recorded in 1934 for Columbia, Iona flips the script on Noble’s formula, opting to infuse jazz with Hawaiian melodies as opposed to the other way around. Backed by His Islanders, Iona leads an ensemble of drums, guitar, clarinet, tenor saxophone, amplified steel guitar, two ‘ukuleles, stringed bass, and two trumpets. The tune is primarily a jazz track in a swing rhythm, accented by a Hawaiian melody carried most significantly on the electric steel guitar. The vocals, provided by a quartet of singers including Iona alongside bandmates Sam Koki, Allen Kila, and Dan Stewart, are delivered entirely in Hawaiian (another table turned on Noble, who notably composed all his Hawaiian danced tunes in English). The recording, clearly a legacy of US-colonial expansion into Polynesia, is featured on Dance Music: Ragtime, Jazz & More as example of the medley of vernacular idioms of the west and near east.

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322 Spottswood, liner notes for Folk Music in America, Volume 5 – Dance Music: Ragtime, Jazz, and More, 4; Kanahele, 267-278.
Reception of FMiA generally echoes the affective analysis offered above. In both praise and critique, the emphasis of reviews of FMiA was on Spottwood’s novel integration of prewar “foreign-language” discs and other “ethnic” recordings into the country and blues of the established national vernacular imaginary. In a review on the first five FMiA volumes published in the New York Times under the headline “American Folk Song Is Tinged With The Bizarre,” Robert Palmer heaps accolades on the “extreme heterogeneity” of Spottswood’s “ambitious new series.” The inclusion of diverse forms of vernacular musical performance excites Palmer in the review, but not without an emphasis on their outsider status to an established sense of “American” folk music. “The strangeness of these voices,” Palmer writes of ethnicized musical performances on the set, “is indicative of a lingering strangeness in a land we do not yet know well. The Indian flutists and singers sound more like Central Asian nomads than anything recognizably “American, the music of immigrants from peasant Europe seems only vaguely familiar, and yet here they are, along with the Blue Sky Boys and Henry Ford’s Old Fashioned Dance Orchestra.”

Writing for The Nation, Nat Hentoff commends the “multiplicity of textures, rhythms, shouts, and improvisatory keening and hosannas” of the set’s first volume, Religious Music: Ceremonial and Congregational. Hentoff also writes positively of the “rainbow of styles and backgrounds” on the other four volumes of the initial batch, noting, “As assimilation inexorably accelerates, this kind of collection is going to become increasingly valuable. And poignant.” The Washington Star’s Boris Weintraub writes approvingly of Spottswood’s thematic structure and pluralistic approach, dedicating several paragraphs of his extended review

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to detailing the history of “ethnic series” recordings featured on the set. Richard Harrington’s review, which appeared in *The Washington Post*, proclaims *FMiA* to be a “document that belongs at the very least, in every library and school,” noting that the set’s pluralism “transcends racial, regional and linguistic boundaries.”

Critiques of the Spottswood collection also centered on its pluralism. Writing for *Living Blues: Journal of the Black American Blues Tradition*, a publication of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, Simon Bronner, then three years out of a folklore PhD program at Indiana University, expressed concerns about “rationale for inclusion” for *FMiA* selections on two grounds: whether or not the recordings were genuinely “folk” and whether or not “recent biases” toward ethnic musics may have “overstated” their significance in US vernacular music history. Bronner’s skepticism over the merits of prewar “foreign-language” recordings is not unmoored from his concerns over taxonomy. As an academic trained in particular set of metrics to ascertain the relative “folkloric” bonafides of any given cultural production, Bronner is dismissive of the record collector practices that inform Spottswood’s justifications. Of the “ethnic series” selections on *FMiA*, Bronner wonders, “how much of the American folk music heritage did [they] really represent? We may be able to count records, but it’s hard to count performances or their vitality.” Whether positive or dismissive, reception of *FMiA* was framed around its pluralism, suggesting that accommodationist debates were both central and contested in the Bicentennial era.

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**Spottswood & the *Recorded Anthology of American Music***

In addition to serving as editor for *FMiA*, Richard Spottswood also produced two single-disc compilations for New World Records’ *Recorded Anthology of American Music (RAAM)*, a one-hundred LP collection said to represent the full spectrum of US popular, vernacular, and serious musics. Concieved and funded through a generous grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, *RAAM* was distributed gratis to almost seven thousand public and private institutions from community and university libraries, to college music departments, to Veteran’s Affairs hospitals, and international embassies. In design and execution, *RAAM* was an experiment in the circulation of and edification through the nation’s recorded musics, one inextricably linked to the US Bicentennial’s broader goal of tethering the national imaginary to the ideal of cultural pluralism. \(^{328}\)

Unlike *FMiA*, which intermingled prewar “foreign-language” recordings with established Americana, Spottswood’s two entries in *RAAM* afforded the anthologist the opportunity to delve more deeply into his interest in “ethnic series” discs. *Old-Country Music in a New Land: Folk Music of Immigrants from Europe and the Near East*, the sixty-fourth entry in the one-hundred disc set, serves as a compilation of various “immigrant” musics. *‘Spiew Juchasa/Song of the Shepherd: Songs of the Slavic Americans*, provides a more sustained study of Polish and Urukranian commerical vernacular recordings in the US. In addition to Spottswood’s selections, *RAAM* features everything from the avant-garde sound experiments of John Cage to Nuyrican bomba to movie-palace Wurlitzer tunes.

**Prehistory of the *Recorded Anthology of American Music***

The origins of the *Recorded Anthology of American Music* predate the Bicentennial celebration it commemorates. A prehistory of the project begins over a decade prior after the

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\(^{328}\) Uy, 75-83.
Foundation added an Arts division to its philanthropic mission. In 1963, Norman Lloyd, the first director of the Arts Division, began conversations with several leading US composers including Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, and William Schuman about the problem of recording American art music works. A report on the project describes the issue in blunt terms: “Commercial companies disdained music by American composers.” The report goes on to cite the following: The market for classical music at the time was limited to only 3% of releases issued by the recording industry. Of that already diminished number, only a solitary percentile was American composition. Recordings that did see release on commercial labels were subject to deletion soon after. And the smaller labels at the time specializing in art music recordings lacked both the distribution and quality control worthy of American “serious” musics. Working in consultation with the US classical community, Lloyd contemplated the possibility of utilizing Foundation resources to underwrite the recording and potential distribution of American art music musics – at points describing the potential project as something akin to a university press, except for music.  

These inclinations were tossed around for about a decade when they met with the headwinds of the nation’s Bicentennial commemoration. In 1972, the Arts division convened a planning committee for what was then dubbed the American Music Recording Project (AMRP). With the goal of producing a Bicentennial “gift from the Foundation to the American people,” the planning committee conceived of a recording project much broader in scope than simply art music works by US-born composers. The AMRP wanted to tell the history of the nation through its musics – or as committee participant Howard Klein coined it, “200 sides for 200 years.”

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330 Ibid.
Whereas earlier concerns in the Arts Division concentrated on the recorded representation of American art music, the AMRP also considered what it meant to represent the United States through music. These twin forces—providing patronage and circulation for the nation’s unrecorded and under-appreciated musics and celebrating the patriotic nostalgia of the Bicentennial—would form the zeitgeist of what would become New World Records and a mandate to produce *RAAM* in 1974.

The early workings of the committee centered on developing a history for American music and determining the qualities that defined music as American. The Foundation commissioned several reports by academics and other leading experts in a variety of fields of musical history and practice. Lehman Engel submitted “An Illustrated Survey of the American Musical Theatre, 1796-1973.” Charles Hamm offered two research papers: “A History of American Popular Music in Sound: A Proposal” and “Sound Forms for Piano: Experimental Music by Henry Cowell, John Cage, Conlon Noncarrow, and Ben Johnston.” Alan Jabbour produced the functionally titled “Non-English-Language Folk Music Traditions in the US: A Summary of Available Resources and Researchers for LP Issue.” The multitude of reports provide evidence for what Michael Sy Uy describes as the emphasis on “expertise” central to the AMRP.331

Additionally, the Foundation facilitated a series of meetings with consultants to the emerging recording project. Participants were paid a “handsome fee” of one hundred dollars per day on top of a flexible per diem.332 Seats at the table were given to people such as Mario di Bonaventura of Dartmouth College, H. Wiley Hitchcock of Brooklyn College, Teresa Sterne of

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331 Various reports submitted to the AMRP are held at the Rockefeller Archive Center in Tarrytown, New York; Uy, 75-77.

332 Herman Krawitz, interview with the author, June 28, 2016.
Nonesuch Records, and Richard W. Killough of Columbia Masterworks, in addition to the aforementioned Lloyd and Klien. Fundamental to discussion was the question of how to certify musical forms as American, how broad or bracketed to define the boarders of a national taxonomy.

Excerpts from notes submitted after AMRP meetings provide insight into the committee’s thinking on this question. For instance, after a meeting in early of May 1973, Howard Klein offered this commentary,

Last week, in Chicago, I saw a hand-painted sign over a storefront community project and the sign only had five faces on it, each with a different color, white, red, brown, black, yellow. Label buttons, too proclaimed the five races—in Chicago. A school in Uptown Chicago says that more than twenty languages are spoken by its students, including a variety of Native American languages. What is the music of Chicago?

In addition to highlighting the pluralism to then-present day Chicagoans, Klein also rooted multiculturalism deeper in US history.

When the last spike in the transcontinental railroad was driven in Promontory Summit in the Utah Territory, May 10, 1869, it was a Chinese laborer whose hammer slammed America’s manifest destiny home. The Chinese laid the last rail of the Union Pacific and the Irish laborers laid the next to the last rail. Each had been working toward the other from the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Question: How does “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” go in Chinese?

Klein’s concluding questions—both “What is the music of Chicago?” and “How does “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” go in Chinese?”—are provocations, designed not so much to be answered, but to arouse more questions, to stretch what we might consider preconcieved audio-national boundaries.

333 “Reports Resulting from Meeting” April 18, 1973 from Unedited Background Material on The Rockefeller Foundation Recording Project, folder 39, box 7, series 925, RG3.2, RAC.


335 Ibid, 1.
The implied pluralism of Klein’s “American sound” was echoed by other AMRP participants, but generally speaking, in more grounded language. Norman Lloyd argued that “A major category” for the project “could be devoted to the music of the peoples” of the US. “It is interesting and instructive,” Lloyd proposed, “to trace what happens to a German, or British, or American song when it lives for awhile in America,” then suggested categories such as “Songs from the British Isles,” “Italian songs,” both Canadian and Cajun “French songs,” “Spanish songs” both “from the Southwest and the Caribbean,” “Songs from Africa,” “Slavic songs,” “Songs of the American Indian,” “Songs of the Scandinavians who came to the upper Midwest,” “Germanic songs,” and “Oriental songs” [pardon the dated, offensive parlance, but like Klein’s provocation, Lloyd hoped to find “some dealing with the making of the railroad”].

Charles Hamm, author of two research papers for the project on contemporary art music, seconded Lloyd’s call for a multi-ethnic, multi-racial approach to the question of American music. Hamm noted,

The history of popular music in America has been one of constant importation of music from other countries. In the 19th century it was chiefly English, Scottish, Irish, Italian, and African music that helped shape what emerged as American music. The 20th century has been even richer, has affected, or will effect, popular music in this century. A set of records with the popular music of today in black, Cuban, Polish, Greek, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Czech, Chinese, etc, etc urban communities would be tremendously interesting and provocative.

It should be noted that Lloyd and Hamm’s pluralism, though expansive in its reach, is bracketed by material limitations – he only wanted the “music of the peoples of America” to account for a

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336 Unedited Background Material on The Rockefeller Foundation Recording Project, folder 39, box 7, series 925, RG3.2, RAC.

337 Charles Hamm to Howard Klein, n.d., Unedited Background Material on The Rockefeller Foundation Recording Project, folder 39, box 7, series 925, RG3.2, RAC.
total of ten of the proposed one hundred discs. In many ways, we might see this as an example of the limitations of liberal accommodationsim.\textsuperscript{338}

Of course, the multicultural panoply of sounds, styles, and performances in Klein’s, Hamm’s, and Lloyd’s projections of American music was tempered by other committee voices. Neely Bruce suggested “repertory…be chosen…on the basis that it truly be said to be American music.” Bruce’s criteria for a definitive American sound include “the fusion of two or more types” that have “influenced each other” in the US [A definition he actually borrowed from Hamm, for what its worth]. Bruce also argued the music should represent “American values” to which he described everything from “extravagance” to “sentimentality,” “evangelical fervor” to “boredom.” Bruce also though a defining characteristic might be music “taken its own my [sic] Americans, and rejected elsewhere, or which had enjoyed a second life here long after its demise abroad.”\textsuperscript{339}

Teresa Sterne cautioned against the “inclusion of ethnic music” on the anthology “as another brand of tokenism.” Not arguing necessarily from a nativist perspective, Sterne did not object to the value of such musics, but instead felt that to adequately cover “the various musics of the American Indian, Cajun, Gospel, Appalachian, and even certain cross-cultural musics” would “call for a larger portion of the 100 albums.” Sterne proposed an “off-shoot” series that could fully meet the coverage needed for ethnic American musics.\textsuperscript{340}

\begin{flushright}
338 Ibid; Norman Lloyd to Howard Klein, June 12, 1973, Unedited Background Material on The Rockefeller Foundation Recording Project, folder 39, box 7, series 925, RG3.2, RAC.

339 Neely Bruce, “A Possible Outline for the Rockefeller Foundation Recording Project of American Music,” 2, Unedited Background Material on The Rockefeller Foundation Recording Project, folder 39, box 7, series 925, RG3.2, RAC.

340 Theresa Sterne, “Thoughts re: April 18 Meeting” April 22, 1973, Unedited Background Material on The Rockefeller Foundation Recording Project, folder 39, box 7, series 925, RG3.2, RAC.
\end{flushright}
Prewar “Foreign-Language” Recordings & RAAM

Contained to only two of the one hundred available discs, RAAM makes little claim for prewar “foreign-language” recordings as anything other than marginal forms to the broader American musical soundscape, but their association with other vernacular musics in the Folk and Oral Tradition wing of the project signals both a departure from earlier configurations separating ethnicized commerical recordings from their racialized counterparts as well as introduces prewar vernacular styles as counterparts of then contemporary ethnicized musics of more recent immigrant communities in US as well as field recordings of American Indian musics, which, of course, predate both waves of immigrant music presented as ethnically American on the compilation. On RAAM, Polish obereks and Serbo-Croatian waltzes meet with Puerto Rican plena, Cuban son, Gullah island songs, New Mexican alabados, and Plains Indian two-step to present a multicultural Americana in the Bicentennial tradition.

New World Records staff identified Spottswood as the person best suited to fulfill Lloyd’s call to include “the music of the peoples” of the US on RAAM, specifically for immigrant and ethnic groups recorded by the commercial industry in the opening decades of the twentieth century.341 Old-Country Music in a New Land utilizes an integrationist approach to its study of ethnic musics recorded in the US, presenting a trans-immigrant musical soundscape featuring contributions from Hungarian, Russian, Mexican, Bohemian, Irish and even English immigrant musicians. ‘Spiew Juchasa/Song of the Shepherd is a more defined study of Polish and Ukrainian emigrants to the US and the vernacular musical forms that accompanied them.

