DEEP RIVER OF SONG

Louisiana
Barrelhouse, Creole and Work Songs
INTRODUCTION — John Cowley, Ph.D.

John A. and Alan Lomax began collecting folk music using a cylinder machine, the earliest audio recording technology employed by field researchers. They set out in 1933, traveling through Texas, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Virginia and it was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on July 15, 1933, that they first switched to the newly-manufactured portable aluminum disc apparatus. The remainder of their 1933 recordings were made using this novel mechanism.

The 1933 Louisiana sessions date from a visit to the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola (July 16–20) and constitute a simple snapshot of Louisiana’s black music repertoire. They were disappointed to find that the prison authorities had suppressed group work songs, but the Lomaxes’ were delighted by their landmark meeting with the extraordinary songster Huddie Ledbetter, about whom Alan enthused, “Lead Belly, however, was some consolation: ‘I’s the king of the twelve-string guitar players of the world!’” Although not represented here, the first smattering of ballads and blues in the repertoire of this most influential of black folk singers was committed to aluminum discs during the Lomaxes’ 1933 Angola fieldwork.

It was not until father and son returned to Louisiana in 1934 that they made a comprehensive attempt to document the different styles of folk music in the state (including Lead Belly’s repertoire). Thus, John A. Lomax wrote:

_For six weeks we have worked among the Acadian (French) people of southern Louisiana, in that section known as the Evangeline country. These people yet invite groups of French singers to be present at weddings to sing folk songs for the entertainment of guests, the singing being prolonged often until a late hour. Drinking and singing always go together, the songs being passed along by “word of mouth” instead of by the printed page. We made records of many of these songs, some of which we believe show undoubted evidence of indigenous origin, though others are carry-overs from French sources. In any event, the changes that have taken place in the process of oral transmission through generations should furnish matter of interest to scholars. It seems important to put into permanent form the actual singing of these songs while the rural life of that section of Louisiana remains distinctly French in manners and in speech._

Alan undertook some of these recordings while accompanying Louisiana folk-song researcher Irène Thérèse Whitfield. John A. and Alan supervised other sessions. A representative sample of these sides, comprising examples of many different styles of black and white Louisiana folk music, can be heard on _Classic Louisiana Recordings, Cajun and Creole Music, 1934–37, 2 vols._ (Rounder CDs 1842 and 1843) in the Alan Lomax Collection.

The present _Deep River of Song: Louisiana_ anthology focuses on black music collected in 1934 and also in 1938 and 1940, putting the earliest Lomax sides in historical perspective and illustrating important facets in the evolution of the music of this distinctive region.

The Lomaxes’ recordings of ring shouts — a remarkable
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In 1942, Alan described the context of the Louisiana ring shouts he had recorded in 1934 this way:

In certain isolated parts of the South one may still find survivals of the earliest type of Afro-American religious song — the ring-shout. True to an age-old African pattern, the dancers shuffle round and round single file, moving in a counter-clockwise direction, clapping out the beat in complex counter-rhythms. This religious dance was universal in the days of slavery, and it was a serious part of religious observance for the Negroes. There were various strict rules. For instance, the participants were not supposed to cross their legs as they danced; such a step would have meant that they were dancing and not “shouting.” Dancing, according to their newly acquired Protestantism, was “sinful” and taboo for church members.

The Lomaxes saw the ring shout as direct evidence of West African cultural survival in the Americas:

We have seen “shouts” in Louisiana, in Texas, in Georgia and in the Bahamas; we have seen vaudou dancing in Haiti; we have read accounts of similar rites in works upon Negro life in other parts of the Western Hemisphere. All share basic similarities (1) the song is “danced” with the whole body — with hands, feet, belly, and hips; (2) the worship is, basically, a dancing-singing phenomenon; (3) the dancers always move counter-clockwise around the ring; (4) the song has the leader-chorus form, with much repetition, with a focus on rhythm rather than on melody, that is, with a form that invites and ultimately enforces co-operative group activity; (5) the song continues to be repeated sometimes more than an hour, steadily increasing in intensity and gradually accelerating, until a sort of mass hypnosis ensues.

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He noted how “in rural Louisiana, the community had recently reintroduced the ring-shout as a means of worship. The phenomenon of the ring shout has received greatest attention in the Georgia Sea Islands, where observation began during the U.S. Civil War. Alan Lomax’s recordings made for the Library of Congress in 1935 and in a parallel field trip in 1939 form part of this body of knowledge (see Southern Journey, vols. 12 and 13; Georgia Sea Islands: Biblical Songs and Spirituals [Rounder CD 1712], and Georgia Sea Islands: Songs for Everyday Living [Rounder CD 1713]). Alan Lomax and John Work pursued the subject in Mississippi in 1941 (see “Rock Daniel” by the Reverend Savage and group in Mississippi Saints and Sinners in the Deep River of Song series [Rounder CD 1824]); and in 1942, Lea and Marianna Seal, supplemented by Harry Oster in 1958, also described the Easter Rock in Louisiana, always in religious or quasi religious contexts.

The secular nature of many of the ring shouts document-ed on this CD (both in English and French Creole) marks them as a bridge between the African slave diaspora to the Americas and subsequent black ceremonial customs in North America and the Caribbean. Caribbean wake commemorations, where the sacred and profane are integral elements — in antithesis to mainstream Christian doctrine — mirror similar West African practices.

Besides shouts, another early reported form of black music in the United States is the work song, performed by...
by an individual or collectively in call-and-response fashion by gangs of laborers. The repertoire (sung solo) of 75 year-old Sam “Old Dad” Ballard is illustrative of railroad maintenance traditions (tracks 5 and 6), as is the call-and-response singing of “Julie Montgomery” (track 7) by an unidentified male section group with steel tamping accompaniment (also heard in Ballard’s “Big Leg Ida” (track 6)). Joe Massie’s French-Creole songs, (tracks 12 and 13) performed “for his own amusement while running the dummy engine on the Saint John’s Plantation, for the last nineteen years” in St. Martinsville, Louisiana fall into the category of individual performance. Massie’s improvised satirical lines about the presence of John A. Domingue (on the island of Hispaniola) dispersed as far as Trinidad at the southernmost tip of the Caribbean archipelago to Louisiana in mainland North America. This was but one significant component in Louisiana’s complex population-mix.

A later example of population fluidity — this time within the United States after World War I — was the migration of French-Creole-speaking black people in search of employment from the Gulf Coast of southern Louisiana to the burgeoning urban center of Houston, Texas. A participant in this translocation was Anderson Moss (b. 1917), who arrived in Houston with his family in 1927. As a child in rural Louisiana, he had witnessed many black Creole dances. Taking up the accordion in his new abode, he became a significant participant in the urban development of zydeco, though like his contemporary Willie Green (who cut sides for Arthoole in 1961) he didn’t record until the 1980s. His two performances on this CD were originally recorded for a Houston TV station in the 1980s. “Allons à Lafayette” (track 16) is a well-known version included in an extended Lomax session on July 1, 1934, while he was still incarcerated in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. His recordings included ballads, barrethol songs, blues, a cowboy song, a reel, and a work song. There was also, in Waltz time, a version of his personal adaptation of a nineteen-century parlor song, “Irene,” known otherwise as “Irene Goodnight” or “Goodnight Irene.” Born in 1889 as “Irene Goodnight” or “Goodnight Irene.” Born in 1889

Gallops” (Child No. 19). The cycle of this long-lived composition includes versions in several languages from northern and southern Europe, indicating the widespread distribution of the story line. It seems likely that it entered the African-American repertoire during the period of slavery. At least, that is the opinion of Dorothy Scarborough, who discovered several versions that can be traced to that era.

