

AFS L 3: Afro-American Spirituals, Work Songs, and Ballads

ARCHIVE OF AMERICAN FOLK SONG

- 11A. 1. TROUBLE SO HARD.
2. CHOOSE YOUR SEAT AND SET DOWN.
3. HANDWRITING ON THE WALL.

Sung by Dock and Henry Reed and Vera Hall, Livingston, Alabama, 1937. Recorded by John A. Lomax and Ruby Pickens Tartt.

- 11B. THE NEW BURYIN' GROUND. Sung by Willie Williams and group, Richmond, Virginia, 1936. Recorded by John A. Lomax.

Anyone who has visited a rural Negro church, where the congregation sings from the heart instead of out of hymn-books, cannot fail to have been touched by the fire, the solemn dignity, the grand simplicity of the Negro spirituals.

One of the elders of the congregation, an old man or woman whose long experience in the church enables the singer to match the song precisely to the tempo of the meeting, begins slowly. The congregation responds with a faint chorus. The leader sings his line again, this time more strongly. This time the response is stronger. By the end of the first or second chorus, the spiritual will have gathered together all the voices of the church into a swelling and rolling chorus. Each participant takes his own part, from shrillest falsetto to deepest bass, and improvises within it. As the songs proceed, sometimes for hours on end, the rhythm of hands and feet joins the thunder of the singing with the thunder of a chorus of drums; the tempo increases slowly and inevitably until the whole audience sways with ecstasy. The air is punctuated with the shrill screams and the hoarse ejaculations of the worshippers who have become possessed, or, as they put it, "got happy." The possessed ones leap and fling their arms about in blind spasms of hysteria; they sometimes roll on the floor or walk across the benches; on occasion they lie on the ground for hours in a trance-like state.

Out of such passionate religious meetings came the Negro spirituals which have comforted the Negro with visions of a heavenly reward. The setting and the manner of these songs are strongly reminiscent of African religious practice; but the content, flowing out of the Bible and the noble folk hymns of the whites, is distinctively Afro-American. All Americans are moved by these inspired and beautiful songs as by almost no other American music.

The songs on the A side are all spirituals of the early ante-bellum type, sung with great purity of style by three rural singing leaders in Alabama. The B side was sung by a chorus of prisoners in the State Penitentiary at Richmond.

For source material and background, see John Work, *American Negro Songs*, Howell, Soskin and Company, New York, 1940; Guy B. Johnson, *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island, South Carolina*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1930; James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamund Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, The Viking Press, New York, 1925; Lydia Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, Creative Age Press, Inc., New York, 1942. For transcription of 11A 2, see page 34, John A. and Alan Lomax, *Our Singing Country*, The Macmillan Company, 1941.

11A. 1. TROUBLE SO HARD

Chorus:

O Lord, trouble so hard. (2)
Yes, indeed, my trouble is hard. (2)
O Lord, trouble so hard. (2)
Don't nobody know my troubles but God. (2)
Yes, indeed, my trouble's so hard. (2)
O Lord, trouble so hard. (2)

1. Wait and let me tell you what the sister will do:
'Fo' your face, she have a love for you,
'Hind your back, scandalize your name,
Jest the same you have to bear the blame. Chorus.
2. Wait and let me tell you what your brother will do:
'Fo' your face, have a love for you,
'Hind your back, scandalize your name,
Jest the same you have to bear the blame.

11A. 2. CHOOSE YOUR SEAT AND SET DOWN

1. O Lordy,
[Jes']* give me a long white robe. } 2
Chorus:
In the heaven, }
Choose your seat and set down. } 2
Trouble over, }
Choose your seat and set down. } 2
2. O Jesus,
Was my mother there? } 2 Chorus.

11A. 3. HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Chorus:

I want somebody read it and tell me what it says,
It's the handwriting on the wall.

1. Luke and John,
It is the handwriting on the wall. } 2 Chorus.
2. My fathers,
It's the handwriting on the wall. } 2 Chorus.
3. Lord, have mercy!
It's the handwriting on the wall. } 2 Chorus.
4. My sisters,
It's the handwriting on the wall. } 2 Chorus.