341 Norman Lloyd to Howard Klein, June 12, 1973, Unedited Background Material on The Rockefeller Foundation Recording Project, folder 39, box 7, series 925, RG3.2, RAC.
Combined, the two discs center on turn-of-the-century immigration to the US, emphasizing the musical means of both acclimating and making home in a new cultural environment.\textsuperscript{342}

*Old-Country Music in a New Land* presents a musical soundscape quite distinct from the established Americana of US folk music. The set opens with a series of three, uptempo, instrumental dance tunes, each with varying instruments carrying the lead. The opener, “Sedliacký Zabavny Czardas (The Farmer’s Diversion Czardas) by Mike Lapcak Slovensky Hudba, is as the titles suggests, a Hungarian czardas featuring a string bass holding the rhythm under melody provided by “fiddles augmented by clarinet and accordion.” The second tune, “Malenky Barabanshtichik (The Little Drummer Boy)” by the Krestyanskyj Orkestr, holds the fastest pace with two brisk violins playing over a string bass, bass saxophone, and percussion taking the form of a Russian cossack dance. The third, alternately known as “Kanaka Polka (Cossack Polka)” or “Tchornyj Ostrov (Black Island)” is, as the title suggests, a polka played by a Russian duo, Ailia and Lyyli Wainikainen on violin and accordion. The three tracks, which all were recorded in New York City studios between 1927 and 1931, work collectively to amplify both similarity and distinction across “ethnic series” performance.\textsuperscript{343} As dance tunes, each holds a particularly corporeal listening experience with distinctions in rhythm balanced out by similar tempos. Though the melodies on each of the recordings is provided by different instruments, each ensemble boasts some of the same instrumentation, most notably the ubiquity of violins across the three tracks.

Where the minutia of ethnic distinction may not be audible to the listener, the brief but informative notes authored by Spottswood that accompanying each track provide the necessary

\textsuperscript{342} Old-Country Music in a New Land: Folk Music of Immigrants from Europe and the Near East; ’Spiew Juchasa/Song of the Shepherd: Songs of the Slavic Americans.

\textsuperscript{343} Richard Spottswood, liner notes to Old-Country Music in a New Land: Folk Music of Immigrants from Europe and the Near East.
detail to distinguish the significance of each particular performance as well as the lineage of its style or genre. For the instrumental numbers which dominate the first half of the compilation, the supplementary notes become key to the laylistener’s experience of the compilation, providing historical information and introducing a vocabulary to aid in describing and identifying the array of songs and dances, as well as calling attention to anomalies as exceptions of note in the recordings.

The issue of language pervades both the material and audial construction of the compilation. Track titles are listed in two languages. Primacy is given to the language found on the original shellac disc label with a translation provided (where applicable) in English. No accommodations are made to translate or “Americanize” the names and titles of performers. For example, a recording by the group Lydia Mendoza y Familia is listed as is, in deference to the original 78 shellac label, and not translated to read Lydia Mendoza and Family.344

Sonically, though, the issue of “foreign-language” lyrics on a compilation of ostensibly “American” music is delayed until the fourth track on side one of the disc. After the initial series of upbeat instrumentals, the tempo drops to a slow waltz. A violin carries the melody, which provides some continuity with the preceding recordings, but, in a lower register, a stringed tamburitza harmonizes, making the tone and tenor of the song’s melodic function both familiar and unfamiliar to the novice listener. The harmony of the violin and tamburitza presage the vocals where brothers Martin and Adam Kapugi sing, in unison, dour Serbo-Croatian lyrics of unrequited love. The tune, “Zalim Te Momce (I Saw You, Lad)” by the Barca Kapugi Tamburica Orchestra, is not only the first slow song, the first waltz, and the first recording with vocals on the compilations, it is also the first sad song, a resulting combination that is as disorienting as it

344 Ibid.
is poignant. Spottswood compensates the English-language listeners with summary translation of the lyrics (“I’m sorry for you, lad, that you love me; you don’t know that I love someone else”) in the brief liner notes specific to the track, but on the whole, “Zalim Te Momce” makes little affordances to listeners unacquainted with Serbo-Croatian. Whereas the instrumentals which precede it suggest “foreign” heritage, the language and intonation of the Kapugi brothers all but confirm a distant travel to a US recording studio.345

“Zalim Te Momce” also anticipates the inclusion of other “tongues” to this disc of recorded “American” musics. Elsewhere vocals are delivered Spanish (Lydia Mendoza y Familia’s “El Coco-cancion (The Coconut Song)”), French (Dennis McGee’s “Jeans Gens Campagnard (Young Men from the Country)” and Elise Deshotel and His Louisiana Rhythmaires’s “La Valse de Bon Baurche (Valse du Bambocheur) (The Drunkard's Sorrow Waltz)”), Armenian (Reuben Sarkisian’s “Yar Ounenal (I Love You)”), and Syrian (Nahem Simon’s “Sayf Lahzig (Your Sword Has Pierced Me)”).346

There is a general lack of concern to cater to an “Americanization” narrative in the recordings on Old-Country Music. Partially this is true because, these recordings are meant to present as, well, “old-country music,” but a competing theme in the supplementary notes displays an interest in the manner movement, migration, and circulation affects musical performance, genre, and form. The notes for “La Peidrera” by Santiago Jimenez y Sus Valedores, an early postwar Mexican recording cut in Los Angeles for the small Globe label, emphasizes the use of accordion on the track, noting, “The double-row button accordion is a legacy from the nineteenth-century German and Bohemian settlers of Texas and northern Mexico to its Spanish-speaking natives.” The notes on “Sayf Lahzig (Your Sword Has Pierced Me), a

345 Ibid.
346 Ibid.
mawwal, or a Syrian “song expressing love and nostalgia for the singer’s home,” by Nahem Simon explain that this historical song type “had great significance in the lives of he nomadic tribesmen who crossed the desert areas between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea.” For Syrians in the US like Simon, Spottswood concludes, “the mawwal assumed new importance.” In this way, the compilation displays interest in the material and affective alterations of musical performance by external forces, but is less concerned in framing that change under nationalizing terms. The emphasis is placed on the movement and migration of peoples and their song forms and performance styles, not in expressing those changes as kind of specific American exceptionalism.

In general, Old-Country Music, like much of RAAM, celebrates ethnic and cultural particularity; but embedded within that celebration, is an acknowledgment of the fungibility and instability of those distinctions. The notes on Russian duo Ailia and Lyyli Wainkikainen explain how their recording circulated under two names, “Kanaka Polka (Cossack Polka)” and “Tchornyj Ostrov (Black Island),” because it was released on both Columbia’s Russian and Finnish series catalogs. As Spottswood indicates, “Polkas, waltzes, and other dances had international appeal” so Columbia released a version of the recording with a title in Russian with credits to the performers and another with a Finnish title and no performance credits. Without any “verbal clue to cultural or national origin” the ethnic distinction of the Wainkikainen polka was only a matter of inference.

‘Spiew Juchasa/Song of the Shepherd is constructed in a similar manner to its companion piece Old-Country Music in a New Land, except bracketed to consider only “Slavic-American”
recordings. The cover prominently features the work of Arshile Gorky, an Armenian immigrant artist. Gorky’s piece, entitled “The Artist’s Mother,” depicts in crayon a headshot of a woman, wrapped in a scarf. Her is face steely, almost expressionless except for her eyes, which appear wet, betraying her resolve. Though the portrait of an Armenian woman, presumably in transport to the US, is inconsistent with the compilation’s proscribed parameters, or more specifically as the track listing reveals, US recordings of Polish and Ukrainian vernacular musicians, the ability of Gorky’s piece to serve as a “stand-in” for US immigrants writ large speaks volumes about the historical perception of turn-of-the-century immigration at the Bicentennial moment, what Spickard critiques as the “Ellis Island narrative.” Ukrainians and Poles were, after all, primarily Ellis Island immigrants, arriving largely through New York City, either settling in the city or migrating elsewhere, most notably for Poles, to Chicago and other areas of the industrial Northeast and Midwest. But the ability of Gorky’s rendering of Armenian mother to serve as a catch-all depiction of immigration flattens the particular circumstances that accompanied those migrations and effectively erases migrations from the nation’s southern, northern and western borders.

Though billed as a study of “Slavic American” musical recordings in general, a closer analysis of the disc’s contents reveal ‘Spiew Juchasa to be a vehicle elevating two musicians in particular, Karol Stoch and Pawlo Humeniuk. Both violinists, Stoch, a Pole, and Humeniuk, a Ukrainian, are presented as exceptional representatives of their respective ethnicities, featured in prominent roles on five of the eight tracks on either side the long-playing album. Unlike Old-


351 Ibid.
Country Music, which presents a representative sample of the variety of ethnic and immigrant musics in the US during the prewar recording period, ‘Spiew Juchasa offers, as an example, the value a more sustained study of particular ethnic and immigrant musical production provides, as well as highlights the discographical prowess Spottswood was developing as a collector.

As violinists who recorded in ensembles under a variety of different names and an even greater variety of translations of names, both Karol Stoch and Paulo Humeniuk’s discographical output can be hard to parse. On ‘Spiew Juchasa alone, Karol Stoch appears as part of the “Okriestra Karol Stoch,” “Sichelski i Barchelda i Karola Stocha Oryginalna Goralska,” “Sichelski i Barchelda, musyzka: Karola Stoch,” “Karola Stocha Oryginalna Muzyka Goralska,” and “Sichelski i Barchelda, Oryginalna Muzyka Goralska Karola Stocha,” despite only playing with two different instrumental ensembles across the recordings. Similarly, Pawlo Humeniuk’s credits on the disc include “Ukrainska Orchestra Pawla Humeniuka,” Ukrainska Orchestra i Chor Pawla Humeniuka,” and “Zlozyw i Widohraw Solo Skrypkowe Pawlo Humeniuk.”

Much of what may be considered confusion regarding the recorded output of both Stoch and Humeniuk can be attributed to differences in naming conventions between the prewar recording period and the more contemporary, established practices of the commercial music industry in the US.

Despite Victor issuing most of Stoch’s recordings and Columbia releasing all of the Humeniuk sides on the disc, variations appear in crediting vocalists, the ensemble, and the ensemble’s leader, as well as which credit deserves the most emphasis. Add to this the common practice of releasing certain recordings across a variety of “foreign-language” catalogs—a factor of particular significance to Humeniuk, whose recorded work was sold on Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian lines—and determining a single musician’s discography becomes an intensive

352 Richard Spottswood, liner notes to ‘Spiew Juchasa/Song of the Shepherd: Songs of the Slavic Americans.
venture.\textsuperscript{353} For a collector and discographer like Spottswood, these variables become part and parcel of the value of such labor. The nature of the hunt and the elation in discovery are well-documented aspects of collector practice.\textsuperscript{354} Like Smith’s \textit{Anthology} before, ‘\textit{Spiew Juchasa}, much like it’s companion \textit{Old-Country Music}, display the fruits of Spottswood’s “ethnic series” record collection, organized not only to highlight exceptional recorded musical performances, but also his discographical prowess in cataloging the recorded works of Stoch and Humeniuk.

Spottswood’s collector epistemology presents itself in other aspects of the compilation as well. Aside from listing record labels, catalog numbers, and pressing matrices as identifying factors in the liner notes for each track, the curatorial model—which recordings to choose and how to emphasize them—also reflect collector practice. For instance, the scant recording history of Bruno Rudzinski and his concertina, though relatively diminutive in scale and representationally anomalous, is offered space as one of only three tracks on the Polish side of ‘\textit{Spiew Juchasa}. Born in Chicago of Polish descent, Rudzinski recorded a handful of sides for Victor during a solitary recording session at the label’s studio on North Michigan Ave. in his home city on July 9, 1928. The three discs—six sides in total—released by the label later that year were marketed under the same “Polish series” as other recordings on side one of the disc, but bare little resemblance to Rudzinski’s peculiar vocals and concertina accompaniment.\textsuperscript{355} Rudzinski, whom Spottswood notes was known as “Wild Bruno” and “Crazy Bruno” to tavern goers on Division St. in Chicago, performed “wordless” songs largely shaped around his nonsense vocals. “Na Obie Nogi (On Two Feet),” featured on ‘\textit{Spiew Juchasa}, showcases

\textsuperscript{353} Ibid.


Rudzinski vacillating between whistling, random syllables, and other voiced inflections over his concertina, played to a polka rhythm.\textsuperscript{356} The song is indicative of the other five sides Rudzinski recorded that day in 1928, but not at all reflective of performance typical to Polish or Polish American identity. Rudzinski’s recorded works appear to have garnered some currency in the postwar collector economy, however. Other recordings of Rudzinski’s “idiosyncratic concertina playing and wordless vocals” appear on a volume of FM\textit{i}A as well as the \textit{Polish-American Dance Music} compilation released on in 1979 on Folklyric Records (the subject of the following chapter).\textsuperscript{357}

To a certain degree, the compilation itself seems cognizant of its shortcomings. Prominently displayed centered at the top of the left panel inside the gatefold, a disclaimer reads:

If the focus of this record is relatively narrow, the quality of the music is fresh and vibrant in spite of the half century that has passed since this music was made. The record offers a concentrated look at one area of eastern Europe through the music of its transplanted peoples. The many other recordings they have made over the years equally deserve attention and further reissuing, as does the music of all the others who brought old traditions to the New World and preserved them for us on recordings.\textsuperscript{358}

The self-conscious admission in the liner notes that the focus of the LP is “relatively narrow” considering the immigrant musics of only “one area of eastern Europe” and that “the music of all the others” who migrated to the US also deserves appreciation undergirds Jacobson’s central critique of the white ethnic revival in the 1970s: the resurgence of interest in white ethnic particularity allowed for multicultural perspectives absent the experience and contributions of people of color. Much like Gorky’s Armenian mother can serve as a stand-in for all turn-of-the-century immigrants and Handlin’s liner notes erase migration to the US that did not occur by

\textsuperscript{356} Spottswood, liner notes to \textit{‘Spiew Juchasa/Song of the Shepherd: Songs of the Slavic Americans}.

\textsuperscript{357} Quote from Spottswood, liner notes to \textit{‘Spiew Juchasa/Song of the Shepherd: Songs of the Slavic Americans; Folk Music in America, Volume 11 – Songs of Humor and Hilarity; Polish-American Dance Music – The Early Recordings: 1927-1933, Folklyric Records 9026, 1979, LP}.

\textsuperscript{358} Spottswood, liner notes to \textit{‘Spiew Juchasa/Song of the Shepherd: Songs of the Slavic Americans}.
crossing the Atlantic, Spottswood’s interest in Humeniuk, Stoch, and Rudinski occupy a disproportionate amount of disc space allotted to prewar “ethnic series” recordings, limited opportunity for a wider range of recordings to find entry on RAAM.

The Limits of Accommodationsim

Under accommodationsim and pluralism all parties get a seat at the proverbial table. Though the table is understood to be figurative in this common expression, the actual application of accommodationsim and pluralism are bound by material limits. In the case of FMiA, the Library of Congress provided a budget for the production of fifteen LPs. At or around forty minutes of playing time divided by the two sides of a single disc, each volume could accommodate eight or nine recordings per side given the running lengths of the 78rpm records from which much of the anthology is sourced. Even on the more expansive RAAM, the broader scope of the project limited the amount of attention any particular music or mode of musicking received in the collection. As noted, prewar “ethnic series” recordings only appear on two of the one-hundred RAAM volumes, part of a broader series the editorial committee and staff of New World Records called “Folk and Oral Traditions,” itself confined to thirteen discs total.\(^\text{359}\)

Beyond the physical realities of disc space and project budgets, curatorial bias also brackets potential pluralities and accomodations. Michael Sy Uy’s analysis of the broader RAAM project critiques the Rockefeller Foundation-funded enterprise for the lack of diversity of its editorial committee. Uy notes that only two women were on the editorial committee of New World Records at the project’s onset. Of the two, Cynthia Hoover, a curator at the Smithsonian, was the only woman to serve the full term of the project. Eileen Southern, Harvard’s first tenured

\(^{359}\) Uy, 82.
African American in on the faculty of Arts and Sciences, left the project shortly after it began.\footnote{Ibid, 78-83.} Howard Krawitz, President of New World Records, cited “differences in opinion with her colleagues” as the reason for Southern’s departure from the committee.\footnote{Ibid, 83.} After Southern resigned, the only person of color on the editorial staff was David Baker, director of Jazz Studies at Indiana University. Uy argues that the lack of gender and racial diversity on the editorial committee of New World Records resonated in RAAM’s curation. Though RAAM is relatively flush with black musical performances, “only two composer of Asian descent were represented: Chou Wen-Chung and Earl Kim.” Uy states, “Additionally, women were gravely underrepresented. While there were many female performers, the only two female composers included were Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger.”\footnote{Ibid.} Though Uy fails to mention it explicitly, Latinx musics and performers were also largely dismissed, only the focus two volumes of the set: Caliente=Hot: Puerto Rican and Cuban Musical Expression in New York and Dark and Light in Spanish New Mexico.