String bands also became prevalent among black inhabitants in the United States during the period of slavery. “Liza Jane” (track 19), recorded in June 1934, provides an approximate sample of the kind of music (mediated by Emancipation) played by these groups. It features Wilson Jones, vocal and guitar, Octave Amos, fiddle, and Charles Gobert (possibly), vocal and banjo. Reports indicate that the guitar was not a regular instrument in the slavery period, thus this lineup is more representative of late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century string units, as are other aspects of the band’s repertoire. In his analysis of the ex-slave narratives collected by the Works Progress
Administration in the 1930s, however, Robert Winans notes three instances in which interviewees recalled a dance tune and song named “Miss Liza Jane.” Although it is not certain if it is exactly the same piece as that played by Jones and his associates, it does give some indication of the historical and musical context of the song.

The tradition of topical lyrics in African-American music is illustrated by John Bray’s “Trench Blues” (track 20), recorded by John A. Lomax in 1934, and representing one of the then-contemporary developments in the evolution of African-American secular vocal music. It concerns the experience of a black soldier in World War I (a rather rare subject on records). John A. Lomax also recorded the string-band musician Joe Harris (a guitarist) during a recording expedition to Shreveport in northern Louisiana in 1940. Harris’s repertoire comprised a number of old-time pieces, including “Baton Rouge Blues” (recorded by Jones and his associates, it does give some indication of the historical and musical context of the song.

The research of Lawrence Gushee shows that Morton’s antecedents settled in New Orleans, Louisiana, as a result of the revolution in Saint Domingue, thereby connecting him with that momentous cultural and population diaspora. Jelly Roll Morton was born in the “Crescent City” in 1890 and assimilated its vibrant and varied musical disciplines into his career as a performer. By his mid-teens, it appears, he became a pianist in barrelhouses and similar places of entertainment throughout the south. The performances on this disc, the most varied of the Deep River of Song series, illustrate the extraordinary cultural richness of Louisiana’s varied population settle-
ments and geographical environments. These range from the primary Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico port of New Orleans, dubbed the cradle of jazz — via a fiercely independent French-Creole speaking community in the southern bayous — to the oil boom city of Shreveport, situated on the Red River in the north. The state’s distinctive history has had a profound influence on the music performed there and has imparted to it qualities that distinguish Louisiana’s black music from that of all other southern states.

— Kings Langley, England, 2002

SONG NOTES
AFS numbers in parentheses after the song titles refer to Library of Congress American Folk Song catalog numbers

1. Hallelujah (Lamb on the Altar)  
(AF5 108-B1)
Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax in Jennings (Lake Arthur), Louisiana, in June 1934.
Previously unreleased.

The first two tracks in this collection are religious ring shouts, sung entirely in English. These same performers are heard in “Feel Like Dying In His Army,” with a chorus in French Creole (track 19) on Classic Louisiana Recordings: Cajun and Creole Music II, 1934-1937 (Rounder CD 1843).

I got a lamb on the altar — hallelujah,  
(etc.)

I got a lamb on the altar — hallelujah.  
(etc.)

I got a lamb on the altar — hallelujah. (Etc.)
Etc., as above:  
My Lord, [ . . . ] been there — 
I got a lamb on the altar.
My Lord, he been there.
I got a lamb on the altar.
Oh, lamb, lamb, lamb.
He got a girdle go ‘round his head.
He got a crown go ‘round his head.
He got a girdle round his waist.
How long he been there?
I got a lamb on the altar (etc.)
Baby, I know he’s been there.
Well, well, well, well.
I got a lamb on the altar.
Yeah-eah-eah — heheah.
That lamb got a skirt.
He got a (?) crown.
All ‘round his head.
He got a girdle go round his waist.
Baby, I know he’s been there.
He’s been there three days.
I got a lamb on the altar.

2. NEW CALVARY  
(AF5 108-B3)
Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax in Jennings (Lake Arthur), Louisiana, in June 1934.
Previously unreleased.

The words in this secular performance invoke the places where Shorty might have traveled, from East Texas and Louisiana, to distant locations.

Lord, Lord, Shorty,
Wonder where is Shorty?
Refrain:
Lord, Lord, Shorty.
(after every line),
Gone to live in [Jersey (?)]
Gone up to Illinois, Shorty gone to Beaumont. Goin’
to live in Illinois.
Shorty gone up to Charles [?].
He goin’ to bring me back a Stetson hat.
Etc., as above,
with Galveston, Alabama, Illinois, Lake Charles, “back
out of town,” “Shorty told me,” “Well, well.”

3. LORD, LORD, SHORTY  
(AF5 109-A1)
Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax in Jennings (Lake Arthur), Louisiana, in June 1934.
Previously unreleased.

When released by the Library of Congress this piece was called “Run, Old Jeremiah,” suggesting a confusion with “Run Here, Jeremiah” by Alberta Bradford and Becky Easley (AF5 106 B 1) recorded by the Lomaxes at Jennings during the same period. This song, however, depicts a religious journey on the railroad and does not mention Jeremiah.

By myself — good Lord (etc.)
You know I’ve got to go — good Lord (“Good Lord” after every verse),
I got to run.
I got a letter,
O’ brownskin.
Tell you what she say,
“Leavin’ tomorrow, / Tell you goodbye”
O my Lordy,Well, well, well.
I’ve [you] got a rock — good Lord,
[I looked at that rock. (?)]
Got on my shoes, On my way,
Who’s that ridin, the chariot?
Well, well, well.
New lead singer: One morning,
Before the evening.
Sun was going down,
Behind that western hill.
Heard number 12
Coming down the track.
Blew black smoke.
See that old engineer,
Told that old fireman,
[To] Ring his ol’ bell
With his hand.
Rung his engine bell.

4. GOOD LORD  
(Train Piece / Run Old Jeremiah)  
(AF5 109-B1)
Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax in Jennings (Lake Arthur), Louisiana, in June 1934.

Fare you well — hallelujah,
Remember me — eeh,
Remember me, mmm,
On New Calvary — eeh. (Etc.)

Refrain:
Lord, Lord, Shorty.
Wonder where is Shorty?
Gone to live in [Jersey (?)]
Gone up to Illinois, Shorty gone to Beaumont.
Goin’ to live in Illinois.
Shorty gone up to Charles [?].
He goin’ to bring me back a Stetson hat.
Etc., as above,
with Galveston, Alabama, Illinois, Lake Charles, “back out of town,” “Shorty told me,” “Well, well.”

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Well, well, well.
He was steady saying,
"I got your life,
In my hand."
Well, well, well,
Old fireman told —
Told that engineer, "Ring your [black] bell,
Ding, ding, ding." (Etc.)
Old fireman say, "I’m so glad I [..] a prayer.
I got a preaching —
That morning,
Well, well, well
(Etc.)
I’m gonna grab my
Old whistle so, ‘Wah, wah wah!’
Soon, soon, soon, I was traveling,
I was riding
Over there. This is the chariot.
Look at that rock and rolling
And you better get your [money], // And you got this
train a-comin’ (etc.)
CATCH THAT TRAIN
(Sung by Sam Ballard.)
Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax in New Iberia, Louisiana,
on June 22, 1934.
Previously unreleased.
This work song identifies two local railroad lines: Morgan’s Louisiana and Pacific Railroad (“hello the Morgan”) and the Texas and Pacific Railroad (“The TPO / TPE line”). The Lincoln may be a railroad engine.
Big leg Ida,
Oh, big leg Ida,
Leg goin’ my way.