11B. 4. THE NEW BURYIN' GROUND

1. [O]* come on, come on, [and] let's go to bur'in'**, (3)
'Way over, over on the new bur'in' ground.
2. [O the] hammer keep a-ringin' on somebody's coffin, (3)
'Way over, over on the new bur'in' ground.
3. [O it] must-a been Laz'us*** that the people was bur'in', (3)
'Way over, over on the new bur'in' ground.
4. [O] come on, come on [and] let's go to bur'in', (3)
'Way over, over on the new bur'in' ground.
5. [O] it must-a been my captain that the people was bur'in', (3)
'Way over, over on the new bur'in' ground.

*Words in the brackets occur only in the first, or leader's line.

**Burying.

***Lazarus.

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12A. 1. LEAD ME TO THE ROCK. Sung by Wash Dennis and Charlie Sims, Parchman, Mississippi, 1936.

2. THE BLOOD-STRAINED BANDERS (THE BLOOD-STAINED BANDITS). Sung by Jimmie Strothers with four-string banjo, State Farm, Virginia, 1936.

Recorded by John A. Lomax.

Both songs on this side represent contemporary folk treatments of Negro spirituals.

"Lead Me to the Rock," sung by two Negro prisoners, is unique among spirituals I have heard. This extraordinary, contrapuntal duet is an adaptation of a modern arrangement of a spiritual for quartet. It has been impossible to do more than approximately transcribe the words, because of the fashion in which the two parts overlap.

"The Blood Strained Banders" (a folkism for "the blood stained bandits") was sung by Blind Jimmie Strothers accompanied on a banjo in the manner of blind Negro street singers all over America.

For source material and background for sides 12A and 12B see John Work, *American Negro Songs*, Howell, Soskin and Company, New York, 1940; Guy B. Johnson, *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island, South Carolina*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1930; James Weldon and J. Rosamund Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, The Viking Press, New York, 1925; Lydia Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, Creative Age Press, Inc., New York, 1942. For transcription of 12A 2, see page 24, John A. and Alan Lomax, *Our Singing Country*, The Macmillan Company, 1941.

A. L.

12A. 1. LEAD ME TO THE ROCK.

Lead Voice

1. Mmmm . . . lead me, my Lord.
 I wonder what my mother want to stay here for?
 Well, this old world ain't no friend to her.

Bass Voice

- Why don't you lead me to that racial rock that's higher and higher?
 (Same as above.)
 (Same as above.)

(Chorus)

Well, you can dig-uh my grave about
 Ten feet deep,
 You can make-uh my grave about
 Fo' feet wide,
 You can bury my body on
 Solid rock.

(The words of the bass during this section are impossible to transcribe.)

Lead . . .

 Oh, Lord!

Can't go round the rock till you
 Can't go round it,
 Then the rock has got so rocky till you
 Can't go over it.

Both

Why don't you lead me to that racial rock that's higher and higher?

(In the following stanzas the same material is given with some variation.)

2. I wonder what old Satan keeps a-grumblin' about?
 Well, he's chained in Hell and he can't come out.
 3. Well, some come cripple and some come lame;
 Well, some come limpin' in my Jesus' name.

12A. 2. THE BLOOD-STRAINED BANDERS

1. If you want to go to heaven,
 Over on the other shore,
 Keep out of the way of the blood-strained banders.
 O good Shepherd, feedin' my sheep.

2. If you want to go to heaven,
 Just over on the other shore,
 Keep out of the way of the gunshot devils.
 O good Shepherd, feedin' my sheep. Chorus.

Chorus:
 Some for Paul, some for Silas,
 Some for to make-uh my heart rejoice.
 Don't you hear lambs a-crying?
 O good Shepherd, feedin' my sheep.

3. If you wants to go to heaven,
 Just over on the other shore,
 Keep out of the way of the long-tongue liars.
 O good Shepherd, feedin' my sheep. Chorus.

12B. RUN, OLD JEREMIAH. Sung by Joe Washington Brown and Austin Coleman, Jennings, Louisiana, 1934. Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax.