Like Uy’s critique of RAAM, the pluralism of FMiA reveals similar shortcomings. Although the experience of listening to the different volumes of FMiA, with their thematic, integrationist sequencing, leaves listeners with the sense of vernacular diversity, weighted representation of the different ethnic and racial vernacular musics, as well as gender distribution, prove otherwise. Women, for instance, are noticeably absent from much of FMiA. Listeners do not hear a woman singing a solo lead vocal until Genevieve Davis’s “Haven’t Got a Dollar to Pay Your House Rent Man,” the seventy-ninth selection housed on side B of the fifth volume, Dance Music: Ragtime, Jazz, and More. Adding insult to ignorance, notes for the Davis track, a
1927 New Orleans Jazz tune, instruct the listener to focus on the the band behind Davis, headed by Louis Dumaine, a cornet player and the “least known of all” the early jazz bandleaders. “Though this item is credited to the singer Genevieve Davis,” Spottswood writes, “her singing leaves more than the usual amount of time allotted to backup groups.” Of course, Spottswood need not instruct his listeners pay little attention to the contributions of women; He more or less does not give an option on FMiA with the selection rate of recordings featuring female musicians and performers never improving across the anthology’s fifteen volumes.

Although FMiA is noted for its inclusion of “ethnic series” recordings pulled from prewar commercial “foreign-language” catalogs and the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress—and, as noted earlier, FMiA’s listening experience is mostly defined by this aspect—the general framework of Spottswood’s curation adheres to the dynamics Smith laid out a quarter-century earlier. Like the Anthology of American Folk Music, non-ethnic white vernacular genres hold the highest percentage of FMiA’s two-hundred-fifty-two slots at nearly forty percent. Also like Smith, Spottswood gives primacy to prewar hillbilly recordings, but does diversify his non-ethnic white selections with postwar honky-tonk and even one modern country recording, “Caterpillar Man” by Carl Trent, originally released in 1970 on a 45 by the tiny Nugget Records label in Goodlettsville, Tennessee, about twenty minutes north of Nashville. Non-ethnic black vernacular genres on FMiA also replicate the status granted to them on Smith’s Anthology, holding about one-third of the available selections. Like the non-ethnic white vernacular genres on FMiA, Spottswood retains Smith’s interest prewar secular and sacred acoustic blues.

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recordings, but stretches the scope of black folk music to include piano blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, and doo-wop.

Ethnic vernacular genres, the signature additions to the national vernacular imaginary under Spottswood’s curation are just that, additions to the established framework of Smith’s Americana. By Spottswood’s categorization, there are twelve different genres of white ethnic vernacular recordings spread across FMiA’s fifteen discs. Most of those genres, like prewar Greek series, Italian series, and Finnish series recordings, only appear a handful of times on the Spottswood’s anthology. A number of ethnic vernacular genres are represented by a solitary recording, including Scandinavian vernacular (Ted Johnson and His Scandinavian Orchestra, “Nikolina”, FMiA, Vol 11 - Songs of Humor & Hilarity), Lithuanian vernacular (Mrs. Juze Dereskeviciene, “Fodukas,” FMiA, Vol 11 - Songs of Humor & Hilarity), and Jewish vernacular (Cantor Isisah Meisels, “Birchas Kohanim,” FMiA, Vol 1 - Congregational and Ceremonial).

Eastern European immigrant musics are disproportionately represented by prewar Polish and Ukrainian series records at eight entries each. Curiously, Cajun vernacular music is represented by seven recordings across FMiA, equal to the number of Cajun recordings on the Folkways collection.

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<td>White</td>
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Non-white ethnic vernacular recordings are the most underrepresented genres on Spottswood’s anthology. Trinidadian calypso fairs best with seven recordings including three by Wilmoth Houdini. John Lomax’s 1934 recording of “Les Haricots Sont Pas Sales,” credited to unknown singers, is the only example of zydeco on the set. Mexican vernacular performance is heard only seven times on FMiA, a relatively diminutive number given the wide selection of Mexican series recordings made in south Texas beginning in the 1920s. Recordings of American Indian vernacular musics total seven selections spread across four tribes or bands: Menominee, Papago, Passamaquoddy, and Yaqui. Inexplicably, FMiA only includes two Hawaiian vernacular performances, “Oua, Oua,” a two-guitar traditional duet by Kanui and Lula, and the aforementioned Andy Iona recordings, noted mostly for its fusion of a variety of ethnic

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<td>1</td>
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<td>Cajun (Zydeco)</td>
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<td>7</td>
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366 Spottswood does call attention to Folklyric Records’ Texas-Mexican Border Music series for interested listeners in the liner notes to the corrido “Gregorio Cortez” performed by Timoteo Cantu and Jesus Maya on Folk Music in America, Volume 12 - Local History and Events, Library of Congress LBC-12, 1977, LP. The Texas-Mexican Border Music series is covered extensively in the chapter that follows.
and non-ethnic vernacular styles. Given the influence of Hawaiian music across US popular and vernacular genres, this omission is particularly egregious.\footnote{For an extensive review on the history and influence of Hawaiian music and musician on broader US popular musics, see John W. Troutman, \textit{Kika Kila: How the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Changed the Sound of Modern Music} (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).}

Absent entirely are performances by Chinese, Japanese, or Korean vernacular musicians. At the time of production, Spottswood, who had only recently developed an interest in prewar “foreign-language” recordings, nor other, more experienced collectors of “ethnic series” discs, knew of any extant recordings of eastern Asian immigrant musicians—venacular, popular, art, or otherwise.\footnote{Norm Cohen and Paul F. Wells, “Recorded Ethnic Musics: A Guide to Resources,” \textit{Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected History}, 219.} Spottswood did not bind himself to the prewar commerical-era like Smith, though, but no attempt appears to have been made to rectify the gap in Asian American musical performance either through the postwar commerical market or in folkloric “field recordings.” A similar argument can be made about the dearth of Turkish and Middle Eastern “foreign-language” recordings on \textit{FMiA}. Prewar commercial concerns did record refugees from Ottoman Empire in significant numbers, but that history appears to have been lost on Bicentennial-era “ethnic series” collectors.\footnote{Ian Nagoski, liner notes to \textit{To What Strange Place: The Music of the Ottoman-American Diaspora, 1916-1929}, Tompkins Square TSQ 2608, 2011, compact disc.} In the resource guide to “ethnic music” recordings published in the book commemorating the \textit{Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected History}, which opens this chapter, John Cohen and Paul F. Wells disparage the “belly dancing” craze associated with then-contemporary Middle Eastern music, remarking that they “are hard pressed to distinguish when the antecedents of particular styles and groups are more folk based or art music, though there is little doubt that the domestic albums themselves are firmly in the pop music vien.”\footnote{Cohen and Wells, 219.}
Spottswood, who served as the sole editor for the set with the exception of three volumes, *Songs of Labor and Livelihood, Songs of Death and Tragedy, and Songs of Childhood*, which were programmed and annotated with the assistance of Richard A. Reuss, Mack McCormick, and Rick Ulman respectively.\(^{371}\) Spottswood, Reuss, McCormick, and Ulman—all white men—reveal significant biases and gaps of knowledge in regards to both gendered and racialized vernacular performance. Five women played minor roles in the production of *FMiA*. Holly C. Baker, Mary Bernstein, and Sue Manos each contributed annotated notes for one selection on the anthology. Erika Brady and Judith R. Harway authored notes for four other selections each.\(^{372}\) No persons of color were involved in the planning or execution of *FMiA*. Echoing Uy’s critique that the inclusion of more women and people of color in the production of *RAAM* or *FMiA* would not have assured gender and racial parity in either anthology, but the absence of both suggests that the limited range of voices involved may have been a significant factor.\(^{373}\)

The primacies of white vernacular and ethnic white vernacular genres within the respective non-ethnic and ethnic categories on *FMiA* echo Matthew Frye Jacobson’s broader arguments on cultural pluralism in the 1970s. The veneration of white ethnicity, which effectively variegated whiteness, afforded a celebration of multiculturalism still centered on white racial identity.\(^{374}\) Combined, white vernacular and white ethnic vernacular musics occupy

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\(^{371}\) See Table V.


\(^{373}\) Uy, 83.

an overwhelming majority of both the raw number of performances on FMiA as well as genre varieties in the collection. As stated earlier, reception to the set, both positive and negative, centered on its ethnic diversity. In press releases, promotional material, and music reviews, FMiA was celebrate, and in the case of the latter, sometimes dismissed, for its wide range of racial and ethnic vernacular musics, never once was the issue of the limitation of its pluralism raised. The occlusion of criticism on the grounds of FMiA absences, gives weight to Jacobson’s arguments about the overall effect of the politics of white ethnicity and cultural pluralism of the 1970s.

Conclusion

“The hyphen performs—it is never neutral or natural” states Jennifer DeVere Brody.375 Both quotidian and powerful, the omnipresence of the hyphen provided a discursive logic to national pluralism in the 1970s. Irish national origins became Irish-Americanism. The progeny of immigrant Poles became Polish-Americans. In the case of prewar “ethnic series” recordings, the hyphen did what the listening ear alone could not. It pulled the waltzes, polkas, and oberekS of eastern Europe and the pentozalis and syrtas of southern Europe into the national vernacular fold. The hyphen instructed the listening ear to hear these “foreign” sounds as national. The hyphen made cultural pluralism audible.

The hyphen, and its discursive logic, were not evenly applied at the Bicentennial, though. Folk Music in America, like other Bicentennial commemorations, celebrated the nation’s newfound interest in ethnic particularity, elevated the significance of prewar “foreign-language” recordings along a number of ethnic lines. As a provocation, it challenged the listening ear to stretch beyond the established parameters of Americana, to find the influence of other vernacular

grammars on national popular music. Curatorial bias and the material capabilities of format
limited the possibilitie of Spottswood’s accomodationist design. The chapter that follows looks
and listens closely to the treatment of prewar Mexican series recordings in the same
Bicentennial-era reissue economy, revealing how the racial logics of citizenship compromised
ethnic inclusion under cultural pluralism.
CHAPTER 4: TEXAS-MEXICAN BORDER MUSIC, BORDER CULTURES, & THE NATION-STATE

Introduction

“And almost of this music—I would say a huge portion of it—is recorded in Texas by Texans. Almost all of them. Some of the musicians were born in Mexico, like Narciso Martínez, and then they came to Texas. However, there were a lot of them, like Valeria Longoria, who were born here in the United States. Even Lydia Mendoza was born in Houston, yet most people think of her as Mexican.”

- Chris Strachwitz, 2014

“I consider myself since I was young a Texas-Mexican. Of course, it’s like every Texan here considers themselves Texans and then they are Americans. But we really are Americans and then we’re Texans, but we like to bring up our state. And that’s what I believe all the time, Texas-Mexicans, but we’re really Texas-Americans or should be Mexican-Americans.”

- José Morante, 1976

“Are Texas-Mexicans ‘Americans’?”

- League of United Latin American Citizens News, 1932

In 1932, the League of United Latin American Citizens [LULAC] published an editorial in the *LULAC News* under the headline “Are Texas-Mexicans ‘Americans’?” For LULAC, an advocacy group working to improve the social, cultural, and political standing for naturalized

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and native-born citizens of Mexican or Latin descent in the United States, the answer, of course, was a resounding yes. Arguing primarily on constitutional grounds—as opposed to the social or cultural standing of Texans of Mexican heritage—the unsigned author makes the case that both by “force of treaty between the two great nations and also by virtue of the provisions of the Federal Constitution” guarantee citizenship status for Mexican Americans living in Texas. The author goes onto defiantly proclaim that “Texas-Mexicans have never been considered as foreigners, and so far as the great State of Texas is concerned, the real, true-blue ‘Americans’ are native citizens of this State of Latin extraction.” Despite the article’s declaration that “Texas-Mexicans have never been considered as foreigners,” the saliency of the headline’s rhetorical question and the author’s measured, calculated response to it suggests a broader, generalized ambivalence to the status of Mexican Americans within the US national imaginary.

This ambivalence has been echoed with remarkable consistency over the eight decades that have passed since LULAC News ran the “Are Texas-Mexicans ‘Americans’?” headline. It’s heard in voice of José Morante, conjunto leader of Sus Conquistadores and sideman for the celebrated Flaco Jimenez, at the opening of Chulas Fronteras, the 1976 documentary about South Texas norteño music. Morante self presents as “Texas-Mexican” while acknowledging a limited ability to claim recognition as a US citizen. Four decades later, Chris Strachwitz, founder of Arhoolie Records and namesake of the Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican and Mexican American Recordings, the largest repository of vernacular and popular musics performed by Mexican and Mexican American musicians held at the University of California at Los Angeles, mused about the same issue when trying to claim space for Mexican American

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379 Quotes and contextual information for the LULAC News editorial in Gutiérrez, 86-87.

380 Chulas Fronteras.
vernacular performers within a national cultural memory. The pre- and early postwar Mexican series recordings he spent his life feverishly collecting “recorded in Texas by Texans” but heard only as referents to Mexico.381

In 1974, Strachwitz would edit and annotate Texas-Mexican Border Music, Vol. 1 – An Introduction, 1930-1960, on his reissue music label Folklyric Records, a subsidiary of his more popular Arhoolie Records. The release would mark the beginning of project that would span a decade and result in the production of twenty-four distinct discs in the Texas-Mexican Border Music series. Whereas other recordings from the prewar “ethnic series” archives were more readily incorporated onto national anthologies in the 1970s like the Library of Congress’ Folk Music in America and New World Records’ Recorded Anthology of American Music, Strachwitz categorized Mexican “ethnic series” recordings in a more regionalized, discrete manner. Mexican and Mexican American “ethnic series” issues during the late-prewar and early postwar periods were part of a “border culture” that developed in northern Mexico and the southwestern US. The movement of people, goods, and ideas between the two nations produced a dynamic and discrete culture outside the bounds of modern nation-state distinction. The continuation of fluid, casual, and temporary migration and immigration from Mexico into the US well beyond the Great Wave period cut off by the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924.382

In this chapter, I examine how the steady migration of Mexicans into the US across the twentieth century in both documented and undocumented contexts as well as the long history of the US and Mexican governments lax approach to border regulation resonates in circulatory history of pre- and early postwar “Mexican series” recordings. Performed by Mexicans and

Flemons.

Mexican Americans alike, these recordings represent a sonic cartography of a “Texas-Mexican” or “Tex-Mex” border culture. Given the geographical proximity of the US and Mexico as well as the racialization of the Mexican heritage, the legacy of “Mexican series” recordings differs significantly from the eastern and southern European “foreign-language” recordings of the same period. The *Texas-Mexican Border Music* compilation series serves a case study for the distinctive position of Tex-Mex culture in US cultural memory. Existing both inside of and adjacent to the US nation, “Mexican series” recordings were cataloged outside the national imaginary. Whereas, eastern and southern European “foreign-language” series discs were enveloped into a broader national vernacular canon during the Bicentennial era, “Mexican series” recordings were celebrated separately. The classification of Texas Mexican vernacular musics as a “border culture” results from the inherent instability of the political, legal, and economic separation between Mexico and the United States as well as the racialization of Mexican heritage in the US, positioning the identity and its cultural effects in conflict with white supremacy’s tight grip on the US national imaginary.

