Listening to the Sonic Archive: Rhetoric, Representation, and Race in the Lomax Prison Recordings

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(Published May 22, 2015)

"Lightnin" Washington singing with his group at Darrington State Farm, Texas.

Introduction

In the opening paragraph of her August 2014 *enculturation* article, "Toward a Resonant Material Vocality for Digital Composition," Erin Anderson recounts, briefly, the development of sound studies as an interdisciplinary phenomenon and its growing influence in rhetoric and composition studies. As she notes, "sound studies scholars have made great strides toward highlighting the role of music, noise, and non-verbal sound as powerful modes of

sensory experience, politics, and persuasion" (para. 1) Further, she observes that "scholars of sonic rhetoric have worked to carve out a space for sound as a subject of rhetorical analysis, a material for multimodal text production, and a methodological model for alphabetic writing practice." Given the contribution of Anderson's work and those she cites both within and outside of rhetoric and composition, it would seem we are at the genesis of a scholarly sonic boom.

Consider, however, the ways that Anderson's report on the status of sound in the field differs in tenor from another published only a few years ago by rhetorical studies scholar Greg Goodale. A guiding exigency in Goodale's *Sonic Persuasion* (2011) is his concern for sound's profound scholarly *neglect* in preference for visualist methods of knowledge making, not just in rhetoric, but within the entire Western tradition. As Goodale argues, this visualist attitude ramifies across intellectual history with particularly cacophonous moments during the Enlightenment in the development of scientific method and observation (both visualist practices) and then again during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when print culture reached its apex. "Our captivation by visual culture," he concedes, "has produced a legacy that will take decades if not centuries to overcome" (5). He then calls us to the work.

Anderson and Goodale, working only a few years from each other, offer quite different perspectives on sound's relationship to rhetoric and its attendant fields. Surely, Anderson's assessment represents the kind of progress Goodale was advocating, but that progress is tempered by his reminder that we are not just dealing in scholarly fads, but in deep disciplinary grooves that require sustained attention if sound studies hopes to become as theoretically and methodologically integral to our work as visual studies has been. We can be encouraged, though, that the growing preponderance of new work in sound and rhetoric has precipitated an emergent scholarly community in rhetoric and sound studies not present in 2011 and one marked by increased opportunity for both conversation and critique. Before getting to the bulk of this essay, then, I trace few possible intersections for these emergent conversations (including my own potential contributions) as well as the questions and critiques they raise.

Cultivating an Ethic(s) of Listening to Historical Sound

Like Anderson's "Toward a Resonant Material Vocality for Digital Composition," this article is also concerned with the sound of the recorded voice. Anderson's work toward developing a more robust understanding of what she calls the "futurity of voice" or "the possibility of remixing and rearticulating voices into new material assemblages" is a key advancement for sonic rhetoric (para. 24). Movement in our concern from *who* produced a voice to *what* that voice does apart from its originating body and "allowing [recorded voices] a valid existence beyond those bodies, even as bodies in themselves" shifts the rhetorical paradigm of the voice away from concerns about "protection" and "preservation" towards something entirely new (para. 18). So how do historians, especially those who work in and with archives—scholars for whom protection and preservation are important (and even ethically integral) components of their regular work—process and work within this paradigm shift?1 One way, as we have seen in recent work from Jody Shipka, is to reimagine and recompose our understanding of the archive itself. When working explicitly with sonic archives, however, and particularly those within state or national institutional systems, remix and rearticulation can be applied as conceptual framings for exploring sound's useful disruption of *ideological* assemblages: gender, sexuality, and (of particular interest for this article) race and racial formation.

Another critique challenges work that seeks to isolate and bracket off single-sensory phenomenon for study. Steph Ceraso addresses this problem in her recent article "(Re)Educating the Senses: Multimodal Listening, Bodily Learning, and the Composition of Sonic Experiences," by arguing that listening should be understood as a multi-sensory practice. "Multi-modal listening," as she terms it, is a practice attuned to the ways that sonic experience involves a concert of sensory modes working together, and "moves away from organ-specific definitions and instead conceives of listening as a practice that involves attending not only to the sensory, embodied experience of sound, but to the material and environmental aspects that comprise and shape one's embodied experience of sound" (105). Thomas Rickert presses the critique a bit more intently suggesting in his recent work *Ambient Rhetoric* (2014) that the notion of "multimodality" itself emphasizes attention to parts rather than their sum and thus casts a discriminating shadow over the reality of our experiences within the complex ambience of the sensorium (142). The varying perspectives here remind us that even as we continue in our efforts to expand sound's theoretical potentials, a sustained scrutinizing of the sonic should lead to a more nuanced understanding of the multiplicities of rhetorical practice itself, across the sensorium.

It follows that the rhetorical practice of composing history stands to benefit from a variety of sonic inversions. Historiography, so often concerned with assembling the most effective methods for accuracy, precision, and preservation of a "true" historical narrative, finds in the sonic artifact the paradox of preserved uncertainty. Stepping away from the quest for certainty as a guiding principle in our work, allows us, in Christa Olson's words, to "learn, not teach, about the rhetorical histories we describe" (82). Olson answers the difficulty of working in a post-certainty age by inviting us to make that decentering part of our approach—to "build our histories on shifting sand yet find ways to make them stand" (82). She invites us to seek out and build "theories to slip" and to choose "conceptual frames that call tensions to the foreground" (96). Historical work, Olson suggests, offers an indispensable arena where we may begin working through the processes of a decentered approach to rhetoric. Historical work utilizing recorded sound, and particularly historical music, provides a conspicuous and auspicious place to begin the practice of what Gunn et al. call a new scholarly "ethic of listening" (477). Like Ceraso and Anderson, Gunn et al. encourage both critical engagement with sound scholarship across disciplinary boundaries as well as the disciplining of the physical body itself toward various listening practices. Compared to the traditional scholarly environment where academic practices have evolved and become engrained within visual practices (reading, skimming, and, of course, looking at the pictures), listening can be a different and demanding experience insofar as it requires of rhetoric scholars more time and patience (you cannot skim audio artifacts) in shaping potentially new sonic literacies. This in addition to the new (for many) experience of dealing in the indeterminate materiality of the sonic register itself which include modes not generally foregrounded in scholarly discourse: simultaneity, dissonance, and multiplicity.

In what follows, I bring together these conversations about the power of recorded voice, decentered rhetorical historiography, and an ethic of multimodal listening to study a shift in cultural history when technological development made a variety of sounds (and particularly music) more accessible to the public, thereby influencing the ways that sonic material culture could circulate and have influence. As mentioned, the emphasis here will be on musical artifacts—prison recordings—housed at the Library of Congress.[2] I examine the historical circumstances of the production of those recordings—the people who sing on them, their material and now digital "remains," as well as the field workers behind the recording machines—in order to better understand how sound as rhetoric decenters traditional approaches to and understandings of cultural history and historiography. Four case studies provide the bulwark for this study and will be supported by a theoretical framework invoked above as well as by notions of rhetorical sound and voice provided by Eric King Watts and others. I conclude the essay with a discussion of how historical sonic artifacts such as those in my study productively complicate our understanding of racial formation and the ongoing racial project of reifying notions of racial otherness in the United States.