Told that engineer, "Ring your [black] bell,
Ding, ding, ding." (Etc.)
Old fireman say, "I’m so glad I [..] a prayer.
I got a preaching —
That morning,
Well, well, well
(Etc.)
I’m gonna grab my
Old whistle so, ‘Wah, wah wah!’ (etc. with mmm and o-o-o)

Soon, soon, soon, I was traveling,
I was riding (etc.)
Over there. This is the chariot.
Look at that rock and rolling
And you better get your ticket, oh, hoo (Etc., as above) /
Been a-rolling in the lowland //
Got this train a running (how you know she’s running?) //
And you better get your [money], // And you got this
train a-comin’ (etc.)
CATCH — yes, yes.

John A. Lomax (spoken): These songs have been sung by "Old Dad," of New Iberia, Louisiana, on June the twenty-second, nineteen-hundred-and-thirty four. "Old Dad" says he was a baby during the Civil War, and that means that he is about seventy-five years old.

6. BIG LEG IDA (AFS 98-B2)
Performed by Sam Ballard (vocal) with steel tamping.
Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax in New Iberia, Louisiana, on June 22, 1934.
Previously unreleased.
This work song identifies two local railroad lines: Morgan’s Louisiana and Pacific Railroad (“hello the Morgan”) and the Texas and Pacific Railroad (“The TPO / TPE line”). The Lincoln may be a railroad engine.
Big leg Ida,
Oh, big leg Ida,
Leg goin’ my way.

Tell you ‘bout a hobo,
Partner, he got killed on the M and O —
Willie Willie Weaver.
Tell you ‘bout hobo,
Partner, he got killed on the M and O.
Oh, Julie Montgomery — ‘gomey
Is the girl I love.
She always [hard to find].
[. . ]
Julie Montgomery
Is the girl I love.
Partner, she got killed on the M and O —
Julie Montgomery.

John A. Lomax (spoken): These additional songs of track-laying and other songs have been sung by "Old Dad"— what’s your other name?
Sam Ballard: Sam Ballard.
John A. Lomax: Otherwise known as Sam Ballard, in New Iberia, Louisiana, for the Library of Congress through funds provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York City.

7. JULIE MONTGOMERY (AFS 97-A2)
Sung by an unidentified male section group, with steel tamping.
Previously unreleased.
This group work song is performed in call-and-response fashion by a male section gang doing maintenance. The M and O is the Mobile and Ohio railroad. The significance of “Willie Willie Weaver” and “Julie Montgomery” is unknown but they appear to be hobo monikers.
Oh Willie Willie Weaver
Is a mighty hobo,
Partner, he got killed on the M and O.
Willie Willie Weaver
Is a mighty hobo,
Jack, he got killed on the — on the M and O.
Willie Willie Weaver
Was a mighty hobo,
Partner, he got killed on the M and O.
Willie Willie Weaver
Is a mighty hobo,
Yes, he got killed on the M and O.
American folk song “Cindy.” The inclusion of a fragmented dance call (“trape donc leurs belles”) suggests square- or round-dance influence. —Barry Jean Ancelet


Comment tu veux te je vas voir Mais quand mon chapeau rouge est fini? Comment tu veux te je vas voir Mais quand mon suit est tout déchiré?


O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, les haricots sont pas salés. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, les haricots sont pas salés.

O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, les haricots sont pas salés.

O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, les haricots sont pas salés. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, vous devez me donner les haricots. O mam, les haricots sont pas salés.
Mais O yé yaie, mais donnez-moi les haricots. O mam, les haricots sont pas salés.

Translation: Chorus: Oh, mama, give me the beans. / Oh, yé yaie, the beans aren’t salty. / Oh, mama, give me the beans. / Oh, yé yaie, the beans aren’t salty. / I went all round the land / With my jug on the pommel. / And I asked your father / For eighteen dollars, dear. / He only gave me five dollars. (Chorus) / How do you expect me to go to see you? / When my red hat is ruined? / How do you expect me to go to see you? / When my suit is all torn? (Chorus) / I went all round the land / With my jug on the pommel. / I asked your father for ten dollars. / He gave me only five.

How do you expect [me] to eat? / Oh, yé yaie, the beans aren’t salty. / Oh, mama, give me the beans. / Oh, yé yaie, the beans aren’t salt. / How do you expect me to go to see you? / When my red hat is ruined? How do you expect me to go to see you? / When my suit is all torn? / Oh, mama, give me the beans. / Oh, dear, the beans aren’t salty. / Oh, mama, let each catch his sweetheart. / Oh, mama, let each catch his sweetheart. / How do you expect me to go to see you? / When my suit is all torn? / How do you expect me to go to see you? / When my red hat is ruined? How do you expect me to go to see you? / When my suit is all torn? / Oh, mama, give me the beans. / Oh, dear, the beans aren’t salty. / Oh, mama, let each catch his sweetheart. / Oh, mama, let each catch his sweetheart. / How do you expect me to go to see you? / When my suit is all torn? / How do you expect me to go to see you? / When my red hat is ruined? Oh, mama, give me the beans. Oh, godmother, give me the beans. Oh, mama, the beans aren’t salty. Oh, mama, let each catch his sweetheart. Oh, mama, the beans aren’t salty. Oh, yé yaie, what will I do? / I went all round the land / With my jug on the pommel. / I asked my father for ten dollars. / He gave me only five. / Oh, yé yaie, what will I do? / Oh, mama, the beans aren’t salty. / Oh, yé yaie, give me the beans. / Oh, mama, the beans aren’t salty.

10. LÀ-BAS CHEZ MOREAU
(Malheureux Nègre) (AFS 81-A1)
Sung by Cleveland Benoit and Darby Hicks.
Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax in Jennings (Lake Arthur), Louisiana, on August 1, 1934.

In this blues lament, as the Lomax’s termed it, two singers alternate verses of irregular lengths, often using the last line of one verse as the first line of the next. Both singers are black Creoles; Cleveland Benoit’s language resembles Cajun French as spoken in the northwestern part of French Louisiana, Darby Hicks’ Creole is that usually associated with the eastern bayou regions.

The subject of several Louisiana songs, Moreau’s was often described as a place where one could get coffee and candy (see “S’en aller chez Moreau” by Jimmy Peters and ring dance singers in Classic Louisiana Recordings: Cajun and Creole Music [Rounder 1843]). The obvious translation is candy, but it is unlikely that Moreau actually sold sweets. In the blues, candy was often used as a euphemism for drugs or sex. Interestingly, in Haitian Creole, the term kandia refers to a love potion or charm, and in Creole, the term candi refers to a rice pudding used in folk medicine. The motif of love lost after a promise of marriage is complicated by the mention of compromising situations associated with Moreau’s place. The young man in question visits the girl there to pick up his clothes. Later, one of the singers talks of drinking coffee before getting up from bed. The singers’ preoccupation with coffee may have something to do with a coffee-colored child or lover. Café or café crème was often used to describe light-skinned Mulattos. The African Creole community traditionally observed a complex social system based on color distinctions generally unrecognized by whites. Light-skinned Mulattos sometimes employed such tests as comparing skin color to a paper bag, or passing a comb through the hair, to exclude darker-skinned Creoles from their social events.