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 West 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 “ring-shout” on this record was made in rural Louisiana, where the community had recently re-introduced the ring-shout as a means of attracting and holding in the church the young people who wanted to dance. There on Saturday nights it was permissible for the community to gather in the church and promenade together in couples round and round the outside aisle. Since instruments were tabooed, the singing orchestra provided the music. Three young men, a leader and two in the chorus, joined together, using their hands and feet as an orchestra of drums. The floor of the church furnished the drum head. The lines of the song are partly religious and partly satirical, using as material the groaning delivery of the Negro minister and the shrill screams of the sisters in the throes of religious hysteria.

A. L.

By myself. (5)	(New Leader :)	— ? —
You know I've got to go.	One mornin'	— ? —
You got to run.	Before the evening	— ? —
I've got to run.	Sun was goin' down (3)	That mornin',
You got to run.	Behind them western hills. (3)	Well, well, well, (2)
By myself. (3)	Old number 12	Ol' fireman say,
I got a letter, (2)	Comin' down the track. (3)	Well, well,
Ol' brownskin.	See that black smoke.	I'm gonna grab my
Tell you what she say.	See that old engineer.	Old whistle too.
“Leavin' tomorrow,	See that engineer. (2)	Wah, wah, ho,
Tell you goodbye.”	Tol' that old fireman	Wah, wah, wah, wah, ho,
O my Lordy. (6)	Ring his ol' bell	Wah, wah, ho,
Well, well, well. (2)	With his hand.	Wah, wah, wah, ho. (etc.)
O my Lord. (2)	Rung his engine bell. (2)	Mmmmmmm
O my Lordy. (2)	Well, well, well. (2)	Soon, soon, soon,
Well, well, well. (2)	Jesus tell the man,	Wah——o.
I've got a rock.	Say, I got your life	Well, well, well,
You got a rock.	In My hand ;	Ol' engineer,
Rock is death.	I got your life	I've got your life
O my Lordy.	In My hand. (2)	In my hands. (2)
O my Lord.	Well, well, well.	Tol' your father, (2)
Well, well, well.	Ol' fireman told,	Well, well, well,
Run here, Jeremiah. (2)	Told that engineer,	I was travellin', (2)
I must go	Ring your black bell,	I was ridin' (3)
On my way. (4)	Ding, ding, ding,	Over there. (2)
Who's that ridin' the chariot? (2)	Ding, ding, ding, ding.	Ol' engineer.
Well, well, well	Ol' fireman say	This is the chariot. (2)

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13A. 1. AIN'T NO MORE CANE ON THIS BRAZIS. Sung by Ernest Williams and group, Sugarland, Texas, 1933. Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax.

In the fall when the frost has purpled the jungles of green sugar cane on the South Texas prison farms, the men go into the fields with long machete-like knives for the harvest. As they plod through the mud between the twelve-foot thickets of razor-edged leaves, their long knives glitter among the bunched stalks; and out of the even ringing of knives against the frosty cane there rises this mournful chant. The song creeps up from the black, wet earth and carries across the field like the breath of a chill wind, fading and again growing strong as each prisoner adds his groan to the sad refrain. The song asks a young prisoner why his sentence is such a long one, and his reply comes back with the terrifying dramatic impact of the final lines of a great ballad. "Shorty George" is the title the Negroes have given the train which brought women visitors to the prison camp. "Brazis" is the Brazos river.

A. L.

13A. 2. LONG HOT SUMMER DAYS. Sung by Clyde Hill and group, Brazoria, Texas, 1939. Recorded by John A. and Ruby T. Lomax.

"Long Hot Summer Days" is another work song of the fields into whose cadences the prisoners have distilled the slow pain of their long, hot summer days of forced labor. They say that in the penitentiary in the early days, when these songs were composed, "You worked from can to can't—from when you can see in the morning until you can't see at night." This choral work song style has been recently noted, so far as I am aware, only in Texas; but it was evidently a common type of song in the days of slavery.

For a transcription of 13A 1, see page 58, John A. and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1934. For background material, see John A. and Alan Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly*, The Macmillan Company, 1936.