**Inventing Mexican Americans**

The long histories of emigration from Mexico to the United States and migrations to and from both countries proves the fungibility of political borders dividing nation-states. As the border between Mexico and the US moved between porous and guarded over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the status of Mexican migrants and immigrants shifted with it. The legacy of human movement across the Mexico-US border, and the social, political, and economic factors compelling those movements in both directions, echoes the precarity of Mexican American cultural productions in the US national imaginary.
The original US citizens of Mexican heritage were not immigrants, or migrants for that matter, but colonial subjects. Following the Mexican-American War, the two nations signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848. As the victors, US delegates compelled the Mexican government to formally recognize the annexation of Texas in addition to ceding a third more of nation’s total territory. The ceded area would encompass “all or part of California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico,” effectively creating the US Southwest. As the border of Mexico “migrated to the south and the west,” the roughly 80,000 to 100,000 Mexican nationals who remained in the ceded territory found themselves newly minted as US citizens. The terms of the treaty granted the new Mexican American population the rights of legal citizenship and the protections conferred in the US Constitution, but the legacy of white American racism towards Mexicans assured the adoption of Mexican Americans into the US polity would be partial and contingent at best.

In California, rapid demographic shifts in the wake of the discovery of gold in 1848 hastened the displacement of Mexican Americans in the former Mexican province. The influx of US immigrants into northern California “reduc[ed] the Spanish-speaking population to a tiny ethnic minority” by 1850. Viewed as “unwanted ‘foreign’ competition,” US prospectors “forcibly expelled Mexican, Mexican American, and other Latin American ‘greasers’ from the goldfields.” Disputes over land titles in the transition from Mexican to US property law, the imposition of property taxes, and a failing livestock market dispossessed many Mexican Americans.

383 Gutiérrez, 14.
384 Ibid.
386 Gutiérrez, 14-20.
landowners of their ranches.\textsuperscript{387} The fall from socio-economic prominence of the former Mexican elite in the 1850s was duplicated in the rest of the state by the end of 1870s as white US settlers migrated south after gold prospects waned. In cities across the state, the Mexican American percentage of the total population dropped by roughly 60 to 75 percent over the period.\textsuperscript{388}

In Texas, similar displacements like those seen in California occurred in the decades following the Mexican-American War. Costly court proceedings stripped many Tejanos of their property and economic influence in the process of conferring title rights to land. While the former Mexican elite were able to hold onto their power and property in cities like El Paso along the newly defined international border, elsewhere in the state demographics shifted dramatically as European immigrants and white Americans, as well as their enslaved West Africans, resettled in Texas. Racial animus between white Texans and Tejanos, deeply rooted the state’s history, manifested in an often explicit project to subjugate the Mexican American population. The Texas Rangers threatened state violence and employers systemically pushed Mexican American workers into low-skilled, low-pay positions. This project continued into the twentieth century when Jim Crow laws aimed at black Texans were extended to block Tejanos from the political and economic power.\textsuperscript{389}

The minoritization of ethnic Mexicans in the southwestern US in the latter half of the nineteenth century was felt most acutely by working-class Mexican Americans. Economically impoverished and socially castigated, working-class Mexican Americans largely lived in exile from white Americans as well as an upwardly mobile Mexican American middle class hoping to

\textsuperscript{387} Ibid, 19-25; quotes from 19, 21.

\textsuperscript{388} Ibid, 21.

\textsuperscript{389} Ibid, 25-28.
achieve full adoption into US society. In avoiding unnecessary contact with either demographic, the Mexican American working class were able to maintain a fairly hermetic culture and lifestyle despite dire circumstances. As David C. Gutiérrez argues,

[Working-class Mexican Americans] took solace…in observing their own variants of Mexican culture in the relative privacy of their neighborhoods or in the more isolated rural areas in Texas, northern New Mexico, and southern Colorado that the Americans had not overrun. By isolating themselves in segregated barrios, colonias, and rural rancherías, [they] could, and largely did, continue to live their lives in a manner similar to that which existed prior to annexation.390

The boundaries of “urban barrios” and “rural colonias” in the southwest may not have had legal standing, but functionally they kept working-class Mexican Americans out of sight and surveillance from the white population and broader US power structure.391 The relative sequestration of working-class Mexican American culture would prove crucial to the ebb and flow of Mexican migration and immigration to the US in the decades to follow.

A Brief History of Mexican Im/migration

Reduced to minority status and residing in remote rural areas or segregated urban neighborhoods, the anonymity of the Mexican American population to broader, whiter US publics played a central role in the fluid movement of Mexican migrants between the two nations in the opening decades of the twentieth century. As stated in the opening chapter of this dissertation, immigration from all borders of the US remained “encouraged and virtually unfettered” until the late nineteenth century.392 For Mexican immigration in particular, this pattern extended well into the opening three decades of the twentieth century. Through the first

390 Ibid, 34.
391 Ibid.
392 Ngai, 17-18.
two decades of the twentieth, immigration officials paid little attention to the US-Mexico border. Mexicans crossing the international line did so to work in agriculture and build railroads. Immigration policy on the southern border acquiesced to the business interests of the US southwest, viewing Mexican immigration and migration as “regulated by labor demands.”

Mexican nationals were compelled to migrate north by economic and political projects on both sides the international line. The origins of large scale Mexican emigration to the US rest in the land colonization policies of the Porfirian dictatorship in the 1890s. In an effort “modernize” the Mexican economy, the Porfirian legal code outlawed the practice of communally held lands known as ejidos forcing the rural indigenous Mexican population to work under debt peonage on privately owned haciendas. This radical redistribution of land into the hands of the entrepreneurial few further impoverished Mexico’s rural poor. Population growth in central Mexico depressed wages while the cost of living rose. With the advent of a railroad running through Mexico’s relatively sparse northern provinces and into the US, Mexican itinerant laborers began a pattern of crossing over into the southwestern states.

While the disastrous policies of the Porfiriato may have started the flow of Mexican workers into the US, they also set the stage for the revolution that increased the practice exponentially. The Revolution of 1910 destabilized Mexico, leading to ten years of violence and devastation scattered throughout the nation. Porfirio Díaz was quickly removed from power in May 1911, but this led to a series of new revolts, regime changes, and increasing brutality against the Mexican citizenry. The impact of the Mexican Revolution was acutely felt by the

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393 Ibid, 64; George Sanchez, Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 52-53, quoted in Ngai, 64.

nation’s working class and poor. Intermittent violence and episodic regime change ravaged an already insecure Mexican economy, leading to increased unemployment and poverty.\(^{395}\) For Mexican citizens looking to escape the dire conditions, improvements to infrastructure accomplished during the Díaz reign did aid in crossing over. From northern Mexico, Conrado Mendoza recalled his ease in traversing the international borderline. “All you had to do was get on the electric trolley, or on the electric streetcar and cross over to the United States,” Mendoza said, “No one told you anything.”\(^{396}\) By train or trolley car, of desire or necessity, Mexican citizens fied the volatile nation in droves. By decade’s end, Mexico was thoroughly depleted with a million dead and nearly as many fleeing to the US.\(^{397}\)

Although free market economics were the main impetus behind US recruitment of migrants from the south, the politics of anti-Asian racism also compelled human movement across Mexico’s northern border. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred Chinese nationals from entering the US, left a hole in the agricultural labor market in the western states. This void was quickly filled by increased immigration from Japan. To US nativists, though, Japanese migrants posed the same threat to “100% Americanism” as their Chinese forebears. A diplomatic solution was reach in the form of the so-called Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1908 in which the Japanese government agreed to cease issuing passports to Japanese laborers, effectively shutting off emigration to US.\(^{398}\) The Immigration Act of 1917 extend Chinese and

\(^{395}\) Cardoso, 38-42.

\(^{396}\) Interview with Conrado Mendoza, 4 Dec. 1976, conducted by Mike Acosta, University of Texas at El Paso, Institute of Oral History, No. 252, p. 3; quoted in Sánchez, 51.

\(^{397}\) Cardoso, 39.

\(^{398}\) Ngai, 38-39.
Japanese exclusions to include a “barred Asiatic zone” spanning “from Afghanistan to the Pacific.”

With Asian laborers denied entry to the US, the large-scale agriculture operations in the western states looked to Mexico to fill their need for what Mae Ngai calls a “migratory agricultural proletariat.” Mexican laborers, though decidedly not white, were considered less a threat to Anglo-Saxon supremacy mostly because of their proximity to the US. To wary nativists, the presence of Mexican migrant laborers was tolerated because it was assumed to be temporary. As such, no quotas were applied to Mexico or other nations in the Western hemisphere in the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. So, while 1920s are characterized by a sharp decline in immigrants from eastern and southern Europe and the outright exclusion of Asian emigres, Mexican immigration remained steady throughout the decade at an average of 25,000 individuals annually.

In total, an estimated one million to 1.5 million people emigrated from Mexico to the US between the turn of the century and the onset of the Great Depression. The passage of Mexican immigrants through the long and largely unsurveiled southern border helped to obscure the significance of their numbers. Unlike the “undesirable races” of eastern and southern Europe who filtered into the increasingly crowded cities of the industrial northeast and midwest, new immigrants from Mexico entered the US mostly undetected. Gutiérrez argues that the relative imperceptibility of mass immigration from Mexico is due in part to the fact that “the vast

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399 Ibid, 18.

400 Ibid, 93-95.

401 Gutiérrez, 69.

402 It should be noted, as Gutiérrez does in his account, that these estimates are speculative and likely inexact given the dearth of verifiable data from the period; Gutiérrez, 40.
majority of Americans never came into direct contact the resident Mexican population.”

Guitérrez elaborates stating, “Because most Mexican workers took jobs and found housing in or adjacent to extant urban barrios and isolated rural areas inhabited by Mexican Americans, few Anglo Americans realized that Mexican immigrants had...contributed to a dramatic expansion of the resident ethnic population.” Living and working beyond the sightline of most white citizens, Mexican immigrants and their migrant contemporaries evaded the kind of scrutiny experienced by other immigrant groups residing in more densely populated areas. Though racism against people of Mexican descent was no less acute (and the sustained racialization of Mexican heritage suggests it was likely more significant), the presence of Mexican communities in the vast expanses of southwestern states never incited the kind of social panic associated with groups targeted by the Johnson-Reed Act and Asian exclusion laws.

The relative anonymity of mass Mexican immigration to the US would be short-lived, though; By the end of the 1920s at the onset of the Depression, Mexican laborers suddenly became more visible to a broader US public concerned about the dearth of employment prospects. The racial logics of white America’s Depression-induced economic anxiety resulted in targeted and sustained repatriation campaigns to pressure Mexican immigrants to leave the US. In cities across the southwestern and midwestern US, Mexican populations were blamed for taking jobs away from white Americans as well as being an undue burden on the social welfare system. By the early 1930s, this racial animus was mobilized into active campaigns to convince local Mexican populations to repatriate to Mexico. Statistics on the efficacy of voluntary

\[403\] Ibid, 40.
repatriation campaigns are notoriously inexact, but most scholars estimate anywhere between 350,000 and 600,000 Mexican nationals left the US during between 1930 and 1939.\footnote{Ibid, 71-73.}

In addition to repatriation campaigns, Mexican immigrants were subject to a sharp increase in formal deportations at the onset of the Great Depression. Though the Immigration Act of 1924 did not enact quotas on immigration from Mexico, it did establish a Border Patrol to enforce the legal codes against unlawful entry at the nation’s southern and northern borders. Officially authorized to arrest individuals without proper visas in 1925, Border Patrol agents increased the rate of deportations steadily as the decade developed from 9,495 individuals in the first year of authorization to 38,789 in 1929.\footnote{Ngai, 60.} Mae M. Ngai argues that immigration enforcement mechanisms of the Johnson-Reed Act invented the modern concept of the “illegal alien.” As formal deportations increased due to the actions of Border Patrol agents, Mexican immigrants became the public face of the Immigration Service campaign as opposed to their Canadian and European counterparts from the northern border. As Ngai states, “Mexicans emerged as iconic illegal aliens. Illegal status became constitutive of a racialized Mexican identity and of Mexicans’ exclusion from the national community and polity.”\footnote{Ibid, 57-64; quote from ibid, 58.}

After a decade spent scapegoating Mexican populations in the US for insecurities inherent to capitalist economies, compelling and formally deporting Mexican nationals from the US interior, and making synonyms of “Mexican migrant” and “illegal alien,” the US agriculture and industry had a demand for labor that exceeded domestic capabilities. The nation’s entry into the war effort in Europe and the signing of the Selective Service Act in 1940 resulted in a
significant shortage of available labor to fulfill industry needs. By August 1942, the governments of the US and Mexico successfully negotiated a bilateral labor agreement to send Mexican farm laborers to the interior US on temporary work contracts.\textsuperscript{407} Designed as a stopgap measure to address wartime shortages, The Emergency Farm Labor Program (known colloquially as the Bracero Program, after the Spanish word for farm worker) became a long-term guestworker program. In effect from 1942 until 1960, the Bracero Program provided US commercial agriculture with an expendable supply of temporary, casual labor. By 1947, US companies had hired estimated 220,000 braceros were employed on contract on large and small-scale farms across the country.\textsuperscript{408}

Alongside the rise of “bracero” as a discrete category of migrant laborer in the national lexicon came a more insidious, disparaging word for Mexican migrant workers: “wetback.” A term in reference to the quite literal wet backs of migrants who crossed over unauthorized through the Rio Grande, “wetbacks” became a colloquialism for undocumented immigrants arriving from Mexico to compete for jobs largely in the same agriculture sector the braceros were contracted to work. Due to the onerous paperwork involved in getting approval to contract bracero labor from Mexico and because the US government shielded industry from repercussions for disregarding the program’s established procedure, many domestic companies found it easier and more cost effective to hire unauthorized migrant laborers to fulfill seasonal demands.

In response to growing nativist outrage over the flow of unauthorized immigrants across the nation’s southern border, the US attorney general launched the repugnantly titled Operation Wetback to identify and deport undocumented Mexican farmworkers and day laborers. At its

\textsuperscript{407} Gutiérrez, 134.

height in 1954 Operation Wetback apprehended unauthorized immigrants in excess of one million. Even at 1954 rates, apprehension was only partial—perhaps even performative. As Tomás Jiménez argues, “The highly visible, though ineffective efforts by the US government to limit immigration provided the illusion of an orderly border, satisfying the citizenry’s desire for limited immigration, while the powerfulful agricultural lobby continued to receive a supply of workers it desired.”

The combination of the bracero’s temporary place in the US labor pool and the racialization of the “illegal alien” led to an air of impermanence and illegality to Mexican presence within the domestic interior that infected broader perceptions of Mexican Americans. Gutiérrez notes that most white Americans over the period “recognized no distinctions between Americans of Mexican descent and more recent immigrants from Mexico.” The racialization of Mexican heritage that developed over the course of the twentieth century positions, to varying degrees, all Mexicans, both birthright citizens and new arrivals, outside the boundaries of the national imaginary. The ebb and flow of human movement over the border, the recruitment of both contract and unsanctioned labor, the voluntary and compulsory deportations, all contributed to the precarity of being both Mexican and American in the twentieth century US. This precarity reverberates outward in the way Mexican-American cultural productions, like prewar Mexican series recordings, are cataloged and anthologized.

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409 Jiménez, 40; Henderson, 71-79.

410 Gutiérrez, 40.
La Frontera and Migrant Agency

To frame the uncertain position of persons of Mexican heritage within and between Mexico and the United States as purely actions done unto migrants would be a disservice to the way Mexican immigrants made sense of their transnational precarity. Given limited options against the hegemon of white supremacy and US racisms, Mexicans laid claim to an identity and worldview between two nations. Alicia Schmidt Camacho refers to the “world-making aspirations” of Mexican immigrants around the international border as “migrant imaginaries.”

To Camacho, migrant imaginaries are inherently transnational. Migrant transnationality, though, is less about the interconnection of two or more nation-states and more about the migrant’s disassociation from national spaces altogether. Camacho states, “The transnational may also stand in opposition to the bounded community of the nation-state. As migrants narrate a condition of alterity to, or exclusion from, the nation, they also enunciate a collective desire for a different order of space and belonging across the boundary.” Migrant imaginaries, as “stand[ing] in opposition to the bounded community of the nation-state,” are therefore in conflict with the national imaginaries at attention in this dissertation project. The border culture of the pre- and early postwar Mexican series recordings that comprise the contents of the Texas-Mexican Border Music series are examples of the world imaginaries of Mexican immigrants.