Most importantly, my study invites readers to stop reading history for a moment and listen to it. Listen to the archived voices and music of African-American men incarcerated in Southern labor camps and thus participate within and contribute to the ethics of listening described above.

I. Prison Moan

Listen: The Angels Drooped their Wings and Gone to Heaven

Sponsored by the Library of Congress, John A. Lomax and his son Alan traveled to eleven Southern African-American prisons during the summer of 1933 to record the "folksongs of the Negro[es]" incarcerated there. This music, John later wrote, was "in musical phrasing and in poetic content . . . most unlike those of the white race [and the] least contaminated by white influence or by modern Negro jazz" (Lomax 112). Both he and Alan understood the vernacular music of the isolated African American as a protected and preserved remnant of slave and, by extension, black culture—a mysterious world that, for most white citizens in the US, seventy years after Emancipation, was only just beginning to receive sustained scholarly attention. Their work that summer would produce over one hundred aluminum discs of recorded material, most of which the Library of Congress preserves, and now and then releases commercially.

Many of the recordings from the Southern prison stops, along with dozens of others collected from other sources during the trips, were carefully transcribed and published in the Lomaxes' *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934). Such publications were once relatively common and followed a similar production formula: a professionally trained musician worked with a vernacular musician to painstakingly transcribe a tune that would then be re-presented visually as sheet music within the text. *American Ballads* was among the first folk collections to be so compiled, using recordings instead of live performance as the source material. Re-presented in various stage-performances organized by the Lomaxes over the course of that decade, and then released in the early 1940s by the Library of Congress, the field recordings would eventually change how American vernacular music could be experienced, studied, and emulated by an expanding audience of both scholars and citizens. In its various phonographic releases, US vernacular music could be experienced beyond mere transcribed textual representation. The voices of the convicts, farmers, preachers, and many others, could at last be heard.

Listen: **Black Samson - "Levee Camp Holler"**

One voice was John Gibson's. When he first met John and Alan Lomax, Gibson had just begun serving a twenty-year sentence in the State Penitentiary in Nashville, Tennessee. Upon that meeting, Gibson (also known as "Black Samson") asked the Lomaxes to help facilitate his release (Lomax & Lomax 151). Perhaps that was why, despite his uneasiness, Gibson relented and allowed himself to be recorded for the Library of Congress archive. In December 1934, a little more than a year later, this report about John Gibson and the song "Levee Camp Holler" was published *American Ballads*:

> This song is the workaday of the Negro behind a team of mules. . . . Black Samson, whom we found breaking rocks in the Nashville State Penitentiary, admitted that he knew the song and had once sung it; but since he had joined the church and had turned away from the world, he no longer dared sing it. All our arguments were in vain. The prison chaplain protested that he would make it all right with the Lord. But Black Samson replied that he was a Hard-shell Baptist and that, according to their way of thinking, he would be in danger of hell-fire if he sang such a song. At last, however, when the warden had especially urged him to sing, he stepped in front of our microphone and, much to our surprise, when he had made sure that his words were being recorded, said: "It's sho hard lines dat a nigger's got to sing a worl'ly song, when he's tryin' to be sancrified; but de warden's ast me, so I guess I'll have to." And he did. But he registered his protest before the Lord on an aluminum plate, now filed in the Library of Congress at Washington (49).

John Lomax's frankness about Alan's and his involvement in persuading Gibson is astounding, but the added detail of their having exerted pressure from ecclesiastical and institutional authority is dumbfounding. Obviously, such machinations were once tolerated, but there can be little doubt that the Lomaxes exploited John Gibson's desire for freedom by exhorting him, despite his pronounced and explicit reluctance to sing, an act of inducement that 80 years later we can readily call coercion.

A close listen of the field recording reveals more of interest in "Levee Camp Holler." The track begins with an introduction from John Lomax followed by a short protest Gibson: "Lord, this levee camp song is mighty bad to sing…." It is unclear why Gibson's words do not match up better with Lomax's published rendering. The track is also uncertain; there are starts and stops during the recording and another muted voice can be heard prompting Gibson with forgotten lyrics. He does not seem to know the song that well or acts as if he does not. Also, "Levee Camp Holler" cuts out abruptly during the middle of the ninth stanza—this compared to the 28 stanzas that appear in *American Ballads and Folk Songs*. The aluminum recording discs were cut in real time with a diamond-tipped needle and could only fit about fifteen minutes per side. Recordings frequently ended mid-song the way that "Levee Camp Holler" does, but those songs would usually be rerecorded on a fresh disc. Perhaps Gibson could not be persuaded into a second take.3

Though the dialectic is captivating, there is more to listen for on the recordings than the drama between present and muted voices. It is impossible not to notice the sound of the recording materials themselves—the scratch and glitch of technology's age and decay as well as the buttressing residues of preservation. There is the revolving swoosh of the original aluminum disc decipherable in an ebb and flow of static and a needle skip, caught and cut off quickly at

the end. There is also evidence of the transfer by Library of Congress technicians, decades ago, from disc to magnetic tape. One can hear a hiccup in the audio—a faint echo of Gibson's voice as magnetic tape folds over onto itself momentarily in the mix. Finally, though much more difficult to detect, the song was transferred into the binary code of a compact disc where all previous imperfections codify forever in the digital version.

Here, compressed again as an mp3, "Levee Camp Holler" is available in ubiquity streaming on the Web (from iTunes to YouTube)—this song John Gibson never wanted to sing in the first place.

Gibson's travails were not atypical. Recording for the Lomaxes offered a unique opportunity, but one with spiritual and ethical consequences for both the subjects and Lomaxes themselves. These prison performances and the subsequent records offered a new if complicated rhetorical agency to a few of the musically talented convicts and also yielded lasting effects on how African-American culture circulated within the US. Portals to a remote, unfamiliar subculture, many of the songs that the Lomaxes archived would eventually contribute to African-American vernacular culture receiving a mainstream (largely-white) public reception that it had not yet enjoyed. Yet a tension emerges out of the knowledge that scholarly work arising out of the Lomax archive is scaffolded upon early 1930s social realities, realities that included a fascination with racial difference as well as concomitant objectification of the black subject/prisoner as historical material. Prejudice's power is, in this way, a paradox; it both motivates and constrains our ability and capacity for understanding and identification. The Lomaxes and other white scholars interested in cultural preservation shaped the reception of that history in profound, often problematic ways. The recordings thus remain a rich yet thorny resource for scholarly and popular inquiry to the extent that they indexed both black experience and the ongoing production of whiteness in the US.[4] We receive the Lomaxes' project, then, within the dissonant complexity of both prejudice and progress. They understood themselves as part of a progressive initiative far ahead of their time. That time has long passed, however, and a contemporary point of view makes moral demands on the Lomaxes that may well have been incomprehensible to them. This, of course, is the paradox of progressive thought: it will be regressive soon enough.