A. L.

13A. 1. AIN'T NO MORE CANE ON THIS BRAZIS.

1. What's the matter; something must be wrong.
 Oh———o.
 Keep on a-workin'; Shorty George done gone.
 Oh———o.
2. You ought to come on the river in nineteen-four;
 You could find a dead man on ever' turn row.
3. But it ain't no more cane on this Brazis;
 Says they done grind it all in molasses.
4. "Little boy, what'd you do for to get so long?"
 Said, "I killed my rider in the high sheriff's arms."
5. You ought to been on the river in nineteen-ten;
 They's rollin' the women, like they drive the men.
6. Oh, it ain't no more cane on this Brazis;
 They done grind it all in molasses.

13A. 2. LONG HOT SUMMER DAYS

1. Captain, I due to be in Seminole, Oklahoma,
 Captain, I due to be in Seminole, Oklahoma,
 Oh, in them long hot summer days.
2. Captain, I'm gonna walk and talk with Alberta,
 Captain, I'm gonna walk and talk with Alberta,
 Oh, in them long hot summer days.
3. Black gal, if I never more see you,
 Well, black gal, I say if I never more see you,
 Oh, in them long hot summer days.
4. Black gal, I'm on my way back to Arizona,
 Black gal, I'm on my way back to Arizona,
 Oh, in them long hot summer days.

13B. 1. LONG JOHN. Sung by "Lightning" and a gang of Negro convicts, Darrington State Prison Farm, Sandy Point, Texas, 1934. Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax.

The axes flash up in unison, bite into the log in unison as the leader sings:

"It's a *long* John."

The axes in their shining arcs make "rainbows round" the striped shoulders. Up again in unison; in unison the fresh chips fly out of the oak log, as the chorus yells back:

"It's a *long* John."

On this record of Negro axemen singing in the hot woods of the South you hear the process by which the rich land was cleared for cultivation. These men could endure long hours of hard-driving work in the sun, could sing as they worked, pouring a new language and new ideas into the old African leader-chorus form. The wildness and savage joy of this work song come from the leader, who was nicknamed "Lightning" because he could move faster, sing better, laugh louder and make wittier remarks than any other man on the farm. The song is the sketch of a man whom Lightning greatly admired, a legendary character named Long John who outran the police, the sheriff, the deputies with all their bloodhounds and got away from jail to freedom. The song is a picture of the chase, but full of puns (about John of the Bible), full of double-meanings and asides.

For another version of this song, see page 75, John A. and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*. A. L.

Leader:

1. It's a *long* John,
He's a *long* gone,
Like a *turkey* through the corn,
Through the *long* corn.

2. Well, my John said,
In the ten chap ten,*
"If a man die,
He will live again."
Well, they crucified Jesus
And they nailed him to the cross;
Sister Mary cried,
"My child is lost!"

Chorus:

Well, long John,
He's long gone,
He's long gone.
Mister John, John,
Old Big-eye John,
Oh, John, John,
It's a long John.

3. Says-uh: "Come on, gal,
And-uh shut that do',"
Says, "The dogs is comin'
And I've got to go."

Chorus:

It's a long John,
He's long gone,
It's a long John,
He's a long gone.

4. "Well-a two, three minutes,
Let me catch my win';
In-a two, three minutes,
I'm gone again."

Chorus:

He's long John,
He's long gone,
He's long gone,
He's long gone,
He's long gone.

5. Well, my John said
Just before he did,
"Well, I'm goin' home,
See Mary Lid."

Chorus:

He's John, John,
Old John, John,
With his long clothes on,
Just a-skipplin' through the corn.

6. Well, my John said
On the fourth day,
Well, to "tell my rider
That I'm on my way."

Chorus:

He's long gone,
He's long gone,
He's long gone,
It's a long John.

7. "Gonna call this summer,
Ain't gon' call no mo',
Be in Baltimore."
If I call next summer,

* Tenth chapter, tenth verse.