—Barry Jean Ancelet

O là-bas chez Moreau,
O cherche ton candi,
O là-bas chez Moreau.
O malheureux nègre,
O malheureux nègre,
C’est malheureux.
O j’ai pas venu ici pour tracas,
O j’ai venu après mon linge,
Cher ami, nègre.
Mmm, cher ami, nègre,
Pas vini ici pour faire toi misère.
Mmm, juste vini ici pour chercher mon linge.
O soleil après coucher,
O la lune après lever.
Mmm, mon nègre est pas arrivé.
Mmm, malheureux, nègre,
O c’est malheureux.
Mmm, toi malheureux, nègre,
C’est malheureux tu fais comme ça.
O mais qui tu m’as dit,
Mmm, quinze jours passés,
O les promesses tu m’as fait,
O maître amie, mon nègre.
O soleil après coucher,
Toi connais la promesse tu m’as fait
O soleil après lever,
Sur un jeudi soir qui passé.
Mmm, toi, malheureux, nègre,
Mmm, là-bas chez Moreau.
Mmm, cher ami, nègre,
O cherche ton candi, nègre.
Mmm, roulé, roulé,
Roulé dans tous les mauvais temps.
O chère amie, nègresse.
Mmm, ta mère puis ton père
O la mère m’a dit non,
Mmm, ton père m’a dit ouais,
Mmm, chère petite Française.
Mmm, peut-être un jour qui va vini
Si mon l’idée pas changé.
O là-bas chez Moreau.
Mmm, moi va voler toi.
Après ça, ta mère et puis ton père
Va connaître comment parler leur garçon.
O mais va chez Moreau,
Cherche ton café,
Mmm, cherche ton café, chère.
Mmm, ton café, chère.
Mmm, mon nègre est pas arrivé.
O là-bas chez Moreau,
O cherche ton candi.
Mmm, malheureuse, pour fait comme ça.
O mais quinze jours passés,
O les promesses tu m’as fait,
O chère amie, mon nègre.
O soleil après coucher,
Toi connais la promesse tu m’as fait
O soleil après lever,
Sur un jeudi soir qui passé.
Mmm, toi, malheureux, nègre,
Mmm, là-bas chez Moreau.
Mmm, cher ami, nègre,
O cherche ton candi, nègre.
Mmm, roulé, roulé,
Roulé dans tous les mauvais temps.
Mmm, pour faire plaisant.
Mmm, sur un jour qui va vini,
Mmm, c’est moi qui gâté toi.
O c’est malheureux, chérie, 
O qui tu m’as fait.
Tu m’abandonne toujours.
Mmm, malheureux.
Oui, c’est malheureux.
Quinze jours passés.
O les promesses tu m’as fait.
Mmm, quinze jours passés.
Mmm, m’en aller, m’en aller.
O m’en aller demain matin.
O va chez Moreau,
O cherche ton candi,
Mmm, bois ton café.
Mmm, bois ton café.
Mmm, avant toi levé.

O j’ai pas venu ici pour tracas.
O j’ai venu ici après mon linge.
O chère amie, mon nègre.
C’est moi qui gâté toi.
O mais va chez Moreau,
O cherche ton candi,
Mmm, bois ton café.
Mmm, bois ton café,
Mmm, avant toi levé.

Je veux me marier
Chère Ami

11. JE VEUX ME MARIER

Je veux me marier.
Je peux pas trouver.
O c’est malheureux.
Je veux me marier.
Je peux pas trouver.
Mais comment donc je vas faire?
O c’est malheureux.
Je peux pas trouver.
O c’est malheureux.
Je peux pas trouver.
O c’est malheureux.

Je veux me marier.
Je peux pas trouver.
O c’est malheureux.
Je veux me marier.
Je peux pas trouver.
Mais comment donc je vas faire?
Je veux me marier.
Je peux pas trouver.
Mais Mam et Pap veut pas.
Je veux me marier.
Je peux pas trouver.
Mais o c’est malheureux.
Je veux me marier,
J’ai pas d’argent,
J’ai pas de souliers,
Mais o c’est malheureux.

Comment donc
Tu veux moi, je fais,
Mais comme un pauvre misérable?

Je veux me marier,
Je peux pas trouver.
O c’est malheureux.

Je veux me marier,
Je peux pas trouver,
Pas de souliers, pas d’argent,
Mais o c’est malheureux.

Je veux me marier,
Je peux pas trouver.
Mais o c’est malheureux.

Je veux me marier,
Je peux pas trouver.
Mais o c’est malheureux.

Que moi malheureux.
Hé, moi malheureux.
Oui, c’est ça la cause que
M’a fait moi dans tracas.

Moi peut pas di, o,
Moi peut pas di.
Oui, m’allé là-bas, nègre,
Mais oui, mais causer avec toi.

C’est toi la cause, oui,
Que moi malheureux.

Moi vini ici, mais oui,
Dans l’Îbérie
Avec un homme qui
Dormait dans la barre.

Voir que d’ici, mais,
Mais, moi pas peur li.

Moi pas peur li, non,
Mais moi pas peur li.

C’est un vaillant ‘n homme,
Tout le monde connaît li.

C’est un vaillant ‘n homme,
Tout le monde connaît li.

Li m’a fait courir, mais,
Moi, moi, moi tout seul.

M’allé là-bas, oui,
Di, m’allé là-bas.

Li m’a fait parti, Lord, mais

12. MOI MALHEUREUX (AFS 82-A1)
Performed by Joe Massie, vocal.

The most notable aspect of this song and the next are that they are largely improvised. Joe Massie seems to have misunderstood John A. Lomax’s instructions. In an interview prior to the performance Lomax had told Massie that he can could sing as long as he liked. Massie apparently understood this to mean that he should sing as long as could, with the result that he starts making up French verses about the man recording him, which he could be certain were not understood by him: “That man there is looking at me” and so on. —Barry Jean Ancelet
Oui, moi, moi tout seul.
M'allé là-bas,
M'allé là-bas.
'Coutez bien donc ça
M'apé di, oui, vous autres,
Mais, oui, aujourd'hui,
Mais, oui, aujourd'hui.

Translation: Oh, Mama, / Well, yes, I'm sad. / I'm sad, /
Hey, I'm sad. / Yes, that's the reason that I got into trou-
ble. / I can't say, oh, / I can't say. / Yes, I'm going there, 
man, / Yes, to speak with you. / You're the reason, yes, 
That I'm so sad. / I came here, yes, / To Iberia / With a 
man who / Was sleeping in the bar. / To show that here 
/I'm not afraid of him. / I'm not afraid of him, no, / I'm
not afraid of him. / He's a nice man, / Everyone knows 
him. / He's a nice man, / Everyone knows him. / He
made me go, well, / Me, all alone. / I went there, yes, 
Say, I went there. / He made me leave, Lord, / Yes, I'm 
all alone. / I went there, / I went there. / Listen well to 
what I'm telling, yes, you all. / Yes, today, / Yes, today.

13. SI LI, LÉ BAT
(IFS 82 A 2)
Performed by Joe Massie (vocal).
Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax in St. John's Plantation, 
St. Martinville, Louisiana in June 1934
Previously unreleased.