The dissonances particular to the early 1933 and 1934 prison recordings are made more comprehensible through conceptual framings that lend themselves well to managing ambiguity. The first is a guiding principle of revisionist historiography—one cued to the both/and-ness of historical "fact" and music's power to capture the layers of that dissonance. Along with this notion of a conflicted representative historiography, another instructive dissonance reverberates instructively across the prison recordings: that of rhetorical voice. Voice as a theoretical concept already enjoys a rich literature within rhetorical and sound studies, which I will contextualize and expand upon below. I will trace three coalescing agencies of personal, communal, and political voice and describe the ways that traditional subject/object representative relationships within and among these agencies in the archive blend together within the sonic. Interested as I am in the agency of the prisoners—particularly the new agency that a chance to perform for the archive afforded a few of the most talented among them—I also wish to complicate the notion of agency to understand its inherently discordant contradictions.

Interlude: Listening Closely

We can begin to get a sense for the dissonance I mention above by listening carefully now to several field recordings from the prison archive. While the casual listening skills I have described above are a good place to start, deeper understanding of the music requires a more attentive ear. I have modeled what might be termed a "close listen" of the song "Levee Camp Holler" in the above "Overture," though there is a good deal more to say about the potential draw of such a listen. For example, I have mentioned sonic and non-musical clues of the material and historical conditions present during the recording (and after), but I have not yet addressed more traditional sonic components such as lyrics, tone, and melody (which are, perhaps, more intuitive). For now, permit me to emphasize the simple practices of care and attention. For example, it took several listens before I realized that someone was supplying John Gibson with the lyrics to "Levee Camp Holler." Sentient listening to this particular grouping of archival music can often be an affecting experience, but some recordings are more difficult to listen to. Their challenge results from the material conditions present at the time of the recording as well as the way that the wear and tear of technology's decay obscures their clarity. More poignantly, perhaps the most exacting difficulty in listening lies in the content of the recordings themselves. The prison recordings echo a despicable past of de jure segregation—resounding of evidence of oppressive injustice, systematic cruelty, and omnipresent prejudice. Each of these listening observations and experiences are significant and lend themselves to a more nuanced understanding of sound's rhetorical impact.

II. Dissonant Voices

Listen: Lightnin' Washington and prisoners, "Good God Amighty"

After being refused admission to the Texas State Penitentiary in Huntsville and rebuffed by a negative experience at Prairie View state school for blacks (Now Prairie View A&M University), John and Alan Lomax made their first real headway in recording African-American prisoners when they visited the Central State Prison Farm in Sugar Land, Texas. At "Sugarland," the Lomaxes encountered two aging men who would become central to the prison archive. The first was seventy-one-year-old Mose "Clear Rock" Platt, who had been jailed for forty-seven years on a murder charge. The other, James "Iron Head" Baker was sixty-four and knew so many songs that John Lomax would later refer to him as a "black Homer." Platt, on the other hand, was a master improviser and could sing the same song with seemingly infinite variations and, just as easily, could make up new ones on the spot, making him, as John Szwed has written, "a folklorist's dream" (41). John Lomax recalls first meeting Platt and Baker in the hospital building on the complex while recording a convalescing man named Mexico in one of the large bedrooms there. Baker was watching the recording session with interest and said (in John's rendering), "I'se Iron Head, I'se a trusty. I know lots of jumped-up, sinful songs—more than any of these niggers" (Lomax 165). He recorded with the Lomaxes for the rest of that night and throughout the next day, taking turns singing with his "pardner," Platt. The Lomaxes observed that the songs produced at Sugarland were of immense diversity. There were "rhythmic, surging songs of labor; cotton-picking songs; songs of the jailbird" as well as "songs of loneliness and the dismal monotony of life in the penitentiary; songs of pathetic longing for his 'doney,' his woman" (166). Above all, the Lomaxes averred the "words, the music, the rhythm, were simple" and the result of the "natural emotional outpouring of the black man in confinement" (166).

Listening and Voice: Mose Platt

In the following case studies, I move within the narratives that the Lomaxes collaborated on with Platt, Baker, and other prisoners to demonstrate sound's relationship to the oral/aural process of personal, communal, and institutional/political agency and remembering. Such processes can be understood as useful nuances of rhetorical voice. While voice as a theoretical concept has been employed to various (and sometimes disparate) ends, Eric King Watts usefully frames a way of understanding the theoretical potential of voice within the sonic mode.[5] Watts distinguishes a "middle road," between the "ontic and symbolic" potentials of voice, drawing out the tensions between "speech as a sensual, personal, and 'authentic' phenomenon and language as an abstract impersonal symbolic system" (180). These tensions are ever-present in the prison recordings and show up in the relationships and rhetorics at play in each level of the rhetorical situation. An example of such a tension can be heard in James Baker's singing voice, which, in concert with the material clues on the recording and the Lomax book excerpt, is a powerful reminder of his humanity and the reality of his subjugation. On the other hand, "Levee Camp Holler" was interesting to the Lomaxes as a *symbol* expressing African-American prison life and by extension an even more abstracted symbolic slave culture. Within such a paradigm, John Gibson himself is unimportant. For the rhetorical listener, the seemingly distinct ontic (or that concerned with *being*—in this case human being) and symbolic components of the recording merge. One cannot exist without the other, and indeed, the presence of a listener (us) opens up other possible meaning relationships between the recordings, the voices on them, and the institution that produced and distributed them.

In this way agency is both contingent to and emergent from the rhetorical situation that produced the recordings and has various meaning dependent upon which relationship is emphasized. Getting at this kind of rhetorical nuance was very much the point of Kenneth Burke's pentad, but I also find a recent framing from Thomas Rickert useful here. Following the work of Jenny Edbauer Rice and others, Rickert encourages an "ecologic" approach to rhetoric that embraces these complexities where "the interactions of numerous agents mutually form and condition a chaotically dynamic system" (xiv). For Rickert, rhetoric is ambient, and does its work "responding to and put forth through affective, symbolic, and material means, so as to . . . reattune or otherwise transform how others inhabit the world . . ." (162). Music performs this ambience well, particularly the ways that the affective, symbolic, and material aspects