Camacho builds her concept of migrant imaginaries off the broader canon of border theory. The borderlands became a significant topic of consideration among philosophers and social theorists in the 1990s. Originating from Gloria Anzaldúa’s landmark text Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, first published in 1987, Anzaldúa’s queer women of color critique


412 Ibid, 5.
of a finite borders bounding geographic, psychic, and sexual lives was soon joined further
criticisms of border ontology from Renato Rosaldo (*Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social
Analysis*, 1989), D. Emily Hicks (*Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text*, 1991), and joint
work by Héctor Calderón and José David Saldivar (*Criticism in the Borderlands*, 1991) to name
just a few. As David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen assessed the field in 1997, border studies
has stretched the concept of boundaries past the legal demarcations separating nations, states,
cities, and towns to “nearly every psychic or geographic space about which one can thematize
problems of boundary or limit.”

The recordings of the *Texas-Mexican Border Series* resonate with implicit critiques of
both the legal, or “hard,” border that divide Mexico and the US as well as the “soft” boundaries
of the national imaginary. Not just abstract expressions either, the artists of the prewar Mexican
series recordings era were part and parcel of the histories that made Camacho’s migrant
imaginaries possible. The early life of Lydia Mendoza, the famous first lady of Tejano music
whose first recording session was detailed in opening of chapter one, plays out like an
archetypical migrant imaginary. Born in Houston, Texas in 1916 to Mexican parents, Leonor
Zamarripa Mendoza and Francisco Mendoza, Lydia’s childhood years were spent living in-
between the US and Mexico, both physically and culturally. Francisco Mendoza’s seasonal and
sporadic employment had the family moving frequently. A sometimes car mechanic, farmhand,
and Carta Blanca brewery worker, the senior Mendoza and family did stints in Houston, San

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David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen, “Border Secrets: An Introduction,” *Border Theory: The Limits of
Antonio, Kingsville, Ennis, McAllen, Weslaco, and Harlingen in Texas and Monterrey in Nuevo León.  

As musicians, the Mendoza family band’s travels added to their itinerant lifeways. Touring and performing on both sides of the Rio Grande, Lydia recounts stops in the Mexican cities of Reynosa, Rio Bravo, and Matamoros and tours to Laredo, Brownsville, and other small cities and towns in Texas. The Mendozas planned their performance routes around the harvest season, making weekend stops in towns where fellow Mexican itinerants would congregate.

Year later, Lydia recalled these weekend ventures:

All the people who would come into town to shop on Saturdays… The people were just milling around, since in those days there weren’t even any dance halls… The poor people who worked would just go into town on Saturday just to pass the time. They would just walk the streets, go buy an ice cream, anything… Because to make matters worse there was so much discrimination against Mexicans. Mexicans could not enter restaurants. If there was a restaurant, they could no eat there. If they were Mexicans, they were not allowed. If it wasn’t a Mexican place, they could not enter that place. They couldn’t go in and buy something because they would not be served. Mexicans have always… you know. So we would arrive and create a fanfare with our music. We would sit there on a corner, and we would stay there… They’d let us use some benches, or whatever. That’s where we’d start to sing; people would gather around us and give us whatever they wanted to give.

Without sanctioned spaces to perform, or even venues to gather and socialize, Mexican migrants redefined their geographic locations “just milling around,” “pass[ing] the time,” and maybe “buy[ing] an ice cream.” This quotidian transformation of public space extended to the performances of the Mendoza family band. In “creat[ing] a fanfare..on a corner,” the Mendozas

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415 Ibid, 1-34.

416 Broyles-Gonzalez., 14.
and their migrant audiences made cultural space out of their alterity. Kept out of the established public life of small town Texas, Mexican itinerants effectively made new public lives on the streetcorners, sidewalks, and park benches where space was open to be claimed. The music the Mendoza family made resonates with this worldmaking process, a kind of soundtrack to a migrant imaginary.

The biography of Alfonso and Martin Chavarria who recorded under the name Los Hermanos Chavarria also resonates a migrant imaginary. The stand-alone LP in the Texas-Mexican Border Music series [Vol. 19, Folklyric 9037, 1983] bills the brothers duo as “Los Trovadores del amanecer de San Antonio, Tejas” (“Early Recording Stars from San Antonio, Texas”), but their story does not begin in the south Texas city. Born in January 1901 and January 1908, respectively, Alfonso and Martin grew up in Parras, Coahuila in Mexico, only emigrating to the US with their parents Caytan Echavarria and Rosa Echavarria-Calletano when both brothers were of working age in 1922. As sharecroppers in San Antonio, the Chavarria brothers began their musical career “singing in the fields” for fellow itinerant laborers, both Alfonso and Martin strumming guitars and belting out harmonies for a repertoire of corridos and canciones.417

The acoustic-style performance that the Chavarria brothers honed entertaining other sharecroppers in the farm fields of San Antonio stuck with them even after they became recording and touring musicians. As Will Spires comments in the liner notes for volume nineteen of the Texas-Mexican Border Music series,

The Chavarrias made little concession to the growing modernity of the record and radio industries. Their style was the antithesis of the sentimental music of tourist-track cantinas and cabarets. Vocally, the Chavarrias never strayed from the traditional limits of taste:

they stressed *gusto*, conviction, and subtle irony, avoiding in the process everything operatic.\(^{418}\)

The technique that Spires describes as “traditional” and hears as “*gusto*” is, in many ways, a relic of a performance practice developed in unamplified, open-spaces like the farm fields of south Texas. The Chavarrias brothers had to strum feverishly and sing with “conviction” to be heard in these nontraditional performance spaces. The subtleties afforded by microphone technology—what Spires refers to as the “modernity of the record and radio industries” and besmirches as “sentimental”—is absent from Chavarrias’ acoustic norteño performance because the genre itself precedes those electrical advances. In working with what instrumental and performance options were available to them, the prewar recordings of Los Hermanos Chavarria resonate a kind of migrant imaginary, the actual sonics of which were informed by the political, social, and economic structures that led their family to cross the border and work the farm fields of San Antonio.

**Chris Strachwitz and Comparative Immigrations**

The recordings that would form the contents of the *Texas-Mexican Border Music* series were the product of multiple migrations, of capital interests from the northeast migrating record for profit various southern and southwestern vernacular musics, and Mexican nationals migrating north on the promise of better prospects on the other side of the Rio Grande. Chris Strachwitz, the man who would collect these recordings decades later and compile them into the *Border Music* series, had his own migration story, though the details of his story bear little resemblance to either the Mexican vernacular musicians journey north or talent scouts of recording companies venture south. Born in 1931 in a section of Germany now under Polish domain, Strachwitz spent

\(^{418}\) Ibid.
his earliest years as child of longstanding wealth and Germanic nobility. With a family legacy, castle and all, dating back seven centuries, his full name — Christian Alexander Maria, Graf Strachwitz von Gross Zauche und Camminetz — includes his noble title as a count (or “Graf,” as its denoted in his German name). Strachwitz’s father, Alexander, was heir to an agricultural fortune as well as a high-ranking German army officer, and the family lived in a mansion in the village of Gross Reichenau in Lower Silesia through the rise of Adolf Hitler, the German National Socialist Party, and the outbreak of World War II.419

Germany’s defeat in the war brought with it dramatic changes for the Strachwitz family. As members of the German aristocracy, the family feared their fate under Soviet rule — Chris, himself, claims he’d be dead or “wound up in Siberia” — so the family, including his five siblings, fled Gross Reichenau for Braunshweig in central Germany to live with an uncle.420 After two years in central Germany, Chris, his siblings, and his mother, Frederike, emigrated to the United States initially settling in Reno, Nevada; Alexander Strachwitz would follow the family a year later in 1948. Frederike had US heritage that, similar to the family’s German nobility, held considerable social and political clout. Fredrike’s grandfather, Francis Griffith Newlands, was a US senator from Nevada, and the inheritor of the Comstock silver mining fortune and several landholdings included the entirety of Chevy Chase, Maryland outside


420 Garner and Brady; quote from Flemons.
Washington, D.C. Frederike’s aunts, daughters of the then late-senator, “pulled some strings in Washington” according to Chris, affording the family entry in the US. The family has been described as entering the US “penniless” and “almost starving to death,” in large part due to the seizure of financial assets held in the US by Frederike by the US government during the reign of Nazi Germany. The Strachwitz’s economic hardships appear to have been short-lived thanks to the generosity of Frederike’s aunts who took in the family. Strachwitz recalled later that the family was “so privileged to have these-well-to-do great-aunts who did everything for us,” including moving the family into the “large house” owned by one aunt in Reno, Nevada in the summer of 1947. In the fall of that year, Chris was sent to the Cate School, a prestigious boarding school in Carpinteria, California, presumably on the generosity of his great aunts. After graduating from Cate School in 1951, Strachwitz enrolled at Pomona College just north of Los Angeles. Never a model student, Strachwitz left Pomona two years later with failing grades, transferring into the University of California at Berkeley. His studies at Berkeley were interrupted by a two-year stint in the US Army in 1954 after he attained US citizenship and was selected in the military draft. Strachwitz returned to Berkeley from army service, graduating with a degree in political science in 1958, followed by teaching credentials a year later.

421 Garner and Brady; Gurza, 14.
422 Ibid; quote from Don Flemons.
423 Garner and Brady; quotes from ibid and Flemons, respectively.
424 Ibid.
425 Garner and Brady.
When Chris Strachwitz entered the US in 1947, he did not speak English and claims “his impressions of American were limited to what he had read in German literature,” but his intense interest in US-based vernacular musics, what eventually would become his livelihood and legacy, began before he crossed the Atlantic.\footnote{Ibid.} Strachwitz’s first exposure to US popular music came in the form two 78s his mother returned with from a trip to the US prior to start of the Second World War. By Strachwitz’s recollection the artists were Al Jolson and Stan’s Greening’s Lido Dance Orchestra and the two discs enthralled him as a young child.\footnote{I note that this information is from Strachwitz’s recollection because he is not entirely certain of both artists. Ibid; “Slices from Arhoolie” by Don Snowden, Los Angeles Times, June 30, 1985, box 27, folder 1806, D.K. Wilgus Papers, Southern Folklife Collection.} The Jolson and Greening discs were a far cry from the music Strachwitz heard growing up in Germany. “I was raised in the countryside,” he recalled, “[His parents] listened to Nazi music, war marches, and pop music which was horribly schmaltzy.”\footnote{As quoted in Gurza, 14.} After the war while staying with his uncle in central Germany, Strachwitz “was captivated by the American jazz and swing music that he heard on the Armed forces radio.”\footnote{Garner and Brady.} These initial exposures to US popular music planted a seed in Strachwitz that would soon grow into a lifetime spend searching for and collecting a wide variety of vernacular musics.

Once in the states, Strachwitz’s access to vernacular music, through the radio, recordings, or live performance, expanded exponentially. He first heard live blues performed at an African American nightclub in Reno during the Strachwitzes first summer in the US. He learned of the club on the advice a black gardener would tended to his aunt’s property. “There’s a club here...
right by the railroad station called the Harlem Club,” Strachwitz recalled the gardener, who he recalls only had one-arm but whose name escapes him, “They got a good piano man playing in there. You ought to stop by.”430 At Cate School, an English teacher would play records by Eddie Condon, Jelly Roll Morton, and other jazz records for Strachwitz.431 At Pomona, Frank Demond, a fellow undergraduate later of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, would accompany Strachwitz on five-hour round-trips to Los Angeles for jazz shows at the Beverly Cavern and black gospel singing at the St Paul Baptist Church.432

Radio was also a major outlet in the listening practice of Strachwitz’s young adult years. From his dormitory room at Cate School, he could pick up XERB, a station in Baja, California, and listen to recordings and performances by the Maddox Brothers and Rose, T. Texas Tyler, Roy Acuff, Bob Wills, and other hillbilly acts. At Pomona, Strachwitz would tune into Harlem Matinee, a “race music” show hosted by a white disc jockey, Hunter Hancock, on KFVD in Los Angeles.433 In Berkeley, Strachwitz “tuned in to Cactus Jack’s hillbilly show on KLX, Jumpin’ George Oxford’s popular R&B show in the afternoons on KWBR in Oakland, and later Rockin’ Lucky’s R&B slot on KSAN-AM in San Francisco.”434

Over this period, Strachwitz also became a prodigious record collector. His first purchase came in 1948 while a student at Cate School. At the expense of seventy-nine cents, Strachwitz

430 Quote from Flemons; Garner and Brady.

431 Ibid.

432 Ibid; Gurza, 17.


434 Adam Machado, liner notes to Hear Me Howling!: Blues, Ballads, and Beyond, Arhoolie Records 518A-D, 2010, compact disc, 10.
purchased a piano blues 78 by Hadda Brooks doing “Bully Wully Boogie” with “Down Beat Boogie” on the flipside.\textsuperscript{435} From this first acquisition, Strachwitz’s collection would grow. At Cate, he relished trips into town where a specialty jazz shop “carried the obscure American Music Records label, with music from New Orleans artists like trumpeters Louis “Kid Shots” Madison...and Will Gary “Bunk” Johnson.”\textsuperscript{436} In Berkeley, Strachwitz made regular stops at a number of recordings retailers in the Bay Area from Melrose Music Shop, Jack’s Record Cellar, and Mellander’s in San Francisco, and Wolf’s in Oakland.\textsuperscript{437} By this time, Strachwitz had also began searching for 78s from more secondary and tertiary sources. Like Harry Smith, Strachwitz combed through junk shops as well as jukebox operators, who in the late forties and early fifties were reformatting operations to 7-inch 45rpm microgroove technology, selling off their 78 supplies at discount rates.\textsuperscript{438} Strachwitz also found himself involved in a network of other collectors like locals Bob Pinson and Archie Green, and later, Samuel Charters, author of the first monograph on prewar acoustic blues recordings, \textit{The Country Blues}.\textsuperscript{439}

\textbf{Arhoolie Records and the Folk Revival Economy}

From Chris Strachwitz’s insatiable desire to track down arcane 78rpm recordings and interest in contemporary artists modeling their performances on the same styles and techniques captured on those recordings would grow Arhoolie Records, the blues and folk revival label

\textsuperscript{435} Gurza, 16.

\textsuperscript{436} Garner and Brady.

\textsuperscript{437} Machado, 11.

\textsuperscript{438} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{439} Ibid; Flemons; Samuel Charters, \textit{The Country Blues} (New York: De Capo Press, 1975; 1959).
launched out of his apartment in November 1960.\textsuperscript{440} Earlier that year, Strachwitz set out for Texas and other parts of the US south to conduct preliminary research in advance of a BBC program on Texas blues musicians to be produced by Paul Oliver, a British blues scholar. Oliver has supplied Strachwitz with a list of artists the blues scholar hoped to locate. Strachwitz, who had taken a teaching job at Los Gatos High School about an hour south of San Francisco, planned his summer break around the venture, travelling in an old laundry truck specifically to store the thousands of 78s he would purchase along the way as well as a his Wollensack recorder to document the performances he would encounter.\textsuperscript{441} The fruits of that journey would include recordings of Mel “Lil” Son” Jackson formerly of the Gold Star and Imperial labels, Black Ace whose performances had previously appeared on the Decca label, and Mance Lipscomb, a self-taught and previously unrecorded sharecropper from Navasota, Texas. The latter of this trio of recordings would form the contents of the first Arhoolie release, \textit{Mance Lipscomb: Texas Sharecropper and Songster}.\textsuperscript{442}

What began as a single LP, pressed modestly at two-hundred-fifty copies, and assembled-by-hand at a kitchen table would transform into a veritable “roots”-oriented empire over the course of its now nearly six decades in operation. In addition to issuing hundreds of releases in a variety of “traditional” styles and genres from jazz, to norteño, to western swing on all manner of playback format including cassettes, compact discs, and streaming services, Arhoolie expanded into several offshoot ventures including subsidiary labels, a wholesale distribution company, a brick-and-mortar record shop, and, eventually, the Arhoolie Foundation,

\textsuperscript{440} Gurza, 19-20; Garner and Brady; Wald, 3.