Si li lé bat, si li lé bat. 
L'homme là apé 'garder moi. 
'gardez li, 'gardez li. 
To crois pas li, mais ça to pas connais, 
Si to pas connais li, moi, moi connais. 
Ta ta ta…
Si li lé bat, nous gain pour bat. 
Ta ta ta…
Si li lé bat, si li lé bat. 
Oui, mais m'a pas couri, mais, la maison. 
Ta ta ta…
Si li lé bat, si li lé bat.
Oui, moi, moi tout seul.
M'allé là-bas,
M'allé là-bas.

Translation: Oh, Mama, / Well, yes, I'm sad. / I'm sad, /
Hey, I'm sad. / Yes, that's the reason that I got into trou-
ble. / I can't say, oh, / I can't say. / Yes, I'm going there, 
man, / Yes, to speak with you. / You're the reason, yes, 
That I'm so sad. / I came here, yes, / To Iberia / With a 
man who / Was sleeping in the bar. / To show that here 
/I'm not afraid of him. / I'm not afraid of him, no, / I'm
not afraid of him. / He's a nice man, / Everyone knows 
him. / He's a nice man, / Everyone knows him. / He
made me go, well, / Me, all alone. / I went there, yes, 
Say, I went there. / He made me leave, Lord, / Yes, I'm 
all alone. / I went there, / I went there. / Listen well to 
what I'm telling, yes, you all. / Yes, today, / Yes, today.

14. BONSOIR, PETIT MONDE
(IFS 85-A1)
Performed by Paul Junius Malveaux, harmonica probably; 
Ernest Lafitte, vocal (probably).
Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax in Jennings (Lake Arthur), 
Louisiana, on August 2, 1934.
Previously unreleased.

Another tale of a frustrated courtship in which the suitor 
is rejected for being an orphan, as in “Bonsoir Mes 
Parents” (track 8), above. Many of the verses are stock 
material. The first verse (sung to an entirely different 
melody) also occurs in “J'ai Fais Mon Idee en Faisant 
mon Paquet” by Alphe and Shirley Bergeron and the 
Veteran Playboys (Lanor 1000). —Barry Jean Ancelet

O fais ton idée, 
O fais ton idée, 
En faisant ton paquet.

O bonsoir, petite fille, 
O bonsoir, petit monde. 
O j'ai demandé à ta mam', 
Ta vieille mam' m'a dit, “Non," 
Va-t'en, toi, orphelin." 
O je m'ai mis sur mes genoux 
Et j'ai levé ma main droite 
De jamais t'oublier, 
Toi, ma chère orpheline.

O je m'ai mis sur mes genoux 
Et j'ai levé ma main droite 
De jamais t'oublier, 
Toi, ma chère orpheline.

O c'est là qu'elle m'a dit, 
"Va-t'en, toi, toi, vieux nègre. 
C'est minuit est passé." 
Hé bye bye, chère petite fille, 
Moi, je suis après m'en aller, 
Depuis à l'âge de quinze ans.

O bonsoir, petit monde, 
O bonsoir, petit monde, 
Dis bye bye pour toujours.

Hé bye bye, chère petite fille, 
Moi, je suis après m'en aller, 
Depuis à l'âge de quinze ans.

O bonsoir, petite fille, 
O bonsoir, petit monde. 
Moi, je suis après m'en aller.

O bonsoir, petite fille, 
O bonsoir, petite fille. 
Moi, je suis après m'en aller.

O j'ai demandé à ta mam', 
Ta vieille mam' m'a dit, “Non," 
Va-t'en, toi, orphelin." 
O je m'ai mis sur mes genoux 
Et j'ai levé ma main droite 
De jamais t'oublier, 
Toi, ma chère orpheline.

O je m'ai mis sur mes genoux 
Et j'ai levé ma main droite 
De jamais t'oublier, 
Toi, ma chère orpheline.
O je m’ai mis sur mes genoux.  
J’ai levé ma main droite.

Translation:  
Oh make up your mind. / Oh make up your mind. / While packing your stuff. [On your way out.]  
Oh goodnight, little girl. / Oh goodnight, little world. / I’m going away. / Oh I asked your mama. / Your old mama told me, “No, / Go away, you orphan.” / Oh I got down on my knees. / And I raised my right hand. / Swearing to never forget you, You, my dear orphan. / Oh I got down on my knees, And I raised my right hand. / Swearing to never forget you, You, my dear orphan. / Oh I went to town, / I went back home. / I knocked at the door. / It was passed midnight. / Oh it was then that she told me, “Go away, you old man. / It's passed midnight.” / Hey goodbye, dear little girl, / I’m going away. / Since the age of fifteen. / Oh, goodnight, little world, / Oh goodnight, little world, / Say goodbye for ever. / Oh goodnight, little girl, / Oh, goodnight, little girl, / I’m going away. / Oh, I got down on my knees, / Oh, I got down on my knees. / I raised my right hand.

15. ZYDECO PAS SALÉ

Performed by Anderson Moss, vocal and accordion;  
Edward Ducrest, steel washboard; Fred Milburn, drums.  
Recorded by Paul Jaeger (?), at Prejean’s Lounge,  
Houston (?), Texas, c. 1980s.  
Previously unreleased.

Asked by John Minton about the origin of the phrase “les haricots sont pas salés” during “a late-1980s ‘oil bust’ in Houston, Texas,” Anderson Moss explained, “What you call this pressure is a high-class depression. That other one in nineteen twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine,  
into the thirties — there was plenty of work, now. You  
want to work, you have the work, but the salary — you  
know what I’m talking about? But if you had five or six  
children, you could feed them for twenty-five cents a  
day, you understand? Meat — what you pay a dollar sixty for  
it — or a dollar fifty a pound — in them days you pay ten  
cents a pound. Said the neck — cost you six cents a  
pound. Pork bones — things like that — three cents a’  
pound. You understand? But go down there in them  
stores and try to get that. Ain’t nothing but a zydeco [i.e.,  
beans but no meat], that’s all it is [laughs]! Yeah. You’ll  
have to pay, man.”

In a session for a Houston TV station, Moss performed  
this truncated version of the song that defines the musical  
genre.

Les zydeco est pas salé  
O malheureux,  
Malheureux, moi tout maudit.

Translation:  
The zydeco ain’t salty / Oh, unhappy me, / Unhappy me, I’m completely damned.

16. ALLONS A LAFAYETTE

Performed by Anderson Moss, vocal and accordion;  
Edward Ducrest, steel washboard; Fred Milburn, drums.  
Recorded by Paul Jaeger (?), at Prejean’s Lounge,  
Houston (?), Texas, c. 1980s.  
Previously unreleased.

A nineteen twenties 78-rpm release of this Cajun stand-  
ard sparked the fashion for commercial recordings of  
Louisiana-French vernacular music. In his Cajun Sketches, Lauren C. Post described the dramatic effect of  
the publication, “First to record was now-famous singer and accordion player Joe Falcon of Rayne. About 1926  
[27 April 1926] he recorded ‘Allons à Lafayette,’ (“Let’s Go to Lafayette,”) for an apprehensive recording company.  
Once the recording hit the market of south Louisiana,  
Acadians bought several records at a time so they would  
ever be without one, no matter what happened. A new  
era had opened up. Other singers and recording compa-  
nies went into the business of recording Acadian folk songs for the south Louisiana market.”