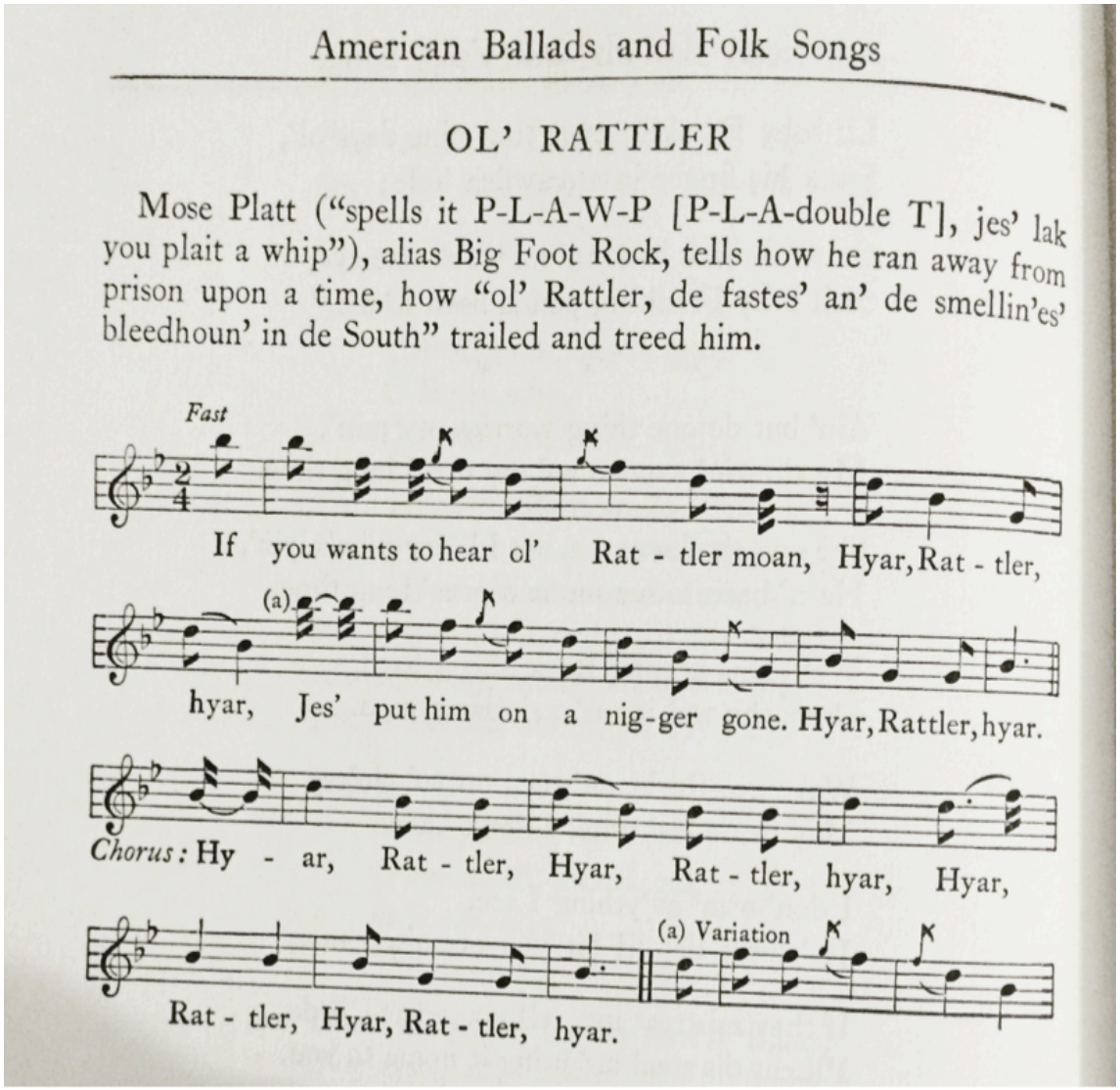
reveal tensions and dissonances within the rhetorical process which, in turn, requires an understanding of rhetoric in its complexity rather than as a tool for clear or incisive determinate persuasion.

An example of these various tensions and dissonances can be found in the voice of Mose Platt who, unlike Gibson, willingly participated in the field recordings. His voice can be heard on at least twelve distinct recordings, which include several solo performances as well as a number of collaborations with other prisoners, including Baker, his friend. Platt has a deep, distinctive baritone singing voice. His seemingly effortless vocal and pitch control indicate years of practice and performance. When other men join in singing with Platt, their ease and enthusiasm reveals participatory singing as part of a deeply embedded culture, not just a shared casual pastime among the prisoners.

Listen: Mose Platt – "Run Nigger Run"

I have selected two of Mose Platt's recordings for a close listen, both about slave escape and capture. The first, a song with the dubious title "Run Nigger Run," is presented here in preface to the second. "Run Nigger Run" evokes the long tradition of slave escape. In fact, a song with a nearly identical refrain can be connected to Nat Turner's slave rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia in 1831 (Lomax and Lomax 228). But listening to Mose Platt sing his version, it is difficult to mistake the enthusiasm in his voice as he performed it proudly for the Lomaxes, the warden, and an audience of his peers. Halfway through the recording (43), we even hear several voices encouraging Platt to keep singing. Clearly, a song about escape had meaning similar as well as particular to the tune's historical context. In a sense as much transgressive as comic, there is dissonance between these two renderings, one historical and symbolic, the other kairotic and salient to the moment. Platt had a dark sense of humor.

We see this dark humor again in another escape slave-escape song, called "Ol' Rattler." "Ol' Rattler" is a song named for its subject, a mythic prison watchdog. The dog's job was to chase and maul any escaping prisoner, a job presumably tied to a longer tradition of slave capture. For this example, I am interested in making the humanistic/symbolic dichotomy explicit by comparing recorded sound in varying shades of abstraction, from recorded vocal singing to its abstract visual/textual rendering. To make my point I will work backward—from most abstract to least. At the far end of that trajectory is Mose Platt and other voices on the recording which present a striking, unmistakably human contrast to the other representations. But in this most "present" and least abstracted space, I will pause to complicate the move toward championing the salience of the voice or its ability to access or understand deep humanity. A voice on an archival recording is still an abstraction and there is still an insurmountable distance between that recording and the people who made it.



In the above excerpt from *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (66), consider how race is represented discursively in the text of the sheet music through lingual dialect and in the short excerpted quote at the top from Mose Platt. Consider also how both textual and musical elements of this discursive artifact might have racialized the interpretation of the content. Lyrics rendered as dialect and grace notes in four of the five opening measures are each attempts to represent the sound of Mose Platt's voice, one approximating his vocal style; the other, seizing on the vocal nuances of his sung musical intervals. The lyrics to the song, printed on the opposite page, also approximate (and do not always match) with the recorded version. They do, nevertheless, depict a bleak reality of African-American prison life, one defined by its invisible and insurmountable rural borders. Ol' Rattler did not simply keep prisoners from escaping, for those who made the attempt would not survive his attack: "If I trip this time" one lyric relates, "I'll trip no more." A close reading of the lyrical texts reveals several other elements, which, when paired with an analysis of other songs in the collection, reveal a complex association of fear, oppression, back-breaking labor, and the constant threat of death and violence—punctuated here and there with a cathartic line of comedy or bawdy tale of sexual conquest. The Lomaxes' meticulous inclusion of the lyrics allow for this careful analysis and, even in dialect, allow the interested reader an opportunity to reflect on the experience of captivity and the terror of attempted escape:

Now I run till I'm almos' blin'
I'm on my way to de long-leaf pine.

I didn' have no time to make no thimpathee
My nighes' route was up a tree.

The various visual, musical, and textual renderings of the transcription, however, contain several significant elisions. They tell us very little about Mose Platt. (We are fortunate to have his name at all given that many of the recordings are attributed merely to "unknown prisoner.") Platt is caricatured in the sheet music, with only his blackness, criminal status, eagerness to escape, and inability to do so represented in the song. Each of these subjectivities can then be re-inscribed and mythologized as representation stands in, ominously, for historical reality.

Listen: "Ol' Rattler" – Piano rendering

In the above audio clip, I recorded a pianist's rendering of "Ol' Rattler" from the sheet music in *American Ballads and Folk Songs*. While the simple melody is also an abstraction of the actual vocal performance, it at least provides interested and musically literate readers with an approximated version of what the song sounds like. Scholars might use this melodic rendering in comparison to other folk melodies or it might even be appropriated by a jazz or blues musician and riffed upon in their own work.