**13B. 2. JUMPIN' JUDY. Sung by Kelly Pace and a group of Negro convicts, Gould, Arkansas, 1934.
Recorded by John A. Lomax.**

I have not yet met a prisoner who could or would tell me who "Jumpin' Judy" was. The word "jumpin'" is said to mean "working hard and at top speed"; thus "he kept me on the jump all day" means "he kept me moving fast at my work all day." Perhaps this character "Jumpin' Judy" represents a bit of ironic alliteration with a double meaning behind it. The term "captain" refers to the white boss of the gang. Stanzas four and five tell the story of two young ladies who were sent to the penitentiary. In stanzas six to nine there is a stark picture of chain gang brutality. These lines have been collected in other parts of the South, and I regret that there was not enough room on the disc to include the remaining stanzas.

This record was made while the men were at work with their axes in the woodyard. The chorus not only sings the refrains, but comments on the lines, yells approval, and groans in the recognition of a line that is bitterly true; so the group encourages itself to sing, to keep its courage, to remember, to work. Here is a sound recording of the supposedly legendary communal group in the act of creation.

For a transcription of this version, see page 392, John A. and Alan Lomax, *Our Singing Country*, The Macmillan Company, 1941. For further general background on work songs, see Howard Odum and Guy B. Johnson, *Negro Workaday Songs*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1926.

A. L.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. [Well-uh] Jumpin', Jumpin' Judy,
Well-uh, Jumpin', Jumpin' Judy,
O Captain, was a mighty fine girl, O Lord,
O Lordy Lord.</p> <p>2. Well-uh, de Judy brought de jumpin', (2)
O Captain, to this whole round world, O Lord,
O Lordy Lord.</p> <p>3. Well, did you hear 'bout 'Berta Robbins, (2)
O Captain, and-uh little 'Berta Lee, O Lord?
O Lordy Lord.</p> <p>4. Well, it's both of them got 'rested, (2)
O Captain, in the down-town jail, O Lord,
O Lordy Lord.</p> <p>5. O well, it's one of them got six months, (2)
O Captain, and the other got a year, O Lord,
O Lordy Lord.</p> | <p>6. O well, me an' my old partner (2)
O Captain, got eleven, twenty-nine, O Lord,
O Lordy Lord.</p> <p>7. O well, you remember last winter, (2)
O Captain, when the weather was cold, O Lord?
O Lordy Lord.</p> <p>8. O well, you had me way out yonder, (2)
O Captain, on that long ferry road, O Lord,
O Lordy Lord.</p> <p>9. O well, you kicked and stomped and beat me, (2)
O Captain, and you called it fun, O Lord,
O Lordy Lord.</p> <p>10. Well, I may meet you over in Memphis, (2)
O Captain</p> |
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14A. 1. ROSIE. Sung by Jeff Webb and group, Parchman, Mississippi, 1937.

2. I'M GOING TO LELAND. Sung by Frank Jordan and group, Parchman, Mississippi, 1936.

Recorded by John A. Lomax.

These two songs are scarcely music in the ordinary sense of the word. They are rather direct expressions in sound of the driving thrust of group labor, of the pain in the hearts of men who are cut off from ordinary human contact, of the desperation of men who have no tenderness or warmth in their lives. When you see the men shouting all together,

“Ho Rosie!
Hey-a!”

the whole line moving down an irrigation ditch, every foot and every hoe moving together; when you see the fierce laughter flash in the hot Mississippi sun; when you hear them yell their approval over an ironic line—you feel that here in the darkness of the lower depths of society, man's courageous and unconquerable spirit and his longing for freedom express themselves in a fashion never to be controverted.

For a version of “Rosie” see page 62, John A. and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1934. For general background on work songs, see Howard Odum and Guy B. Johnson, *Negro Workaday Songs*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1926.

A. L.

14A. 1. ROSIE

1. I seen little Rosie in my midnight dreams, (3)
O Lord, my midnight dreams,
O Lord, in my midnight dreams.
2. Big-leg Rosie at the women's walls, (3)
Well, now, she got her twenty, O Lord, and I got 'em all,
I got 'em all, O Lordy, I got 'em all,
She got her twenty, Lordy, I got 'em all.
Chorus:
Ho, Rosie!
Hey-a hey-a!
Ho, Rosie!
Ho, Lord, gal!
3. You told a promise when you first met me, (3)
Well, now, you wasn't gonna marry, till-uh I go free. Chorus.
4. Say, little Marie, a-let your hair grow long, (3)
Oh, well I be your barber when-uh I come home,
I come home, good Lordy, I come home,
Be your barber when-uh I come home. Chorus.