The song’s symbolic significance was recognized by  
Anderson Moss, who sang it when asked “Do you have  
one that’s really more French than anything else?” His  
verse is based on Joe Falcon’s original recording.

Allons à Lafayette,  
C’est pour changer ton nom.  
Comment tu veux t’appeler?  
Madame, Madame Comeaux.  
Petite, t’es trop mignonne  
Pour faire la criminelle.

Translation:  
Let’s go to Lafayette, / It’s to change your name. / What do you want to be called? / Mrs. — Mrs.  
Comeaux. / Little girl, you’re too cute / To act so mean.

Chorus:  
Irene goodnight,  
Irene goodnight,  
Goodnight Irene,  
Goodnight Irene,  
I get’s you in my dreams.  
Quit ramblin’ an’ quit gamblin’,  
Quit stayin’ out late at night,

Translation:  
Pour faire la criminelle.
Go home to yo’ wife an’ yo’ family,  
Sit down by the fireside bright. (Chorus)

Last Sat’day night I got married,  
Me an’ my wife settle down,  
Now me an’ my wife have parted,  
Goin’ take me a stroll uptown. (Chorus)

I asked your mother for you,  
She told me you was too young,  
I wish the Lord that I never seen your face,  
I’m sorry we ever was born. (Chorus)

One day, one day, one day,  
Irene was a-walking ’long,  
Last word that I heard her say,  
I want you to sing this song: (Chorus)

[... ] and she caused me to moan,  
She cause me to leave my home,  
Last words that I heard her say,  
I want you to sing this song: (Chorus)

Spoken: She brought everything she could rake and scrape (sings:)  
Son, I brought you some silver,  
Son, I brought you some gold,  
Son, I brought you l’il everything,  
To keep you from the gallow’s pole.  
Yes — I brought it,  
Yes, mama, I thought it,  
You would bring me,  
Keep me from the gallow’s pole.

Spoken: You know she done bring everything that was in town if she could get it (sings:)  
Babe, I brought you some silver.  
Babe, I brought you some gold,  
Babe, I brought you a little everything,  
To keep me from the gallow’s pole.  
Lawd — I brought it,  
Yes, I brought it,  
Son, I brought you To keep you from the gallow’s pole.

Spoken: Oh, whip it! — Yah! Here come his wife. He had a wife at that time. When his wife come, he was so glad to see his wife he want to know what she bring (sings:)  
Wife, did you bring me any silver?  
Baby, did you bring me any gold?  
What did you bring me, dear darling,  
To keep me from the gallow’s pole?  
Yes — what did you — bring,  
What did you bring me,  
Keep me from the gallow’s pole.

Spoken: You know she done bring everything that was in town if she could get it (sings:)  
Babe, I brought you some silver.  
Babe, I brought you some gold,  
Babe, I brought you a little everything,
To keep you from the gallows pole.
Yes — I brought it, 
Yes — you oughta thought it, 
I brought you, 
To keep you from the gallows pole.

Spoken: Oh, whip it — to a gravy! Now here come his so-called friend. His friend liked him when he was outside but when he got behind the bars, that's just the place he want to see him. So he run up and saw his friend, he didn't think to have nothin' to bring him, but he want to see the face and see how they talked about it. Here what he said to him (sings):

Friend, did you bring me any silver? 
Friend, did you bring me any gold? 
What did you bring me, my dear friend, 
Friend, did you bring me any silver?

It. Here what he said to him 
he want to see the face and see how they talked about 
friend, he didn't think to have nothin' to bring him, but 
place he want to see him. So he run up and saw his 
side but when he got behind the bars, that's just the 
so-called friend. His friend liked him when he was out-

Oh, whip it — to a gravy! Now here come his 
Spoken: To keep you from the gallows pole. 
I brought you, 
Yes — you oughta thought it, 
I brought it, 
To keep you from the gallows pole.

Alan Lomax: This version of “The Young Maid Freed From The Gallows,” was played and sung by Huddie Ledbetter in New York City, November [sic] the twenty-sixth, nineteen-thirty-eight. Mr. Ledbetter learned this song in the South when he was a young man and played to fast time. And he's sung it for the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress. This song, nor this record — neither this song or this record may be used without permission — written permission, from Mr. Ledbetter. What's you address Huddie? — Three-fifty-six, West Fifty-Second Street, New York City.

19. (LITTLE) LIZA JANE (AFS 94-81)

The leader of this string band, Wilson Jones, took the nickname “Stavin’ Chain” which, as John A. Lomax noted in 1936, “is the name of a Negro hero à la Paul Bunyan. John Henry could only manage that hammer, Stavin’ Chain could do anything. He was the great woman man of the South.”27 Although Jones did perform a version of the “Stavin’ Chain” song for the Lomaxes, it is very unlikely that he was the originator of the piece or the appellation (see track 22 for more about Stavin’ Chain.)

The repertoire of Wilson Jones’ group ranged from ballads to reels. The dance-song tune, “Miss Liza Jane” is reported from the slavery period, and “Eliza” or “Liza Jane” remained a popular name for dance tunes into the twentieth century. “Little Liza Jane,” words and melody apparently copyright to Countess Ada de Lachau in 1916, is similar to the reel played here by Stavin’ Chain and his group. In 1918–19, in the Hampton Institute Series, Natalie Curtis-Burlin published a series of Negro Folk Songs which included a Dance-Game Song (“Stealin’ Partners”) entitled “Liza Jane.” Burlin also prints another set of words sung by black soldiers in France during the First World War.29 Another variant is “Square Dance Calls” performed for John A. Lomax by Pete Harris in Richmond, Texas, in May 1934 (track 13) on Deep River of Song: Black Texans: Balladeers and Songsters of the Texas Frontier (Rounnder 1821). There is also a second and different song entitled “Liza Jane” with the chorus, “Poor little Liza, poor girl, she died on the train.”30

Don’t you hear little Liza say, Eliza Jane. 
I say, don’t you hear little Liza say, Little Liza Jane.

Chorus: 
I say [I mean], little Liza, little Liza, 
Little Liza Jane, 
Say, little Liza, little Liza, 
Little Liza Jane.

Yes, I see little Liza walkin’ round, 
Little Liza Jane. 
Yes, I see little Liza walkin’ round, 
Little Liza Jane. (Chorus)

Yes, people say Liza don’t steal, 
Little Liza Jane. 
Yes sir, people told me Liza won’t steal 
Little Liza Jane. 
And I caught little Liza in my cornfield, 
Little Liza Jane. 
Yes sir, I caught little Liza in my cornfield. (Chorus)

Yes, little Liza is dressed in blue, 
Little Liza Jane. 
And I can’t see how she know what to do, 
Little Liza Jane. (Chorus)

Now, tomorrow morning, ’fore day soon, 
Little Liza Jane. 
Yes, tomorrow morning, ’fore day soon, 
Little Liza Jane. (Chorus)

Yes, get your mule in my cornfield, 
Little Liza Jane. 
Oh yes, you got your mules in my cornfield, 
Little Liza Jane. (Chorus)

I’m goin get my hound, with its own […] 
Little Liza Jane, 
I’m goin get my hound, with its own […] 
Little Liza Jane. 
I’m goin to call my dog before your horse, 
Little Liza Jane,
I’m goin’ to call my dog before your horse,  
Little Liza Jane. (Chorus)  

20. TRENCH BLUES (AFS 93-A)  
Performed by John Bray, vocal and guitar.  
Recorded by John A. Lomax, near Morgan City, Louisiana, on October 17, 1934.  