Listen: Mose Platt -- Ol' Rattler

Now, compare both the sheet music and the simple piano melody of "Ol' Rattler" with the Lomax recording. The differences are striking. Platt's voice is rich and expressive compared to the piano's monotones. Variations on the melody are noticeably present on the recording, even within the few verses captured. Platt's phrases sometimes garble together—just like they might in an everyday encounter; it is difficult to understand his every word. Also, his singing companions emerge as salient pieces of the song's arrangement while these parts go unmentioned in the text. In contradistinction to a prescriptive understanding of rhetoric as logical clarity in persuasion, the most powerful aspect of voice rendered here or anywhere else is not the clarity of its communicative potential, but its variety, nuance, and multiplicity.

Another powerful aspect of an "ontic" listening of recordings like "Ol' Rattler" is that it momentarily diverts attention away from the heroic white-savior narrative so prominent in Western culture and demands that attention be granted to the person's voice on the recording. Symbolic meaning is lain aside for a moment and we are reminded of Roland Barthes' characterization of the voice's uncanny ability to connect us with the human. For Barthes this human essence is the "grain of the voice," —or language "in its very materiality" (506). If, as John Durham Peters reminds us, "the voice is a metaphor of power," tied distinctly to the experience of embodied identity, then "[e]ach person's voice is a creature of the shape of one's skull, sinuses, vocal tract, lungs, and general physique. Age, geography, gender, education, health, ethnicity, class, and mood all resound in our voices" (n.p.). We hear each of these things in the recorded voice of Mose Platt—evidence of his distinct humanity, and even though incarcerated, his power and agency. However, and in line with Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence, the humanistic qualities of Platt can only reach out so far.6 Eventually his voice gets lost in the mix of the earlier representations, and, under scrutiny, the recording also cannot bear the weight of a true *present*-ation of the subject. The recording—which has a grain all its own—reminds us of the disconnection and temporal distance between his human body and mechanized historical reproduction. And suddenly, Mose Platt becomes a ghost.

Iron Head Blues: Secular and Spiritual Communion

James "Iron Head" Baker, Sugar Land, Texas

Platt's singing companion James Baker ("Alias: Iron Head" as he was wont to say on the recordings) had lived and worked as a prisoner in the Central Imperial Prisoner near Sugar Land, Texas. Tall and quiet, he had a reputation among fellow inmates as having a large repertoire of songs. Over several years of acquaintance, John Lomax got to know him well and would devote a whole chapter in his autobiography to Baker. As mentioned before, Lomax called Baker a "black Homer" because he knew hundreds songs of all varieties and his abilities for improvisation and on-the-fly composition may well have matched the genius of ancient epic poets. This comparison is more apt than even Lomax would have imagined. Baker's rhythmic facility contributed to his popularity with and also to his respect among fellow inmates. Baker said he got his nickname while on the Ramsey State Farm, a work prison in Angleton, Texas while cutting wood. A felled oak tree fell nearby and "Some of the limbs hit my head, an' it broke 'em off; didn't knock me down, an' it didn't stop me from working." So he became known as Iron Head.

On the other hand, Baker referred to *himself* as "De roughest nigger what ever walked de streets of Dallas. In de pen off an' on fo' thirty-fo' years" (Lomax 166). Calling himself, after six convictions, an "H.B.C.—habitual criminal, you know" (166). Lomax comments, however, that he did not really look the part. His dignity and tenderness far outshone any residual evidence of hardness in his face. By Lomax's description, Baker seemed a solemn and honest figure, one whom "unlike the other Negro convict[s] [. . .] confessed that he was guilty of other crimes than those that had put him in prison": "Mos' of de times dey didn't catch me" (168), he was said to say. Indeed, if anything, Baker had a familial relationship with other inmates. One night while he was recording for the Lomaxes, his colleagues crowded the room and shouted requests. One of those requests, Lomax writes, did cause a bit of a rise out of Baker. They urged him to sing "Shorty George" a song about "the short passenger train that ran from Houston to the farm once a month on a Sunday, bringing visiting wives and sweethearts" (168). They begged until Iron Head had to shout at them: "You niggers know dat song always tears me to pieces. I won't sing it," after which he walked away and stood in the corner shadows and motioned for Lomax. "I'll sing dat song low for you":

Shorty George, you ain't no fren' of mine
Take all de wimmens, leave de mens behin'

Listen: James Baker - Shorty George

“It makes me restless to see my woman,” he confided in Lomax. “I’se a trusty an’ I has a easy job. I could run down one o’ dem corn rows an’ git away, any day. But when de law caught me, dey would put me back in de line wid de fiel’ han’s. I’se too ol’ for dat hard work” (167).

In the spring of 1936 and after corresponding with Baker a few times, Lomax returned to Sugarland and arranged for Baker’s parole. The conditions of his release were that he would work for Lomax as a chauffeur and as an ambassador in the prisons, “acting as a go-between with black musicians and demonstrating the kinds of songs Lomax was looking for” (Porterfield 375). After the recording trip concluded—and if Baker cooperated—Lomax would help him set up a business doing the work he had done in prison. Lomax tried unsuccessfully to teach him to drive, but Baker was more successful in his second role. “Feels sorta like home,” he remarked after a stop at Parchman prison (Lomax 172). While they drove, Iron Head would often sing his favorite song, “Go Down Old Hannah,” which was “one of the best known of the slow drag work songs sung by Negro prisoners in South Texas” (Botkin 5). Baker claimed to have first sung it in prison in 1908 “on long hot summer day when about three o’clock in the afternoon the sun (Old Hannah) seemed to stop and ‘just hang’ in the sky” (5). Unlike earlier examples, I have provided all of the lyrics for “Go Down Old Hannah” in order to call attention to the juxtapositioning of the sacred and secular represented there (which will be the focus of the next section).

Listen: "Go down, old Hannah"

Chorus:
Go down, old Hannah,
Won't you rise no more?
Go down, old Hannah,
Won't you rise no more?

Lord, if you rise,
Bring judgment on.
Lord, if you rise,
Bring judgment on.

Oh, did you hear
What the captain said?
Oh, did you hear
What the captain said?

That if you work
He'll treat you well,
And if you don't
He'll give you hell.

Chorus

Oh, long-time man,
Hold up your head.
Well, you may get a pardon
And you may drop dead.

Lord there's nobody feels sorry
For the life-time man.
Nobody feels sorry
For the life-time man.

The inmates generally considered songs like "Go Down, Old Hannah" and "Shorty George" "sinful" and, like John Gibson, many refused or had to be persuaded to sing them. This, however, did not seem to be the case for Mose Platt or James Baker who sung them often and without much prompting, as often the anecdote above reveals, as part of the daily experience of living. "Sinful" songs are part of a rich tradition of secular African-American songs that, unlike the "negro spiritual," were sung for pragmatic rather than religious purposes. As a product of an antebellum African-American consciousness, Lawrence Levine writes, such African-American secular music was "occasional music" and "as varied, as narrow, as fleeting as life itself" (19). Spirituals, he argues, were the best source for understanding the black world-view during slavery because "slaves used it to articulate their deepest and most enduring feelings and certainties" (19). Despite these differences, Levine concedes that the two styles of music had unmistakable similarities: "In both the temple and the field, black song was for the most part communal song" (217).