\textsuperscript{441} Garner and Brady; Machado, 12.

\textsuperscript{442} Garner and Brady; Machado, 12; Mack McCormick, liner notes to Mance Lipscomb, \textit{Texas Sharecropper and Songster}, Arhoolie Records F001, 1960, LP.
a nonprofit enterprise currently dedicated to the digitization of the Strachwitz’s vast Mexican and Mexican American recordings collection to be stored and preserved at the Frontera Collection at the University of California at Los Angeles. To paint Arhoolie’s success as either a stroke of good luck or, its converse, the organic maturation of a revival and reissue label as it continues to produce releases, downplays Strachwitz’s role as a relatively savvy businessperson.

For starters, Strachwitz knew his audience. Like other reissue labels of the period like Origin Jazz Library, County Records, and Yazoo, Strachwitz modeled Arhoolie on Folkways Records of Harry Smith’s Anthology fame. A goal of Arhoolie was to preserve and promote “traditional” vernacular musics, and Strachwitz “hoped [the label] would capitalize on Folkways’ burgeoning folk music movement at the time.” As a commercial entity of the folk revival, Arhoolie mimicked Folkways in both design and material construction. Utilizing Folkways’ signature paste-on label strategy, Strachwitz and Arhoolie graphic designer, Wayne Pope, sat at a kitchen table gluing Mance Lipscomb LP covers onto black outer-sleeves, complete with the label only wrapping around a quarter of the back of the jacket.

Likewise, the package is completed with notes authored by folklorist and record collector Mack McCormick. Like the LP’s title Texas Sharecropper and Songster, which identifies several key aspects of Lipscomb as a person and a musician — that he’s southern, rural, and a laborer, and that his performance style is vernacular — McCormick’s notes expand upon these established thematics. In the liners the reader is provided a concise history of African American vernacular performance practices to which McCormick argues are “obscured” by commercial phonograph records because the recordings isolate the performer, removing the social function of

443 Gurza, 7-11.

444 Quote from Garner and Brady.
these musics, such as group singing and dancing. From there, McCormick moves to properly authenticate Lipscomb as a rural (read, remote or isolated) and heretofore unknown (read, to a folk revival audience) purveyor of those musical traditions lost on earlier commercial recordings, or as McCormick states, “a songster undiminished by age or the onslaught of industrial music.” The presentation of the notes, much like the entirety of the LP package, positions its musical contents as distinct from commercial enterprise. The Arhoolie release is to be understood in the context of academic folklore, as a work of rich, cultural significance. The introductory nature of both the title and McCormick’s notes also clearly position the LP’s audience outside the population of Navasota familiar with Lipscomb and toward a folk revival community demographically whiter, more urban, and more affluent.

In accordance with the material and textual elements of Arhoolie releases, Strachwitz also utilized recording techniques that easily identified the label’s output within the realm of “roots”-based musics. Strachwitz’s preferred method of recording for Arhoolie release involves positioning a microphone or two in the general vicinity of a musician or group and capturing the performance as it is delivered in real time. Eschewing modern studios and multi-track consoles allowing recording engineers to layer individual performances in sync with each other, Strachwitz opts instead for a “live” recording strategy. Or, as Strachwitz proudly states, “My stuff isn’t produced. I just catch it as it is.” To be clear, though, Strachwitz’s “catch it as it is” philosophy is, itself, a production technique. Furthermore, a “live” recording strategy produces its own sonic aesthetic replete with specific signifiers and pointed associations. As opposed to

445 McCormick, 1.

446 Garner and Brady.

the manufactured or “produced” sound of modern or, in McCormick’s words, “industrial” music, “live” recording evinces a more “natural,” “raw,” or “organic” sound, qualifiers used to attest to the “authenticity” of early blues of hillbilly performances. In effect, Strachwitz’s recording technique works as a sonic nod to the prewar records treasured by revivalists and collectors alike when live mic’d single-track recording was the industry standard.

In addition to identifying an interested and paying audience for a Lipscomb and future Arhoolie artists — and presenting their performances in material and sonic aesthetics pleasing to those demographics — Strachwitz also developed several lucrative side businesses to prop-up a less-profitable folkloric recordings industry. Preceding Arhoolie, Strachwitz’s first line of business was in exporting contemporary blues recordings to fans and collectors in Europe. The International Blues Record Club, founded by Strachwitz while still a college student, functioned as a mail-order subscription service wherein European participants received a selection of new blues recordings upon release from US labels. As curator, Strachwitz utilized his skill as a tastemaker in the international blues collector scene, advertising his service in promotional spots in British publications like Vintage Jazz Mart. Additionally, Strachwitz would auction off rare discs, both duplicates from his own collection and discards he acquired on his many record buying outings, through similar channels in order to buoy his fledgling label in its early days.

Strachwitz’s most successful side project in the opening years of the Arhoolie label came with his knowledge of music publishing rights. Strachwitz had learned the value of copyright

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449 Garner and Brady.

450 Guznar, 17-18.
from friend and mentor Ed Schuler, owner of Goldband Records, an older, established small-scale Cajun label based in Lake Charles, Louisiana. The information Schuler provided Strachwitz became unexpectedly useful to the Arhoolie labelhead following an impromptu recording session arranged by a friend, Ed Denson, with a band Strachwitz described as “this motley crew of shaggy looking characters.” Denson wanted Strachwitz to make a tape of some anti-war songs the “motley crew” had written in advance of a peace march planned for the Bay Area. Reluctantly, Strachwitz agreed to the job despite needing to make preparations to leave the following day for a European tour with Lightnin’ Hopkins. That afternoon Denson and the band of “hippies” arrived at his Berkeley apartment and Strachwitz hung a solitary multidirectional microphone from a ceiling lamp in the center of his living room, quickly committing a few tracks to tape. As they were packing up to leave, asked Strachwitz what they owed him for his services. Not expecting to be paid for his work, Strachwitz said, “You don’t owe me nothing,” but then offhandedly remarked, “Let me be your publisher.”

Strachwitz’s offhand comment would turn out to be quite fortuitous. One of the songs recorded that day was “Fixin’ to Die Rag,” and when that “motley crew,” Country Joe McDonald and the Fish, were featured performing the tune in the 1970 documentary Woodstock, Strachwitz became heir to an unexpected windfall of cash. The first publishing check to arrive after the film premiered came in at $70,000. Strachwitz split half the earnings with the group, using his $35,000 to put a downpayment on a building in El Cerrito, California, just north of Berkeley, which became home to Down Home Music, the retail face of Arhoolie Records as well as a warehouse to serve the label’s needs, store his growing record collection, and as

451 As quoted in Wald; This Ain’t No Mouse Music: The Story of Chris Strachwitz and Arhoolie Records.

452 Ibid.
headquarters for a wholesale distributor of like-minded folkloric music labels. The publishing rights, a significant source of revenue on its own, became the seed money to grow different wings of his Arhoolie enterprise, securing the label’s long-term trajectory.

**Texas-Mexican Border Music & the Turn Toward Ethnicity**

In 1973, Strachwitz, relatively flush with cash given the continued success of the Country Joe McDonald anti-war anthem he had inadvertently claimed copyright over, published the second issue of the *Arhoolie Occasional*, a full-fledged newspaper, pressed on newsprint and all, covering the ongoings of the label and its increasing number of offshoots. Headlining issue number two, front and center, and above the fold, read the news: “Folklyric Label to be Reactivated.”

Folklyric, or rather, Folk-Lyric Records, as the name was hyphenated in its original incarnation, was the concern of Harry Oster, an English professor at Louisiana State University and, later, the University of Iowa. Oster first became involved in the vernacular recordings business following a research grant he received in 1956 from the graduate college at Louisiana State University to record the region’s folk musics. Pleased with the selection of French ballads, Cajun dance tunes, Afro-Cajun blues, and Afro-French spirituals he acquired, Oster elected to self-release an LP of the material under the title *A Sampler of Louisiana Folksongs*, issued in 1957. This eventually led to two additional LPs of Louisiana folk traditions as well as two discs of material Oster recorded with incarcerated African Americans at Angola.

453 Ibid; *This Ain’t No Mouse Music: The Story of Chris Strachwitz and Arhoolie Records*.

454 Ibid.

455 “Folklyric Label to be Reactivated,” *Arhoolie Occasional* 2 (1973), 1, folder 397, box ??, discographical files, Southern Folklife Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
State Prison, all produced in conjunction with the Louisiana Folklore Society. Encouraged by the positive reviews his compilations received in national periodicals like the *New York Times* and *Time*, and somewhat irritated that his discs came out on the Louisiana Folklore Society label even though he fronted all the money, Oyster decided to drop the society’s moniker in favor his newly-minted Folk-Lyric label in 1959.\(^{456}\)

Over the next four years, Folk-Lyric would quickly grow to release at least twenty-eight distinct compilations, including those Louisiana Folklore Society LPs rebranded with Folk-Lyric disc labels. A Folk-Lyric catalog categorized the label’s releases under a variety of genres including “Negro,” “Southern White,” “Louisiana Collections,” and “English, Scottish, and Irish,” a range relatively similar to the parameters of US vernacular musics defined in the Smith anthology. Perhaps only the disc of Irish folk songs performed by Dominic Behan and the collection of urban barrelhouse piano tunes titled *Primitive Piano* deviate at all from Smith’s Americana.\(^{457}\) In 1963, Oster was offered a job teaching folklore at the University of Iowa. Given his teaching load, and that it was in a field that more closely aligned with his interests as opposed the English courses he proctored at Louisiana State University, Oster lost the drive to continue producing Folk-Lyric LPs. In 1970, Strachwitz absorbed Folk-Lyric into the Arhoolie fold, purchasing the remaining backstock in addition to pressing some issued and unissued Folk-Lyric material on Arhoolie proper.\(^{458}\)

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\(^{456}\) Harry Oster, “The Evolution of Folk-Lyric Records,” *JEMF Quarterly* 51 (Fall 1978), 148-149.

\(^{457}\) Ibid, 149; *Folk-Lyric Records* catalogue, undated, folder 397, Collection 30014, Discographical Files, 1907-2006, Southern Folklife Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

\(^{458}\) Oster, 149.
The Folklyric label Strachwitz announced in 1973 would be a different label entirely. Rebranded minus a hyphen, Arhoolie’s Folklyric Records would be a subsidiary label dedicated to the reissue of pre- and early postwar “foreign-language” recordings from Strachwitz’s ever expanding record collection. At this point, Arhoolie already had several subsidiaries under its umbrella. By 1965, Strachwitz had launched both Blues Classics and Old Timey imprints. Whereas Arhoolie properly primarily focused on new recordings of contemporary purveyors of vernacular musics understood to be traditional, Blues Classics charge was the reissue of prewar acoustic blues, in forms both “rural” and “urban.” Old Timey culled its material from Strachwitz’s archive of prewar hillbilly recordings.\(^{459}\)

As 1960s reissue imprints, Blues Classics and Old Timey joined a small cadre of other prewar reissue labels focused on either early blues or country recordings. Blues Classics had Origin Jazz Classics and Document among its category, while Old Timey shared aesthetics with County and Old Homestead. Labels like Yazoo, of course, cut across both racial categories.\(^{460}\) In the 1970s, Arhoolie’s Folklyric Records would find common cause with Richard Spottswood’s *Folk Music in America* series and his contributions to New World Records’ *Recorded Anthology of American Music* detailed in chapter three displaying an interest in a more expansive range of prewar vernacular musics. In rebranding “foreign-language” recordings as “ethnic series” issues, Folklyric resonates with the broader turn toward ethnicity in the 1970s.

Over the decade and into the 1980s, Strachwitz produced a variety of compilations for Folklyric each centered around a particular “foreign-language” catalogue including Polish series,

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\(^{459}\) Arhoolie Records catalog, summer 1965, folder 61, Collection 30014, Discographical Files, 1907-2006, Southern Folklife Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Ukrainian series, Irish series, Hawaiian series, Greek series, Bohemian series, and Italian series recordings. Chief among Folklyric’s concerns, though, was Mexican series issues. Compiled into the Texas-Mexican Border Music series, stretched pre- and early postwar Mexican series recordings across twenty-four separate LPs showcases an array of performances, performers, musical forms, and performance styles. At two dozen volumes, the Texas-Mexican Border Music series dwarfs Folklyric’ other “ethnic series” compilation categories, none of which ever reached past a second volume. Working with Strachwitz’s expansive Mexican series record collection in cooperation with several folklorists and ethnic studies academics, the Texas-Mexican Border Music series established Folklyric as the preeminent reissue label interested in the preservation of historical Mexican and Mexican American vernacular recordings.

The organizational structure of the Texas-Mexican Border Music series (the TMBM series) breaks down as detailed in Table VI.

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<tr>
<th>VOL</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PRODUCTION</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
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• Notes by Chris Strachwitz | 1974 |
| 2   | Corridos, Part 1: 1930-1934 | • Edited by Chris Strachwitz  
• Notes by Philip Sonnichsen | 1974 |
| 3   | Corridos, Part 2: 1929-1936 | • Edited by Chris Strachwitz  
• Notes by Philip Sonnichsen | 1974 |
| 4   | Norteño Acordeon, Part 1: The First Recordings | • Edited by Chris Strachwitz  
• Notes by Ry Cooder & Chris Strachwitz | 1975 |
| 5   | The String Bands: End of a Tradition | • Edited by Chris Strachwitz  
• Notes by Chris Strachwitz | 1976 |
| 6   | Cancioneros De Ayer - Part 1 (Songsters from the Past 1920’s/1930’s) | • Edited by Chris Strachwitz  
& Guillermo Hernández | 1977 |


462 Ibid.
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In totality, the TMBM series showcases a range of sequencing strategies. The set includes single-artist compilations including two discs of Lydia Mendoza’s early recordings both with her family and as a solo artist, as well as group-based LPs like volumes eighteen and nineteen featuring Los Madrugadores and Los Hermanos Chavarria, respectively. The multi-artist compilations are arranged through various taxonomies. *Corridos Parts 1 and 2* and the four volumes titled *Canciones De Ayer* represent structures based on song form. *Norteño Acordeon Parts 1 and 2* and *The String Bands* focus on instrumentation as well as genre. Additionally, the series hosts topical compilation documents historical and cultural phenomena like *The Mexican Revolution* and *The Chicano Experience*.

As a sustained project, the twenty-four volumes of the TMBM series were released over at least an eleven-year span. The majority of the set appears to have been released in waves between 1974 and the mid-1980s. The first wave occurred at the project’s onset with first three volumes of the series appearing in the first year. The biggest and most consequential wave took place between 1977 and 1978, which saw the release of eight volumes of the TMBM series including all four installments of *Canciones De Ayer* and parts two and three of *Norteño Acordeon*. After the second wave of releases, information currently available regarding years of release is more scattered. Volumes fourteen through sixteen are housed in gatefold jackets of

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463 At the time of writing, archival files for Folklyric Records are currently in transit to the Smithsonian Folkways Archive Center in Washington, D.C. alongside the rest of the Arhoolie collection. Once those items have been received, processed, and opened to research, some basic details related to release date and year will be more easily accessible. As it stands, my release dates are speculative, based on comparative material analysis and catalog number sequence.
similar quality, suggesting they were released around the same period. Volumes seventeen through nineteen are housed in single-sleeves, decidedly slimmer than the single-sleeved volumes pressed earlier in the series, suggesting a release date at or around 1985, the year given for the only dated volume in that grouping. Finally, the last volume, no. twenty-four, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto* was released in conjunction with a book of the same name by Manuel Peña, published by the University of Texas Press, giving it a release date of 1985, which suggests the last eight volumes of the set appeared around the mid-1980s.464

Though the set appeared in various installments over its eleven-year run, the disparate volumes are tied together by their uniform graphic design, courtesy of Arhoolie in-house graphic designer Wayne Pope.465 Pope’s motif for the *TMBM* series negotiates the dynamic between image and text with significance deference to image. Cover text appears mostly in the top header of the layout. For most volumes, the only text below the header is a Folklyric logo printed in diminutive scale in the bottom right or left corner. The focus of the design is image, generally a historical picture, often of Mexican or Mexican American musicians staged for performance and printed in a grey scale that is accented by a bright, deep solid color painting the background. Each volume identified by a singular shade of orange, red, brown, yellow, green, or blue. Tied together by a consistent font displaying the *TMBM* series name, signature to the series itself, Pope’s design provides continuity for the decade-plus long project.