This song appeared in Our Singing Country (1941), where the Lomaxes described John Bray this way:  
“Big Nig” of Amelia, Louisiana, stood six feet and seven inches in his socks. Alan, on one of our visits, measured the spread of his mighty arms as an inch longer. When he works, “Big Nig” is the singing leader of a gang of Negroes who snake cypress out of the Louisiana swamps. “Big Nig” booms his signals to the flatboat out on the black bayou; the engineer toots his reply, and the logs come busting through the tangled swamp forest. Ten whistles means “a man dead.”

On our first visit we mistakenly tipped “Big Nig” in advance of his singing, only to find out later that he had become too drunk to sing. A year or so afterwards repeated visits put on records the singing and guitar picking of this remarkable man.

The “Trench Blues,” according to “Big Nig,” was composed during the World War when he was a soldier in France. “They didn’t give me a gun,” said “Big Nig”; “all the weapons I ever had was my guitar, a shovel, and a mop.”  

World War I is mentioned only occasionally in black music in commercial releases issued during the 1920s and in some later performances, including field recordings like this one.  

I went a-stealin’ across the deep blue sea,  
Lord, I was worrying with those submarines,  
Worrying with those submarines,  
Hey hey hey hey.  

My home’s in the trenches, living in a big dugout,  
Lord, my home’s in the trenches, living in a big dugout,  
Home’s in the trenches, living in a big dugout,  
Hey hey hey hey.

We went a-hiking to the firing line,  
Lord, I was standing hearing mens a-crying,  
Standing hearing mens a-crying,  
Hey hey hey hey.

We went a-hiking to old Mountsac (?) Hill,  
Lord, forty thousand soldiers called out to drill,  
Forty thousand soldiers called out to drill,  
Hey hey hey hey.

I went to Belgium, blew my bugle horn,  
Lord, time I blewed [motherless] Germany gone,  
Time I blewed [motherless] Germany gone,  
Hey hey hey hey.

We went to Berlin, went with all our will,  
Lord, if the whites don’t get him the niggers certainly will,  
Blacks don’t get him the niggers certainly will,  
Hey hey hey hey.

Last old words, heard old Kaiser say,  
Lord, he was calling them Germans long ways ’long the wind,  
Calling them Germans long ways ’long the wind,  
Hey hey hey hey.

Here she comes with her headlights down,  
Lord, here she comes with her headlights down,  
Home she comes with her headlights down,  
Hey hey hey hey.

[The Berlin?] women no — a-non comprend,  
Lord, the women in France hollering “non comprend,”  
The women in France hollering “non comprend,”  
Hey hey hey hey.

Raining here, storming on the sea,  
Lord, raining here, storming on the sea,  
Raining here, storming on the sea,  
Hey hey hey hey.

Whistle blow, big bell sadly tone,  
Lord, many soldiers, Lord, is dead and gone.  
Many a soldier, Lord, is dead and gone,  
Hey hey hey hey.

Called him in the morning, chased him in the night,  
Lord, hit him in the head, make him read the Americans right,  
Hit him in the head, make him read the Americans right,  
Hey hey hey hey

John A. Lomax (spoken): Two songs by John Bray, better known as ‘Big Nig’, near Morgan City, Louisiana, October the Seventeenth, Nineteen-Thirty-Four. Sung by the Library of Washington “[sic].”  

21. BATON ROUGE RAG / Interview (AFS 3990 B 2)  
Performed by Joe Harris, guitar.  
Recorded by John A. and Ruby T. Lomax in Shreveport, Louisiana, on October 9, 1940.  

When John A. Lomax recorded him, Joe Harris was in his early fifties. Born in about 1888, he had lived much further south, in New Iberia, and spoke French Creole. “Baton Rouge Rag” was also recorded commercially in 1937 by Kitty Gray and her Wampus Cats. Composer credits are to J[oe] Harris and J[immy] Davis, the old-time music singer and Louisiana Governor (1899–2000) who also composed “You Are My Sunshine,” Louisiana’s state song. Harris’s guitar playing style suggests he performed this piece with the Wampus Cats for Vocalion (although it was not issued until the 1970s). In the interview he tells John A. Lomax that he had learned the tune from a trumpet player in Bunkie, Louisiana, in about 1907. His guitar instrumental, however, has a banjo-like theme, with heel-and-toe dance timing.  

John A. Lomax: Joe, where did you get this song — this rag?  
Joe Harris: Oh, I jus’ studied it up myself.  

Lomax: Didn’t you tell me that somebody started you off on it?  
Harris: Yes sir, I sure did. The boy was a trumpet player and — eh, he learned it to me.  

Lomax: How long ago?  
Harris: Been around thirty-three years ago.
I live off women,” and was “the hero of a long, rambling real person): Stavin’ Chain. Alan Lomax reported that he himself with a character of legendary prowess associat-

cover for the insecurities of the manual workers who rural juke joints might have likewise functioned as a

smutty — a bit; not so smutty, but something like this.”36

femininity stamp. And I didn’t want that on, so, of course, man played piano the stamp was on him for life — the

start to playing piano in that section — of course when a

New Orleans. In the very early days, when people first

(AFS 1687) for Alan Lomax, Jelly Roll explained the sig-
nificance of “Winding Boy” in his repertoire, “This hap-
pens to be one of my first tunes in the blues line down in New Orleans. In the very early days, when people first start to playing piano in that section — of course when a man played piano the stamp was on him for life — the femininity stamp. And I didn’t want that on, so, of course, when I did start to playing — the songs were sort of smuttiness — a bit; not so smuttiness, but something like this.”36

Bawdy lyrics served to cover Morton’s insecurity in the bordellos where he found employment as a singer and pianist. The bawdiness of the barrelhouse blues of the rural juke joints might have likewise functioned as a cover for the insecurities of the manual workers who frequented them. In “Winding Boy” Morton compares himself with a character of legendary prowess associat-

ed with the barrelhouse (who may have been based on a real person): Stavin’ Chain. Alan Lomax reported that he “lived off women,” and was “the hero of a long, rambling

ballad, known all through the Southwest.”37 The associa-
tion of Stavin’ Chain with the barrelhouse is confirmed by Richard M. Jones, who reported hearing ‘a tall powerful negro’ with this sobriquet play boogie piano in 1904 around Donaldsonville, Louisiana, at Bayou la Fourche during the construction of the Texas and Pacific Railroad between Shreveport and New Orleans.38 Morton may be describing the same performer when he told Lomax, “Stavin’ Chain didn’t amount to very much. There was just a song around him. He was a very low-class guy. Belonged to the honky tonk gang. Just a lady’s man. Was just a song around him. Nothing to make nobody think about him the second time. “Stavin’ Chain” don’t mean a thing. They named him for a nickname.”39 In this, the moniker parallels Morton’s appellation Winding Ball or Winding Boy (as this song is titled).


Yes, winding boy, don’t deny my name, Winding boy, don’t deny my name. Winding boy, don’t deny my name.

I want a mama that’s nice and kind, I want a mama, baby, that’s nice and kind I want a mama that’s sweet and kind, So she can shake that big buh-hind. I’m the winding boy, don’t deny my name.