This is the sense one gets listening to James Baker's songs in the Lomax archive. He was a master of both the secular and the sacred, and—in his case—the two styles often merge. It can be difficult to tell if a song is meant for working or worshiping. "Go Down, Old Hannah" is a prime example here. The song was a "slow drag work song" used in the field for laborious work with a hoe or other ground tilling implement. Listening to the song, the slow but intense rhythm of that work is manifest, but so also is the depth of the tune as an emotional petition to the sun, Hannah, to "rise no more." The song, despite its seemed secular content, is sung in a distinctly spiritual style and in the traditional call-and-response, or antiphonal, structure of sacred songs. This antiphony was intentionally communal and, as Levine and others have shown, residual of African life and sociality (33). In the case of "Go Down, Hannah," both the secular and the sacred are present. For Baker and his fellows, Hannah (the sun) is a source of both suffering and light. Her persistent rising and falling is a reminder of the rhythms of prison life, hard work, and the lack of hope for the "life-time man." Death-as-escape is welcomed and characterized here in the petitioning of the sun to "raise no more." However, the line "Lord if you rise, bring judgment on" could as easily be part of a hymnal. And the connections to the sacred may go even deeper than just style. Christians often see Hannah, the Old Testament mother of the prophet Samuel, as a type and shadow of Mary, mother of Jesus (see 1 Samuel 2). Like Jesus', Samuel's birth was miraculous; the rising and setting "sun" Baker sings of—one explicitly connected to judgment in "Go Down, Hannah"—is reminiscent of the other, homophonic, "son." In this case, the song has both a functional, practical communal purpose for the inmates as well as what sounds to be a more implicit, symbolic one. Still, the rhetorical complexity of the song makes it hard to classify as either secular or sacred. Instead, we can understand "Go Down, Hannah" as an amalgam of enmeshed rhetorical components, material, practical, spiritual, historical, and, for Baker, even sentimental.

Lead Belly and the Sonic Politics of a Pardon

We have thus far explored the ontic and symbolic meshing of sound-as-voice as well as the rhetorical implications of such a meshing for personal and communal meaning making for incarcerated men in Southern Jim Crow prisons. We have seen—or *heard*— multi-vocal nuances within those two modes and I have sought to parse the ways that voice-in-song cuts across easily classifiable rhetorical ideals. Instead, those ideals are always in tension, always dissonant, and always decentered. So, even as voice is significant to personal identity, Gibson's, Platt's, and Baker's individual identities are easily subsumed by the symbolic in even the most carefully drawn attempt to focus in on ontological individuality. An intentionally symbolic understanding of voice, while a more familiar rhetorical positioning, is also complicated by this multi-vocality. Songs can be abstracted from their original voices and be given new meanings by external parties for specific institutional, nationalistic, or racial purposes, but the same music can also be richly symbolic for its originating users. Institutionalized or nationalistic symbolism codifies African-American experience (and race itself) into a reduced and simplistic monotone. To use a sonic metaphor from earlier in the essay, the institutionalization of the prison recordings has the same effect as their digitization: compression, distortion, and the codification of various imperfections. On the other hand, the sonic symbols at play within the vernacular context of the song itself—represented nicely in the antiphony of call-and-response—is that of community, sympathy, and shared struggle. The former symbolization is reductive, the latter productive.

In this final case study, I wish to discuss the political voice, which along with the personal and communal rounds out three agencies or rhetorical modes sonically discernable in the prison recordings. As I have asserted, the differences between these modes do not necessarily differ in the ways that they sound, rather they work together in concert and, depending on context, reach out to meet one rhetorical need or another, depending on what the moment offers up. This, perhaps, is one of the most exciting and frustrating elements of studying music rhetorically: it is rife with

significance. Any one voicing can have a multitude of rhetorical implications. John Lomax understood this and used the music from the prisons (as well as the prisoners themselves when he could) to further his career. This was a part of the political environment of the prisons while the Lomaxes were on site making records. They were not just there to gather recordings, philanthropically for the greater good of the country. Occasionally, however, prisoners also recognized the political possibilities of their involvement with the Lomaxes and others from whom they could leverage privilege, and also took advantage.

In the above example, I mentioned that John Lomax helped to arrange James Baker's parole. Lomax then employed Baker as a traveling companion until their relationship and tolerance for one another dissolved and they parted company. Lomax encountered Baker a few years later in the Ramsey State Convict Farm where Baker was working on the garden squad. "I should have left him at Sugarland to weave from corn shucks horse collars and rugs for Captain Gotch and Captain Flanagan," Lomax later wrote (Lomax 177). As much as Lomax laments the ultimate results, Baker's release was a significant political triumph for both. Recall that John Gibson also hoped that his interaction with the Lomaxes would lead to his release. In a rhetorical situation where privilege is so unevenly distributed, the political agency of the incarcerated would be limited to the few things that might set them apart, like good behavior and cooperation. In Baker's case, when the Lomaxes arrived, his talent as a singer gave him sufficient agency to negotiate release—even though his freedom would not last long.

Baker's story is reminiscent, however, of the much more famous example of Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter's release from Sugarland penitentiary in Texas in 1925. In January of 1935, *Time* magazine ran a headlining story in their music section titled "Murderous Minstrel" that relates the story. Juxtaposed conspicuously alongside a more typical-to-form article about famed composer Igor Stravinsky, "Murderous Minstrel" was accompanied by the below verses and a photograph of a middle-aged African American man wearing worn overalls and strumming a patched 12-string guitar.

I am your servant, composed this song;
Please, Governor Neff, let me go back home
I know my wife will jump and shout
When de train roll up and I come steppin' out.

Please, Governor Neff, be good an' kind,
Have mercy on my great long time,
I don't see to save my soul;
If I can't get a pardon, try me in a parole […]

Please Governor Neff, be good and kind,
And if I can't get a pardon, will you cut my time?
If I had you, Governor Neff, like you got me,
I would wake up in the mornin' and set you free.
And I'm going home to Mary—po' Mary.

The article begins in a racially charged and sensationalized vernacular common to the day: "In Texas a black buck known as Lead Belly murdered a man." The statement, while crude and patronizing, was true enough. It referred to a 1918 incident that led to Lead Belly's imprisonment in Sugarland. The story continues, with a simplified account of the circumstances that led to his release in 1925 but then back into prison by 1930:

> [Lead Belly] sang a petition to Governor Pat Neff and was granted a pardon. Back in the Louisiana swamplands, where he was born Huddie Ledbetter, his knife made more trouble. He was in State Prison at Angola when John A. Lomax, eminent ballad collector, stopped by last summer and asked the warden if he could please hear Lead Belly sing.
>
> John Lomax arrived in Manhattan last week to lecture on ballads and with him was Lead Belly, wild-eyed as ever. The Negro had been pardoned again because Mr. Lomax had made a phonograph record of a second petition and taken it to Louisiana's Governor Allen.