**Hearing Texas-Mexican Border Music Through Strachwitz’s Ears**

Chris Strachwitz had help compiling and annotating the *TMBM* series. Early on Phillip Sonnichsen, a white folklorist, provided his knowledge of Mexican corridos, or narrative ballads

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465 Garner and Brady.
Later on, Guillermo Hernández, a Spanish professor at the University of California at Los Angeles, authored notes for the four-volume *Canciones Del Ayer* set and served as both compilation editor and annotator for *The Mexican Revolution*, a 4-LP boxed set that serves as volumes twenty through twenty-three of the *TMBM* series. Despite the significant contributions of Sonnichsen, Hernández, and others whose names grace the credits on the set, the *TMBM* series does really begin and end with Chris Strachwitz. The recordings on all but the final volume were sourced from Strachwitz’s personal collection. As editor for the majority of *TMBM* releases and Folklyric label head, the set is shaped in many ways by Strachwitz’s relation to the material. As such, understanding what Strachwitz heard in Mexican and Mexican American pre- and early postwar recording and what value he made of them become significant factors in assessing the construction of the set.

Strachwitz recalls his first exposure to Mexican vernacular music over the same airwaves that brought hillbilly music into his dormitory room at Cate School in the late 1940s. XERB, the border station headquartered in Baja, California that brought the vocal harmonies, string bass and fiddles of early country acts like Maddox Bros. and Rose, also introduced him to mariachi and ranchera music of Mexican and Mexican American performers. After high school, during one

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468 *Texas-Mexican Border Music, Vol 24 - The Texas-Mexican Conjunto* (Folklyric 9049, 1985, LP) was edited and annotated by Manuel H. Peña in conjunction with an academic monograph of the same name. As such, and because Chris Strachwitz is not credited with providing the source material, it is assumed Peña or the affiliated Chicano Research Center at Fresno State University sourced the collection.

469 Derrough; Flemons; Chris Strachwitz, interview with the author, March 10, 2017.
of his many weekend trips to Los Angeles from Pomona College to attend R&B and gospel shows, Strachwitz passed, in his words, the “Mexican dives on Main St.” Walking into one of those “dives,” he described the scene there: “People were dancing and there was a conjunto playing in the middle of the whole scene, you know, just accordion, bajo sexto, drums, and string bass, and I just thought: this is the most delightful music.”\(^{470}\) Strachwitz also recalls hearing “La Cucaracha,” the popular conjunto recording on Bluebird Records, playing on the radio during southwestern and southern research and record collecting trips. “I heard it every time I drove through South Texas, San Antonio, and so forth...I was fascinated.”\(^ {471}\) These initial encounters with Mexican vernacular musics led Strachwitz to expand his record collecting habits to include pre- and postwar 78s identified as “Mexican” on the label, eventually assembling “what is believed to be the largest private collection of Mexican-American and Mexican music” in the world.\(^ {472}\)

The manner in which Strachwitz encountered Mexican vernacular musics, as an established collector of white working-class and black working-class vernacular musics largely of the southeastern US, resonates in what he heard in them. “[Mexican] music had the same appeal to me that the hillbilly music did,” he told the New York Times in 2010, “This soulful country sound and a lot of duet singing. And this weird mixture of string music with the trumpet filling in almost like a jazz musician, which I thought was just gorgeous. And the accordions!”\(^{473}\) Strachwitz expanded on this idea:

\(^{470}\) Flemons.

\(^{471}\) Ibid.


206
There’s a certain aura, or feeling that I can’t describe, in all those musical genres. I mean, I heard it in the blues. I heard it in hillbilly duet singing. And I heard that kind of soulfulness in these [Mexican] duetos. … I never thought if it was artistic or not, I just loved it. God, it had this sound, and the way these two voices blend together. To me, that’s the most soulful stuff I’ve heard. It’s sort of a common rural quality that I felt. And I just love it.⁴⁷⁴

Rhetorically, Strachwitz positions Mexican vernacular musics in close sonic relation to musics of established favor to other collectors, revivalists, and “roots” music enthusiasts. In the canciones, corridos, and dance music of norteño, Strachwitz hears “soulfulness” and rurality. There are elements of jazz and the accordions of Cajun recordings. Mexican duetos sound “country.” In describing the appealing qualities of Mexican and Mexican American vernacular musics, Strachwitz borrows from the same vocabulary used to valorize other, more common forms of vernacular musical production to the US collector and “roots” communities, placing Mexican vernacular music performance adjacent to the genres of Americana.

Strachwitz’s listening ear extends to the construction of the TMBM series. In brief remarks printed on the back of the jacket for volume 2, Corridos, Part 1: 1930-1934, under the header “Editor’s Note,” Strachwitz introduces the Mexican corrido, or narrative ballad often documenting significant historical events, to presumably unfamiliar listeners as “the literature of the poor.” In explaining his criteria for selection, Strachwitz states, “I chose recordings by artists who I felt to be representative of the rural tradition in contrasts to the trained, urban, middle-class singers. Last but not least the recordings were selected from the period of 1929 to 1935 which I like to call the “Golden Age of the Recorded Corrido!”⁴⁷⁵ In his “Editor’s Note,” Strachwitz

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⁴⁷⁴ As quoted in Gurza, 18-19.

effectively authenticates the recorded corridos on volumes two and three of *TMBM* series as properly prewar and distinctly working-class and rural.

By 1974, the practice of attributing authenticity both to prewar recording techniques and to performance styles understood to originate from rural areas was itself a long-standing tradition in record collecting and “roots” music circles. Strachwitz’s “Golden Age of the Recorded Corrido,” of course, lines up fairly succinctly with the period Harry Smith identified in handbook for the *Anthology of American Folk Music* of 1928 to 1932 before popular culture “tended to integrate the local types.” In *The Country Blues*, the first published history of acoustic blues music published in 1959, Samuel Charters, himself a collector and close friend to Strachwitz, describes the distinctions between urban blues and rural blues performance. Urban blues, to Charter’s ears was “slick,” performed by “young girls who were vaudeville entertainers,” and “composed by New York writers.” “It was city music,” to Charters’ ears, and it lacked relation to the southeastern US. Country blues, on the other hand, “were generally sung by men accompanying themselves on guitar.” In the solo vocal and guitar performance of country blues, Charter’s heard “an intense individual expression of the deepest strains of Negro music in the South.” Though volume two’s “Editor’s Note” is less burdened with the the blatant misogyny of Charters’ writing, Strachwitz still describes the value of Mexican and Mexican-American corridos in a way that valorizes the individuality, and to a certain extent, masculinity attributed to their composition and performance. In effect, Strachwitz translates the “foreign” corrido to the “familiar” palate of the prewar country, blues, and Cajun listener.

476 Smith, liner notes for *Anthology of American Folk Music*, Folkways FA 2951/3, 1952, six LPs, 1.

477 Charters, 46-49.
Beyond rhetoric, the listening experience of the TMBM series is also framed around the relation of Mexican and Mexican American vernacular musics to the established vernacular canon. Fourteen of the twenty-four discs in the set feature performances comprised only of vocals and guitars. The vocal harmonies, which Strachwitz heard as reminiscent of hillbilly performance, are consistent across these twelve volumes. Corridos, in particular, which are showcased not only on the two volumes named for the narrative ballads, but also on all four LPs of The Mexican Revolution boxed set and much of the discd dedicated to Los Hermanos Chavarria recordings, evince resonances of both hillbilly and early blues styles. The term corrido, a derivative of the verb for “to flow” in Spanish, are composed in strophic form with each subsequent stanza runs into the next without the linkages of a chorus or bridge. Strophic composition, of course, was popular in prewar hillbilly performance as it affects, for lack of better terminology, “old timey” sensibilities. Likewise, the thumb-brush guitar playing on of corrido performance is mostly indistinguishable from The Carter Family, famous for the style of play.

Pedro Rocha and Lupe Martinez, a prewar Mexican series duo of guitars and vocals who Strachwitz describes in his liner notes as the “first and most interesting corridistas” of San Antonio, appear a told of seventeen times on the TMBM series, including the introductory first volume, both Corridos discs, all four Canciones de Ayer volumes, and The Mexican Revolution boxed set. The thumb-brush playing of Rocha and Martinez on all seventeen performances, though, is distinguished by detuned strings and a fairly loose approach to rhythm. Despite these

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seeming flaws, Rocha and Martinez were awarded the lead track on *Corridos, Part One* and the first three volumes of *Cancioneros de Ayer*, as well as the closing slot on the latter series fourth volume, suggesting that their imprecision was heard by Strachwitz in the same way as idiosyncrasies on acoustic blues and hillbilly recordings, as “rough,” “raw,” and “authentic.”

In addition to the fourteen volumes of guitars-and-vocals performances, the single-artist compilation of El Ciego Melquiades features instrumentals of “The Blind Fiddler” accompanied by either guitar or bajo sexto, itself a twelve-string guitar. Violins are prominent on the volume dedicated to prewar Mexican series string bands, an ensemble style popular in Mexican and Mexican American vernacular performance prior to the incorporation of accordions. Finally, the two volumes of recordings featuring Lydia Mendoza combine Mendoza family string band performances with sessions cut by the famous Mendoza solo on guitar and vocals.480

The accordion, of course, is the other major instrument of note on the *TMBM* series. As suggested earlier, the button accordion replaced the violin in Mexican and Mexican American vernacular performance beginning in the 1930s, as such it became central to the development of norteño music.481 Accordions, of course, were staples in Cajun ensembles of French Louisiana, a performance style heard as Americana as early as Harry Smith’s famed anthology.482 On the *TMBM* series, accordions are the distinguishing feature of four separate volumes, including a single-artist compilation of Narciso Martinez, a popular prewar Mexican series button

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accordionist, backed only by bajo sexto. In many ways, the Martinez volume is a counterpoint to
El Ciego Melquiades violin-and-bajo-sexto-or-guitar volume. The other major accordion affair
is the three part Norteño Acordeon set occupying volumes four, twelve, and thirteen. Like the
string band ensembles of volume five, the accordion-centric ensembles are rounded out by string
bass and guitar or bajo sexto. Of significance, both parts two and three of the Norteño Acordeon
series, which feature postwar recordings from the 1940s and 1950s, are decorated by cover
photos of norteño bands featuring saxophonists, but no saxophones are heard on any of the
recordings on either volume.

Across its twenty-four LPs, Chris Strachwitz keeps the sonic palette of the TMBM series
remarkably consistent. With the exception of a handful of conjuntos including drums at the end
of side two of the twenty-fourth volume and the inexplicable last track of The Chicano
Experience by Los Hermanos Barrón y conjunto, recorded around 1973 and featuring electric
organ flourishes—both volumes, it should be noted, were not edited by Strachwitz—the
instrumentation and, to varying extents, song structures of the pre- and early postwar Mexican
series recordings selected for inclusion follow many of the same parameters established by the
national vernacular imaginary. The similarities between Mexican series recordings and their
hillbilly, blues, and Cajun contemporaries make the distinctions of the Mexican and Mexican
American vernacular performance all the more significant.

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483 Narciso Martinez, Texas-Mexican Border Music, Vol. 10 - Narciso Martinez (“El Huracan del Valle” His First
Recordings, 1936-1937), Folklyric 9017, 1977, LP.

9019, 1978, LP; Texas-Mexican Border Music, Vol. 13 - Norteño Acordeon, Part 3: South Texas and Monterrey,
N.L., The 1940’s and 50’s, Folklyric 9020, 1978, LP.

485 Texas-Mexican Border Music, Vol 24 - The Texas-Mexican Conjunto, Folklyric 9049, 1985, LP; Texas-Mexican
Even amidst the pluralism of 1970s US cultural nationalism, Mexican Americans cultural productions largely remained adjacent to, if not outside of, the national fold. The *TMBM* series arrived at time when eastern and southern European immigration to US, contracted from restrictions set forth by the Johnson-Reed Act, had dwindled to pre-Great Wave numbers while Mexican immigration into the US expanded dramatically. The stabilization of eastern and southern European immigration beginning in 1924, and its eventual decline 1970, in part allowed for the white racialization of eastern and southern European heritage in the US polity. The expansive growth of the Mexican American population, alongside the perceived illegality of that population within US borders, racialized Mexican heritage as separate and distinct from whiteness. These dynamics—the racial logics of citizenship—are borne out in the *TMBM* series as well as the broader reissue economy of the period.

Central to these dynamics was the issue of language: Mexican series recordings were sung in Spanish. The rise of Mexican immigration to the US at the time of the *TMBM* series coincided with a not incidental social panic regarding the public address of the Spanish language within the US. The audibility of Spanish offended broader, whiter, English-speaking US publics. Dolores Inés Casillas reports that in at least one public radio station in Ohio denied access to Spanish-language programming because the programs could not properly be screened for content, suggesting a broader sense of distrust of both Spanish and the Spanish-language speaker. Southern and eastern European series recordings were also sung in languages other than English, but by the 1970s, the prevalence of Slavic and Hellenic languages in the public square had diminished. The historical recordings of Spanish-language lyrics on Mexican series

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486 Jimenez, 7.

recordings held a contemporary and contested audiopolitics at the time of the *TMBM* series, making their audition suspect at best.

Mexican American precarity in the US nation also manifests in the taxonomy of the *TMBM* series. The parlance “Texas-Mexican” grammatically situates the music of the *TMBM* series more authoritatively on the southern side of the US-Mexico border; “Texas,” in this read, modifies the dominant “Mexican.” Even the converse reading arguing for the primacy of “Texas” in the parlance, posits Mexican Americans as only regional subjects of the nation. This, of course, stands in contrast to the other prewar “ethnic series” compilations released on Folklyric. The vernacular musics of European immigrant and ethnic musicians appear on Strachwitz-edited LPs under then-contemporary hyphenated American headers. Irish series discs form the contents of *Irish-American Dance Music and Songs* (Folklyric 9010, 1977). Ukrainian series recordings resurface on a two-volume series entitled *Ukrainian-American Fiddle and Dance Tunes* (Folklyric 9015, 1977). Polish series waltzes, polkas, and obereks are revised as *Polish-American Dance Music* (Folklyric 9026, 1979).

The significance of this phenomenon is only compounded considering that some of the rhythmic distictions on the *TMBM* series distinguishing Mexican series recordings from hillbilly, blues, and Cajun musics are shared by the hyphenated American musics of eastern European immigrants. El Ciego Melquiades, for instance, performs a series of polkas and waltzes on fiddle backed by acoustic guitar. The compilation is, in many ways, the perfect marriage of the aesthetics between the established national vernacular imaginary and the hyphenated American musics retroactively enveloped into the canon at the Bicentennial moment. Political, social, and cultural forces, though, position El Ciego Melquiades and the rest of the Mexican series

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recordings on the periphery of both nations, the undefined geographical and theoretical landscape of the borderlands.

This, of course, was not the doing of Chris Strachwitz alone. As evidenced by the Jose Mórante quote that opens this chapter, “Texas-Mexican” was the standard terminology of the period. Likewise, “Polish-American,” Ukrainian-American” and “Irish-American” were common parlance as well.\textsuperscript{489} The compilations pressed by Folklyric Records resonate with the thinking of the time. The quotidian nature of these taxonomic distinctions amplifies the casual, yet significant manner in which full, contingent, and tangential cultural citizenships were distinguished during the period.