I like a sweet little mama, she’s good to me, Let me have that thing, really free. I’m winding boy, don’t deny my name.

Oh, this winding boy, don’t deny my name, I’m the winding boy, don’t deny my name. Yes, winding boy, don’t deny my name, Pick it up and shake it, like Stavin’ Chains. Winding boy, don’t deny my fucking name.

When I see that gal coming back to me, When I see my girl coming back to me. When I see my bitch coming back to me, I know I’m going to make her sing “Nearer My God to Thee.” Winding boy, don’t deny my name.

23. TIGER RAG / Interview (AFS 1648-B, 1649-A/B)


The New Orleans origin of “Tiger Rag” — the melody for which was copyright by Nick LaRocca’s Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1918, after they recorded the piece — is a matter for critical discussion and is best summarized by Marshall Stearns (1956) and most recently by Jack Stewart (2001).40 It seems clear, howev-

er, that the tune to “Tiger Rag” was traditional and had been played under a variety of titles for many years before anyone had the idea of copyrighting it for com-

mercial gain. Regardless of the respective merits of Morton and LaRocca’s claims to authorship, in this inter-

view, Jelly Roll gives a vivid and eloquent demonstration of how, in “Tiger Rag,” European and African-derived music were synthesized to produce an original new form of American music. Morton’s claim to have named the piece (from “making the Tiger on my elbow” or the sound “like a tiger howling”) notwithstanding, Alan Lomax’s explanation of the name may be closer to the mark. He points out that in barrelhouse lingo tiger meant the low-
est hand a man could draw in a poker game — seven high, deuce low, and without a pair, straight, or flush.” Referring to Morton’s prowess as a card shark, Lomax adds, it takes nerve to hold onto a tiger and bluff it to win, but Jelly Roll had the nerve to take the pot with bluff alone. He had learned some tricks from Sheep Eye, the gambler, as well as from Tony Jackson. All he had was the music of the Storyville bordellos — it was his tiger and he bet his life on it.”41

I like a sweet little mama, she’s good to me, Let me have that thing, really free. I’m winding boy, don’t deny my name.

Oh, this winding boy, don’t deny my name, I’m the winding boy, don’t deny my name. Yes, winding boy, don’t deny my name, Pick it up and shake it, like Stavin’ Chains. Winding boy, don’t deny my fucking name.

When I see that gal coming back to me, When I see my girl coming back to me. When I see my bitch coming back to me, I know I’m going to make her sing “Nearer My God to Thee.” Winding boy, don’t deny my name.

Jelly Roll Morton (spoken): Jazz started in New Orleans and this, er, “Tiger Rag” happened to be trans-

formed from an old quadrille that was in many different temps, and I’d no doubt give you an idea how it went. This was the introduction, meaning that every one was supposed to get their partners: (plays) “Get your part-

ners, everybody, get your partners.” And people would be rushing around the hall getting their partners. They’d maybe have — maybe five minutes lapse between that time. And of course they’d start it over again and that was the first part of it. (plays) And the next strain would be a waltz strain, I believe. (plays) — that would be the waltz strain. Also, they’d have another strain that comes right below — right beside it: (plays) — the Mazouka [mazurka] time — (plays). Of course, that was that third strain. And of course, they had another strain. And — er, that was in a different tempo: (plays). (Alan Lomax,
spoken: What time is that? (Morton): That's a two-four time, (plays). Of course they had another one. (Lomax): That makes five. Morton: Yeah, (plays). Now, I'll show you how it was transformed. It happened to be transformed by your partner at this particular time. “Tiger Rag” for your approval.

Lomax: Who named it the “Tiger Rag”? Morton: I also named it — came from the way that I played by making “the tiger” on my elbow. And I also named it. A person said once, “That sounds like a tiger howling.” I said, fine. To myself I said, that's the name.

So, I’ll play it for you: (plays): Hold that tiger!

That was many years before the Dixieland had ever started, when I played the “Tiger Rag.” Of course we named it “Tiger Rag,” but we had a lot of other numbers around that it was supposed to be good . . .

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FOOTNOTES


6 Ibid.


8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.


16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.
Deep River / Deep River, Lawd / Deep River, Lawd,
I want to cross over in a ca’m time.

— From American Ballads and Folk Songs, by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax

About THE DEEP RIVER OF SONG series: More than half a century separates us from the performances in this series, and nearly all of the artists who gave them to us have “crossed over” in that time, leaving us these treasures in trust so that we might be delighted, informed, and edified by them. Each song tells its own story, but together they form an epic of a people seeking to ford a turbulent river of oppression and disadvantage, a people who brought forth another life-giving river of untold riches; a deep river of song from which all may draw.

It was this tradition that John A. Lomax and his son, Alan, sought to preserve and document when they began their field recording for the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress in 1933, and it was this same source that Alan Lomax sought to replenish in 1981 when he and Peter B. Lowry reviewed more than a thousand field recordings of black music made by the Lomaxes in the South, the Southwest, Haiti, and the Bahamas.

Alan Lomax spent the summer of 1978 in Mississippi with John Bishop and Worth Long, shooting the program Land Where the Blues Began. “I discovered to my consternation that the rich traditions that my father and I had documented had virtually disappeared,” he wrote. “Most young people, caught up by TV and the hit parade, simply did not know anything about the black folklore that their forebears had produced and that had sustained and entertained generations of Americans. I resolved to try to do something about this situation, so far as I could.”

Lomax and Lowry eventually compiled 12 albums at the library, with more planned. The compilations were “organized in a way that might help to show blacks and other Americans the beauty, variety, the regional traits and African characteristics of this great body of song.” These albums bear witness to a transformative moment that saw the creation of a new singing language, new musical forms, and thousands of songs that belong in the first rank of human melodies. They evoke now-vanished musical worlds, showing how black style developed as settlement moved westward from the Carolinas to Texas, and how regional styles branched forth along the way.

“This music is a thing of very great beauty — a monument to the extraordinary creativity of the black people of North America,” Lomax wrote. “No song style exists anywhere that can surpass this material for sheer variety, originality, and charm. Yet its most genuine aspects are little known today and are fast fading out of currency under the pounding of the media.” He hoped that this series could help “restore to the American consciousness, and especially to African-Americans, a heritage that is about to be altogether lost.” Perhaps now, as we enter the twenty-first century, we are close enough to the “ca’m time” of songs and dreams for this restoration to take place.

CREDITS:

Original field recordings produced and recorded between 1934 and 1940 by Alan Lomax, John A. Lomax, and Ruby Terrill Lomax, and Paul Jaeger, c. 1980.

Collection Producers: Anna Lomax Chairetasikis, Jeffrey Greenberg

Deep River of Song series researched and compiled by Alan Lomax and Peter B. Lowry

Deep River of Song Series Editor: David Evans, Ph.D., University of Memphis

Prepared for release by Anna Lomax Chairetasikis and Matthew Barton

Introduction: John Cowley, Ph.D.

Song Notes: John Cowley and Barry Jean Ancelet

French Creole translations: Barry Jean Ancelet

Sound Restoration / Mastering Producer: Steve Rosenthal

Mastering: Phil Klum, Jigsaw Sound, NYC

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Copy Editor: Nathan Salsburg

Associate Editor: Eilen Harold

Series Coordination for Rounder Records: Bill Nowlin

Series Consultants: Bess Lomax Hawes, Gideon D’Arcangelo

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