14A. 2. I'M GOING TO LELAND

1. I went to Leland, Lord, I thought I was lost, (2)
When I went to Leland, Lord, I thought I was lost,
Lord, I walked around the corner, spied my walking boss
Walking boss, Lord, my walking boss,
Walked around the corner, spied my walking boss.
2. Gal, I love you, tell the world I do, hey—,
Gal, I love you, tell the world I do,
Gal, I love you, tell the world I do, hey—,
Hope someday you'll come to love me too.
3. Tell little Mamie, tell her dollar —?— (3)
Dress she wanted costs a dollar a yard.

14B. 1. JUMPING JUDY. Sung by Allen Prothero, State Penitentiary, Nashville, Tennessee, 1933. Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax.

2. LOOK DOWN THAT LONG, LONESOME ROAD. Sung by a group of Negro men, Boykin, South Carolina, 1934. Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax.

It may strike the listener as strange that all of the work songs on this and other Archive records were made in Southern prisons. The truth is that in 1933, when such recordings became possible, work songs were seldom sung by Negroes except in penitentiaries. In the world outside, machines had already replaced most group hand labor—ditch-digging machines, steam shovels, donkey engines, tractor plows, etc., had almost totally replaced the gangs of laborers with picks and shovels in their hands. In the penitentiary, however, where hand labor was to be had for nothing, gangs of convicts still functioned as road builders, hoe gangs, axe gangs and so forth. There the rhythmic work song still had, and to a limited extent still has, a function. As John A. Lomax travelled from state to state, visiting the great Negro prisons, during the years from 1933 to 1940, he was able to record a large volume of still living work song, a body of material which has unique historical, ethnic and cultural interest. Whatever the future of other types of folk song, the work song type will probably shortly disappear from the world.

Comparison of these records indicates that in each prison community there were fairly distinct work song styles. The songs on this record stand for three of these styles—from Mississippi, Tennessee and South Carolina.* In the latter state, represented by the folk version of the famous Negro song, "Look Down that Lonesome Road," all the work songs were sung with barbershop harmony. Evidently an influx of young prisoners had brought a fairly sophisticated singing tradition with it. The Mississippi style is distinguished by the rough voice timbre used, the savagery of the singing, the overlapping of leader and chorus. Allen Prothero stands alone as a great folk artist, making his own personal contribution to all of his songs in the same fashion that any great singer does, whether he sings in an opera house, a country church, or a gloomy prison. The rhythmic grunts on this record indicate the work blows of the axe or pick. It would be worthwhile to compare his version of "Jumping Judy" with the Arkansas version found on record 13B.

For a transcription of B1, see pages 82 ff., John A. and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*; of B2, see page 404, John A. and Alan Lomax, *Our Singing Country*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1934 and 1941. References cited in these works give further background.

*For examples of Texas and Arkansas singing, see record 13B.

A. L.

14B. 1. JUMPING JUDY

1. Jumping Judy, Jumping Judy, (3)
All over this world. (2)
2. Gonna take this old hammer, (2)
Give it back to Jumping Judy,
Lord, and tell her I'm gone,
Lord, tell her I'm gone.
3. O Lord,
Jumping Judy, Jumping Judy, (3)
Wonder where the Captain's gone?
4. Lord, you want a dollar, (3)
But he got to go home. (2)
5. Jumping Judy, Jumping Judy, (3)
What's the matter now? (2)
6. Well, you kicked him (me) and you beat me, (3)
'At's all I know. (2)
7. Yonder come my captain, (3)
Who has been gone so long.
8. O Lord,
Go'* tell him how you treat me,
Tell him how you treat me; (2)
Lord, you better get gone.
9. He's got a forty-four (3)
In-uh his right hand. (2)

* I'm going to.