\textbf{The Women of \textit{Texas-Mexican Border Music}}

The role of women on the \textit{TMBM} series distinguishes the set from other compilations of domestically produced prewar recordings in ways less directly linked to the US nation or the national imaginary. \textit{The First Women Duets (Los Primeros Duetos Femininas)}, the seventeenth \textit{TMBM} entry, alongside the two volumes of early recordings by Lydia Mendoza comprise the extent of female performance on the twenty-four volume series. That three LPs dedicated to female performance—two of which for one woman— is noteworthy speaks more to the unarguable dearth of women on both Smith’s \textit{Anthology of American Folk Music} and Spottswood’s \textit{Folk Music in America}, not to mention reissue labels focusing on prewar material. These entries also come late into the \textit{TMBM} with the \textit{The First Women Duets} not arriving until 1983, nearly a decade into the project.\textsuperscript{490} Still, the significance of female-centered reissue material on the \textit{TMBM} series should not go unstated, as both the content and presentation of

\textsuperscript{489} Chris Strachwitz, interview with the author, March 10, 2017.

\textsuperscript{490} \textit{Texas-Mexican Border Music, Vol. 17 - The First Female Duets (Los Primeros Duetos Femininas)}, Folklyric 9035, 1983, LP.
Lydia Mendoza, Hermanas Padillas, Trio Garnica, and the other female performers of volumes fifteen through seventeen highlight the gender politics at play in an obvious silence in the broader reissue economy and the source material provided by the prewar market.

Part One: First Recordings, 1928-1938, the first LP of material performed by Lydia Mendoza, opens with “Mal Hombre,” a haunting canción recorded in 1934 about a “cold-hearted man” who wrongs the song’s female narrator, leaving her to “suffer[] the harshness and cruelty of the world” alone.491 “Mal Hombre” is early evidence of the qualities that would make Lydia Mendoza a household name by the time the TMBM series would launch; it is also an anomaly on the set. “Mal Hombre” is the only the song composed from a woman’s perspective performed by Mendoza. Certainly, there are performances where the gender is left ambiguous like “El Lirio” where the object of the narrator’s desire is only referred to with an androgynous “you,” but more common are songs like “Sique Adelante” about an “unfortunate” and “false” woman who failed to appreciate to affection of the jilted, masculine narrator.492 This trend continues on the The First Women Duets, with examples like Las Hermanas Huerta’s performance of the traditional tune “El Cigarrillo” about a cigarette-smoking man resentful of an “ungrateful woman” he longs to “poison” because she would not marry him.493 Women are heard on volumes fifteen through seventeen of the TMBM series but in so much as they give voice to male narrators, often misogynists.


492 Ibid.

This issue is mitigated to some degree in the liner notes, which for volumes fifteen and sixteen are penned by Mendoza herself. On *The First Women Duets*, the notes are attributed to Philip Sonnichsen but are largely comprised of long block quotes taken from interviews with Lydia, Juanita, and Maria Mendoza and Margarita Padilla, all featured on the compilation. Mendoza’s notes are mostly cursory, though, quickly telling the story of her family’s journey to their first recording session in 1928 (detailed in chapter one) and her steady rise to fame as a solo artist in more or less than a few hundred words.\(^{494}\) The notes arranged by Sonnichsen are far more detailed and expansive, aided by the sixteen page booklet they printed on. Included are additional anecdotes about Mendoza family performances and recording sessions. Las Hermanas Padillas describe their rise to fame in Mexico as a duo from California and the economics of recording for Columbia Records at $25 a disc in the 1930s.\(^{495}\) The space provided to hear from the women involved in the recordings is refreshing. The novelty of the enterprise, and the fact that so little was known about these performers prior to Sonnichsen’s interviews speak to a broader need to recover information about prewar female performers, a project largely ignored by the reissue music economy.

**Conclusion**

The ambivalent place of the *Texas-Mexican Border Music* series within national boundaries resonates both the migrant imaginaries of Mexican border crossers carving out their own collectivites in disregard for state policy as well as the social, cultural, and political currents that maintained Mexican American adjacency to the US nation. The long history of migration,


\(^{495}\) Philip Sonnichsen, liner notes for *Texas-Mexican Border Music, Vol. 17 - The First Woman Duets (Los Primeros Duetos Femininas)*.
both sanctioned and unsanctioned, seasonal labor cycles, and periodic expulsions, painted
Mexican heritage impermanently within the national imaginary. The sonic cartography of the
TMBM series, as both emanating from in and around the Rio Grande, on one hand rejects the
necessity of the nation-state and, on the other, disavows a fully recognized citizenship in either
polity for the Texas Mexicans on the compilations. Whereas the guiding impulse of the period
pointed towards pluralism, the racial logics of citizenship pushed back against inclusion of ethnic
populations racialized outside whiteness.
CONCLUSION

In a 2015 interview, Jeff Sessions—then a United States senator for the state of Alabama, now the nation’s Attorney General—spoke with Steve Bannon—then head of the alt-right website Breitbart.com prior to his meteoric rise and spectacular fall from President Trump’s inner circle—about his fear of a pan-ethnic, multiracial US society. Session states,

In seven years we’ll have the highest percentage of Americans, non-native born, since the founding of the Republic. Some people think we’ve always had these numbers, and it’s not so, it’s very unusual, it’s a radical change. When the numbers reached about this high in 1924, the president and congress changed the policy, and it slowed down immigration significantly, we then assimilated through 1965 and created really the solid middle class of America, with assimilated immigrants, and it was good for America.496

Sessions’s assessment of the US racial and ethnic landscape of 2015 and his praise for politics of the Johnson-Reed Act—which The Atlantic magazine rightfully characterized as “unqualified”—carries the animus and xenophobia of the 1920s to the contemporary present.497 Sessions’ racist view of immigrants—both historical and presentist—made him an easy ally for the president, who, of course, launched his bid for the office on the claim that Mexican immigrants were criminals and rapists (two accusations, mind you, which have also been levied against President Trump). Donald Trump’s improbable ascendency to the US presidency—alongside the rise of like-minds Richard Spencer, Stephen Miller, Steve Bannon, Jeff Sessions, and the legions of red-capped Make America Great Again voters and Pepe the Frog avis—make it clear that the


497 Ibid.
ethnonationalism which shaped the demographics of the US in the twentieth century did not end with the liberalization of immigration policy in 1965.

I began this project in late 2014 before the current nativist wave had crested, much less risen to a perceptible level beyond outliers like far-right websites and men’s rights subreddits like Redpill. I, of course, knew it was always there. That same hometown I described in the introduction to this dissertation, which celebrated the eastern European ethnic heritage of its residents, also stoked fears of “gang infiltration” in the late-1990s when I was in high school. The gang of concern was the Latin Kings. The impetus for the social panic: low-income housing recently erected in a neighboring town with units being rented to Puerto Rican families new to the area.

In the preface to second edition of *Strangers in the Land*, John Higham describes the persistency of nativist thought in the US; to study nativism, according to Higham, is not to identify beginnings and ends, but to note when the “fever raged” and when it “slackened.” The Trump presidency and the fears of gang violence in my hometown are fevers of varying degrees, each symptomatic of a more consistent “ideological disease” endemic to the modern conception of the nation.\(^{498}\) A central charge of this dissertation was to look, or really, *listen* beyond the fever pitches, to the subtle, steady forces that underpin and link overt nativist recurrences: to find nativism in the everyday.

Sound proves optimal for such an inquiry. As a sensory experience, sound is understood as biological as opposed to cultural. Sound exists in nature, therefore the perception of sound is a natural process. But listening is a learned activity. The sense made from what is heard is deduced relative to prior audition. Listening is a reinforcing process. Taste is a result of this

process. The continuum between favored and unfavored sound, and the critical function of
discerning between the two, is not an innocent act. As such, these judgements carry weight. They
hold power. Marie Thompson argues, “there is much more to noise than unwanted sound, and to
fail to recognize this is to fail to recognize the crucial role noise plays in auditory and in material
culture more generally.” Likewise, Paul Hegarty suggests, “Noise is not the same as noises.
Noises are sounds until further qualification…but noise is already that qualification; it is already
a judgement that noise is occurring.” Although both Thompson and Hegarty write of a binary
between music and noise, their positions stand in the vast sonic space between both extremes.
Thompson’s “crucial role” that sound plays is Hegarty’s “judgement” itself. The process of
defining pleasing or preferred musical sounds and replicating them in future performance is a
powerful act which carries resonances beyond just aesthetics.

Patterns of influence are not organic processes. The through-line between early hillbilly
recordings and contemporary Americana did not occur naturally. Aesthetics carry politics.
Something as innocuous as the tropes of Americana, those audile signifiers that define the
interiors of the genre, are implicated in the cartography of nativism. Harry Smith, Richard
Spottswood, and Chris Strachwitz were not the architects of this phenomenon, but their
productions, the *Anthology of American Folk Music, Folk Music in America*, and *Texas-Mexican
Border Music*, resonate ideologies of nationhood. By definition, national music anthologies
define the boundaries of the audible nation. Smith, Spottswood, and Strachwitz own the title of
anthologist, but their curatorial decisions were informed by broader networks of tastemaking.
Smith’s racial dualism of the *Anthology* is a midcentury construction. Spottswood’s provocations

of pluralism and whiteness-centered multiculturalism are Bicentennial. Strachwitz is not a border theorist, but his collection reflects a border culture.

How the current wave of nativism will pattern influence is a story only tomorrow can tell. With Thomas D. Homen, head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), comparing the actions of mayors presiding over “sancutary cities” to that of the “gang lookout yelling “Police!” and the Attorney General—that same individual who only three years ago heaped praise on the racist law that defines the last major nativist wave—suing the state of California over laws to protect the rights of immigrants, the current administration has made it clear how it imagines the nation. But those brown bodies ICE is rounding, that Sessions is concerned are overtaking the US, and the president’s signature wall is designed to keep out, are part of the nation regardless of how the executive branch imagines it. The Dreamers, those recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (otherwise known by its acronym DACA) policy enacted by President Obama, arrived, as the policy name implies, in childhood. The southern border has been fluid for over a century. This nativism, like the many nativisms before it, is a reaction to the visibility and audibility of difference within the nation. If understanding the audible past has any merit, then attuning our ears to how the sound of the nation through history might help guard against the active silencing of certain sounds and bodies currently in progress.

Marika Papagika passed away on August 2, 1943 in Richmond, New York at the age of fifty-two.\textsuperscript{502} Although she only recorded a handful of times in the year after her session for Columbia Records in 1928, her legacy lives on in the reissue economy. In the 1970s, cultural memory of Papagika became associated rebétika, the urban Greek vernacular form popular in the early 1930s. With songs about gambling, sex, and, most famously, hashish, rebétika is often referred to as “Greek blues.” Like the blues, the genre experienced a late-century revival with reissued recordings appearing most notably on Strachwitz’s Folklyric label.\textsuperscript{503} Papagika’s association with the genres is a bit of a distortion. She only briefly flirted with the style in her career before returning to the syrtas and kleftikos that made her a sensation with prewar Greek audiences.\textsuperscript{504} More recently, Papagika has been the focus of sustained interest to fans of prewar recordings, garnering enough name recognition to be the namesake of single-artist compilations on Mississippi Records and Alma Criola Records.\textsuperscript{505}

Karol Stoch died in Chicago at age sixty on August 25, 1947.\textsuperscript{506} Stoch recorded regularly in the year following his session with Stanislaw Bachelda in June 1928. Less is known of his recording career after 1929, though. At least one recording has surfaced from the 1940s prior to

\textsuperscript{502} Marika Papakia, \textit{The Farther the Flame, The Worse It Burns Me}, Mississippi, MR-051, 2010, LP, notes by Ian Nagoski

\textsuperscript{503} \textit{Greek Oriental Smyrna-Rebetic Songs and Dances - The Golden Years: 1927-1937}, Folklyric Records 9033, undated, LP, notes by Prof. Martin Schwartz.

\textsuperscript{504} Papagika, \textit{The Further the Flame, the Worse it Burns Me}.

\textsuperscript{505} Ibid; Marika Papagika, \textit{Greek Popular and Rebetic Music in New York 1918-1929}, Alma Criola Records ACCD 802, 1994, compact disc.

\textsuperscript{506} Date of death is attributed to a death certificate on file at the Cooks County public records office. An earlier biography of Karol Stoch authored by Timothy Cooley for the compilations album \textit{Fire in the Mountains: Polish Mountain Fiddle Music, Vol. 1 - The Karol Stoch Band} (Yazoo Records 7012, 1996, compact disc) lists Stoch’s year of death as 1962. In email correspondence, Cooley recollected that the date came in conversation with Stoch’s descendents.
his death on the a local Chicago imprint Podhalan Medleys. Stoch was survived by his wife of thirty years, Katarzyna Skubis Stoch, and their five children. Stoch’s recordings resurfaced again nearly fifty years after his death as the featured artist on the 1997 compact disc *Fire in the Mountains: Polish Mountain Fiddle Music, Vol 1. - The Karol Stoch Band*, released by the famed roots label Yazoo. Compiled, of course, from the collection of Richard Spottswood, the notes for the disc were prepared by ethnomusicologist Timothy Cooley. As a late-century production, Stoch’s Górale dance and folk tunes were framed absent the nationalizing impulses of the Bicentennial. Re-ascribed to the Polish mountains, Stoch’s music lived on at the turn of the twenty-first century, but within a “world music” context.

Sal Ho’opi’i died on November 16, 1953 in Seattle, Washington where he spent the last years of his life as a devout Christian, evangelist, and composer of religious music. In the decades between his conversion and the March 1928 session detailed in the introduction of chapter one, Ho’opi’i enjoyed considerable success as a recording and performing musician. His later career was marked by a distinct departure from his first recordings of traditional Hawaiian tunes, developing a repertoire consisting of continental US-sourced material sung in English like

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507 *Spiew Juchasa/Song of the Shepherd: Songs of the Slavic Americans* (New World Records NW 283, 1977, LP) includes the Podhalan Medleys recording “Wspomnienia Sabaly (Reminiscences of Sabala)” credited to the Orkiestra Karol Stoch. Richard Spottswood, the disc’s program consultant, dates the disc as circa 1950. This projection was made prior to a known date-of-death for Stoch, though. As such, I am suggesting the recording happened, at the very least, prior to August 1947.


“Twelfth Street Rag,” “Stack O’Lee Blues” and “An Orange Grove in California.”\(^{511}\) Based in Los Angeles, the steel guitarist also furnished a career in the film industry scoring films and working as a casting director for Warner Brothers.\(^{512}\) About a quarter century after his passing, Ho’opi’i’s music had garnered enough attention with record collectors to warrant the reissue of significant portions of his recorded canon. In the 1970s into the 1980s, Ho’opi’i appeared on compilations released by Folklyric, Yazoo, and Rounder, among others. Billed as the “Master of the Hawaiian Guitar,” Ho’opi’i was celebrated as a major influence on western swing, blues, and country musics in the US.\(^{513}\) His sons, Sol, Jr and Rick Ho’opi’i carried on their father’s legacy, releasing a number of LPs on the small Hawaiian label Poki Records in the 1970s billed as the Ho’opi’i Brothers.\(^{514}\)

Lydia Mendoza’s recording career was only beginning when her family traveled to San Antonio in 1928. From that first session Mendoza would grow into a remarkable Tejano sensation in the US, Mexico, and throughout Latin America. She toured internationally from the 1940s until her performing career was tragically cut short by a stroke in 1987. During the forty years in-between Mendoza’s live stature grew, performing in theaters and the US folk festival circuit. In 1977, she was invited to perform at the inauguration of President Jimmy Carter. Medonza also recorded prolifically during the period for major outlets like Columbia and RCA as well as smaller imprints like Falcón and Ideal. In 1999, she was awarded a National Medal of


\(^{512}\) Funeral Rites Planned Today for Sol Hoopii, *Los Angeles Times*.


the Arts by President William Clinton. Lydia Mendoza passed away on December 20, 2007 in San Antonio, Texas. She was ninety-one.

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