This and many other reports of Lead Belly's *second* pardoning—a compelling but disputed detail related to the circumstances around his release from Angola prison—is part of a fascinating historical problem that, as both Lead Belly's and Lomax's biographers have acknowledged in different ways, remains "a central element of Lomax-Leadbelly lore" (Porterfield 331). In short, it never actually occurred, but Lomax and Leadbelly would both use the tale to advance their commercial and professional success.

The first pardon, however, is a fact of record. It is also a remarkable example of the ways that music became one of the few political tools afforded prisoners serving in the Southern African-American prison contexts at the beginning of the twentieth century. "Governor Pat Neff (Sweet Mary)" was the name of Lead Belly's sung petition. For it, Lead Belly drew on a number of rhetorical tactics to accomplish his goal of release. For example, Lead Belly knew Governor Neff was a Baptist and wished to appeal to his religious sensibilities. His girlfriend's name was Mary, but calling Mary his "wife" in the song was conflated powerfully with the symbolic Mary of scripture: "I put Mary in it, Jesus's mother, you know. I took a verse from the bible, around about the twenty second chapter of Proverbs, around the fourteenth verse: if you will forgive a man his trespasses, the heavenly father will also forgive your trespasses" (86). This compositional choice was part of a larger, more carefully composed process for Lead Belly. He didn't usually write down his compositions, but in this case he wanted to be precise. One of the better lines from the song, "If I had you like you have me, I'd wake up in the morning and set you free," is a good example of this precision. Listen here to the song in full, recorded out of its original context several years later, but maintained as an artifact of the pardon narrative in the Library of Congress.

Listen: Lead Belly – Governor Neff

I will resist the temptation of a point-by-point analysis here—to do so would be to suppose that there is a determinable equation within the song that led to Lead Belly's release. Surely his musical talent, his persistence, his correct assessment of audience, his timing, and his lyrics were all contributing factors, but one cannot point casually to any one combination of those factors leading to his pardon by Governor Neff. This indeterminacy is part of the larger rhetorical decentering that occurs within a sonic rhetoric. A close listen paired with a careful historical analysis reveals several resonant and contributing details that point toward causality, but they also raise several unanswerable questions. Indeed, what is unknown about the release of Lead Belly from Sugarland in 1925 is as interesting as what is known. One question that looms large for this study, for example, is to what extent did Lead Belly pardon lore resonate within John Gibson, a captive of that same Sugarland complex in 1933, the year the Lomaxes arrived.

Conclusion: Toward a Sonic Rhetoric of African-American Vernacular Culture

To speak of "vernacular culture" is to consider how highly particularized experiences of quotidian folklife are everyday represented and codified both within that culture as a shared cultural identity and also as a means of presenting and differentiating that identity from other, sometimes competing, vernaculars. For Margaret Lantis, a more complete rendering of the idea might be the "vernacular aspect or portion of the total culture" which expresses the notions of "'native to . . .' or common of a locality, region, or, by extension, of a trade or other group: the

commonly used or spoken as distinct from the written" (203). Vernacular culture, then, is more readily found in the currency of everyday experience (speech, and by extension song, but also in the "handmade" and material). The residue of tradition is represented within these practices, but the traditional need not mean antiquated. Indeed, Lantis's entomological analysis of the word reveals that the "Latin does not seem to suggest traditional or primitive but rather 'of one's house,' of the place. This is the connotation we want: the culture-as-it-is-lived appropriate to well-defined places and situations" (203). "Since speech is not only essential," she continues, "but an important essential of situationally structured behavior, it is quite all right if 'vernacular culture' suggests first speech, then an extension to other behavior" (203).

Though the Lomaxes were not necessarily the first investigators drawn to African-American study, their interest in collecting the musical vernacular artifacts of African-American prisoners is distinguished by their pioneering attempt to understand and give structure to an obscure, distinctly racial history of slave and postbellum culture through the study of recorded, speech-based vernacular artifacts in the study of African-American culture. Though the Lomaxes saw their work as one of cultural preservation—of locating and preserving a distinct and authentic African-American musical past—we can understand it as one exploring both racial difference *and* racial formation through the collection and distribution of African-American vernacular music. The proto-blues music that the Lomaxes and others recorded in the South carried with it vernacular evidence of what was taken by some to be a "new race" forged in the blending of African extraction and American emancipation/reconstruction. Amiri Baraka underscores this point by using this phrase in his influential study *Blues People*, arguing that the "African cultures, the retention of some parts of these cultures in America, and the *weight* of the stepculture produced the American Negro. A new race" (7, emphasis in original). Baraka makes music the "persistent reference" of his study because "the development and transmutation of African music to American Negro music (a *new* music) represents [. . .] this whole process in microcosm" (7-8). The Lomaxes' work, then, might be understood in terms of what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call a "racial project," which is "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (56). Furthermore, "racial projects connect what race means in a particularly discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning" (56, their emphasis). Thus do Omi and Winant call attention to the linkage between social structure and representation in the processes of racial formation. These two elements can be understood in the same terms as the contrasting-but-linked elements discussed above related to voice where both internal/social and external/representative rhetorics are in circulation.

In the prison recordings the vernacular genres of African-American life on the sharecropping farms of the Jim Crow South help to understand distinct types of behaviors within African-American experience during that era and likely, as the Lomaxes suspected, much earlier eras as well. They also provide a keystone in our understanding of African-American music's progression from the 19th to 20th century. As well as presenting the rhythm of work life in the prisons in 1933, work songs such as "Levee Camp Holler" or "Pick a Bale O'Cotton" can be understood accurately enough as "the immediate predecessors of blues" (Baraka 18). Spirituals, as I have sought to show, characterize the merging of American and African superstitious/religious traditions; secular or "sinful" songs like "Ol' Rattler" or "Run Nigger Run" were expressions of sorrow, rebellion, sexuality, and playful levity. Each of these genres carry with them what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has famously named "Signifyin(g)" elements.

Though dated, Gates's theory remains a poignant descriptor for African-American artistic, rhythmic, and poetic culture. Signifyin(g) is the "black trope of tropes, the figure for black rhetorical figures" (75) and can be found in the African-American linguistic stylings of (among others) trickery, half-truth, innuendo, boasting, and playful circularity. The manipulation of these "classic black figures of Signification" created African-American agency—the opportunity for "the black person to move freely between two discursive universes" (76) and help to understand Lead Belly's political petition. His music successfully Signified both African-American suffering and virtuosic creativity—a kind of masterful pairing of everyday black experience and white genre expectations. This both/and sonic rhetorical appeal allowed both he and James Baker to secure freedom from prison. Even when release was not the end result, all of the examples I have discussed above showcase vernacular African-American music's rhetorical power. We have heard this power in the voices of convicts engaged in everyday (and often personal) activities and emotions, in the symbolic cadence of community, and also as decontextualized representation of African-American culture appropriated by the powerful voice of institutional authority. Though we now see the cracks in the Lomaxes' methods and ideologies, their recordings would, for a time, have significant progressive impact on scholars' and

later a (largely white) middle-class by nuancing previously held views of both racial difference through an increased understanding African-American experience during and in the decades immediately following slavery.

As a racial project, then, the Lomaxes' work within African-American prisons had two significant opposing ideological consequences, one expansive, the other, reductive. First, the sounds of toiling, worshiping, and otherwise Signifyin(g) prisoners would help to redraw the racially coded parameters of African-American vernacular culture for white audiences comfortable with paradigms drawn from other long-held black cultural representations.7 Theorists within critical race studies call this process "rearticulation."8 On the other hand, these representations would themselves become tropes of typical African-American life in the South —codified as the "African-American tradition"— and therefore limit and even re-essentialize public understanding of the complexities and always-evolving nature of African-American culture in the United States.

These ideas voice the ways that the study of vernacular music as rhetoric offers various possibilities for understanding cultural formation and difference. This is especially so when the vernacular is part of a racial project because of vernacular music's ability as a discursive practice to express multiplicity concisely. As I expressed in the introduction of this essay, the seeming paradox of concision/multiplicity should be a heralding attribute of a sonic rhetorical approach. In the prison recordings we listen to what seem to be a simple expressions of lived experience. But, as I have explored above, deeper listening reveals the ways interpretation, representation, and historical explanation of racial experience reveal the complexities inherent to racial dynamics in the US (Omi and Winant 56). Rhetorical meaning here is derived not through so-called *persuasion*, but from the difficult, often painful dynamics of working through and against difference—of both working towards a sustainable *understanding* of otherness and of working from the other side out of obscurity, discrimination, and subjugation and toward equality. In the 1930s, African- American vernacular music was beginning to be understood as more than a body of artifacts to be collected and indexed for the archive, but as a discourse engaged in changing understanding of race and racial difference itself. Indeed, during the interwar period, some began to realize, as Baraka argues, that African-American music was not just representative of black cultural experience "from slave to citizenship" but instead could be understood as being symbolic of American culture itself.

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Songs (in the order of their appearance in the essay):

1. "The Angels Dropped their Wings and Gone on to Heaven." Sung by group of Negro convicts. Tennessee state penitentiary. Nashville, TN. AFS 00179 B02. John A. Lomax, August 1933.

2. "Levee Camp Holler." Sung by John Gibson (Black Samson). Tennessee state penitentiary. Nashville, TN. AFS 00179 B03. John A. Lomax, August 1933.

3. "Good God A'Mighty." Sung by group of Negro convicts with ax-cutting. State penitentiary, Huntsville, TX. AFS 00179 B03. John A. and Alan Lomax, November, 1934.

4. "Run Nigger Run." Sung by Mose Platt (Clear Rock). Central state farm, Sugar Land, TX. AFS 00196 A01. John A. and Alan Lomax, December, 1933.

5. "Ol' Rattler." Sung by Mose Platt (Clear Rock). Central state farm, Sugar Land, TX. AFS 00208 B01. John A. and Alan Lomax, April 1934.

6. "Shorty George." Sung by James Baker (Iron Head). Central state farm, Sugar Land, TX. AFS 00202 A02. John A. Lomax, February, 1934.

7. "Go Down, Hannah." Sung by James Baker (Iron Head), Will Crosby, R. D. Allen, and Mose Platt (Clear Rock). Central state farm, Sugar Land, TX. AFS 00195 A02. John A. and Alan Lomax, December 1933.

8. "Governor Pat Neff." Sung by Huddie (Lead Belly) Ledbetter with guitar. Wilton, Connecticut. AFS 00053 A. John. A Lomax, February, 1935. f.l. Nineteen hund'ed an' twenty-three, judge took my liberty away from me. Singer from Shreveport, La.

Notes

- 1. Anderson is well aware of the importance of representational ethics, noting the "obvious liability" of efforts to intentionally defy the identity or property of individuals from which recorded voices originate. These concerns are particularly important to institutions like the Library of Congress where "protection" and "preservation" are part of its mission. Violations of these ethics are common, however. Two contemporary examples are worth mentioning: In 1999, the musician Moby had a hit record with "Natural Blues," which sampled Vera Hall's "Trouble So Hard" from a recording made by John and Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress archive. Similarly, Canadian artist Feist recently recorded a version of the traditional folksong "Sea Lion Woman," another Library of Congress recording. Moby never compensated Hall or her estate with a percentage of the monetary proceeds from the single and Feist claimed composition credit for "Sea Lion Woman" in the liner notes for her 2007 album *The Reminder*.
- 2. Many, if not all, of the recordings I present in this essay have been released in a variety of places, some sanctioned by the Library of Congress, others not. My selection of recordings, which are not yet a part of the public domain, have been graciously curated and sanctioned by the Library of Congress with the help of Todd Harvey, collections specialist and curator of the Alan Lomax Collection. Harvey's first response to me when I asked about publishing the songs was on the ethics of the process: "a good faith effort [should be made] to contact the rights holders." Unfortunately, no contact information is currently available for the estates of John Gibson, Mose Platt, or James Baker.
- 3. West Virginia University Press recently released "Levee Camp Holler" on Jail House Bound a collection of songs culled from the Lomaxes' 1933 prison trip. In the liner notes, they observe correctly that John Lomax often "altered the sequence of stanzas, changed words, or even compiled a version from several sources" for American Ballads and Folk Songs. He justified this from the standpoint of a curator. His goal

was a comprehensive understanding of a song's variety, not the capture of a single performance, or a statement about a particular performer (even when one is implied).

- 4. According to folklorist Patrick B. Mullen, it was John Lomax's southern paternalism that made the "idea that the white man was the hope of freedom for the black convict" so resonant within his worldview. In contrast, the growing leftist sentiment among the rising educated generation shaped Alan's ideals and contributed to his sense of "pity and desire to help" the African-American men and women he began to meet during his first field recording trip. Both Lomaxes "had their whiteness reinforced by contact with blackness and their own sense of freedom intensified by the lack of freedom of the prisoners they were recording" (84).
- 5. In his recent edited collection *The Sound Studies Reader* (2012), Jonathan Sterne curates a productive list of scholarship on the voice as the subject relates to the nascent field of sound studies. Among those whose work is important to the discussion of voice are Ferdinand de Saussure and his Course in General Linguistics, which situates the voice "as a fundamental modality of social enunciation"; Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong, who "based an entire psychological theory of orality around ideas of the voice as presence"; as well as Jacques Derrida's critique of these positions as a misguided "metaphysics of presence" (491-2). Sterne's own positioning on voice is resonant with Derrida and his collection draws together several other works that complicate and expand upon traditional conceptions of voice.
- 6. Joshua Gunn's work on speech, the voice, and, by extension, Derridian presence is instructive for further reading on the various material and theoretical tensions between sound and presence. See his 2011 essay "On Recording Performance or Speech, the Cry, and the Anxiety of the Fix," and his "Speech is Dead; Long Live Speech" from 2008.
- 7. These representations include (but are not limited to) the highly influential and distinctly racist blackface minstrel show which permeated American culture from 1840-1940 and beyond, popular "race records" of "classic" city blues singers like Bessie Smith and others, and an increasingly whitewashed but popular jazz music of the day.
- 8. As Omi and Winant write, "Rearticulation is a practice of discursive reorganization or reinterpretation of ideological themes and interests already present in the subjects' consciousness, such that these elements obtain new meanings or coherence. This practice is ordinarily the work of "intellectuals." Those whose role is to interpret the social world for given subjects—religious leaders, entertainers, school teachers, etc.—may on this account be "intellectuals" (195).