14B. 2. LOOK DOWN THAT LONG, LONESOME ROAD

.....
She's my own, own true love; (hah)
Darlin', (hah) my time, time so long. (hah)

Look down, (hah) look down, (hah)
Partner, that long, (hah) lonesome road, (hah)
Where you (hah) and I, I must go.

Stand back, (hah) stand back (hah)
All you five, five and ten cent men; (hah)
Got a man (hah) knocking on, on my door.

Hattie Bell, (hah) Hattie Bell, (hah)
O she's my own, own true love. (hah)
Darlin', (hah) what have, have I done?

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15A. THE GREY GOOSE. Sung by James (Iron Head) Baker and group, Sugarland, Texas, 1934.
Recorded by John A. and Alan Lomax.

The folk have always loved humble heroes who were absolutely invincible, who could endure any hardship or torture without fear or harm. For the southern Negro, faced with the problem of sheer survival under slavery and later as the sub-standard economic group, this pattern has dominated his ballads and folk-tales. The ballad of the heroic goose, who, after being shot, picked, cooked, carved and run through the sawmill, was last seen with a large, derisively honking flock of goslings, flying over the ocean, epitomizes the Negro's belief in his own ability to endure any hardship.

The design of the song is the African leader-chorus form, and this version is used on the Texas prison farms for hoeing—a whole gang moving forward together, their hoes flashing together in the sun, across an irrigation ditch, thus:

“Well, *last Monday mornin'*,
Lord, Lord, Lord! . . .”

For a version of this ballad, see page 242 of John A. and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1934.

A. L.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Well, last Monday mornin',
Lord, Lord, Lord!
Well, last Monday mornin',
Lord, Lord, Lord! | 15. Gonna give a feather-pickin'. |
| 2. My daddy went a-hunting. | 16. And we put him on to parboil. |
| 3. Well, he carried along his zulu.* | 17. He was six months a-parboil'. |
| 4. Well, along come a grey goose. | 18. And we put him on the table. |
| 5. Well, he threwed it to his shoulder. | 19. Now the forks couldn't stick him. |
| 6. Well, he reared his hammer 'way back. | 20. And the knife couldn't cut him. |
| 7. Well, he pulled on his trigger. | 21. And we throwed him in the hog-pen. |
| 8. Well, uh-down he come windin'. | 22. And he broke the belly's** jawbone. |
| 9. He was six weeks a-fallin'. | 23. And we taken him to the sawmill. |
| 10. We was six weeks a-findin'. | 24. And he broke the saw's teeth out. |
| 11. And we put him on his wagon. | 25. And the last time I seen him. |
| 12. And we taken him to the white house. | 26. Well, he's flyin' across the ocean. |
| 13. He was six weeks a-pickin'. | 27. With a long string o' goslin's. |
| 14. Lordy, your wife and my wife. | 28. And he's goin' "Quank quink-quank!" |

*His gun (?).

**The sow.

15B. JOHN HENRY. Sung by Arthur Bell, Gould, Arkansas, 1939. Recorded by John A. and Ruby T. Lomax.

If a group of folklorists were asked to choose the most important ballad produced in the United States, I believe most of them would agree on the Ballad of John Henry, the steel-driving man. The ballad probably was born in the mountains of West Virginia about 1870 during the construction of the Big Bend Tunnel on the C. and O. railroad. In order to plant the powder charges for blasting the tunnel through the mountain, deep holes had to be driven into the face of the rock. At the time of the making of this ballad, this operation, called "steel-driving," was done by hand and the "steel-drivers" were the heroes of the work—men who could swing their nine-pound hammers against their drills all day long and sing as they worked. The legendary John Henry was the mightiest of these men, and, as the legend goes, it was he that the foreman chose to drive against the newly invented, mechanical steam-drill. "The flesh against the steam," one singer puts it, hand labor against the machine—this was the substance of the contest. The mighty heart of John Henry drove him to victory over the machine, but—

"The rock was so tall and John Henry so small,
That he broke his poor heart and he died."

Further west, where the details of tunnel construction are not so familiar to Negro workers, John Henry appears as a section gang worker, as in this version. It is interesting to note that the ballad was composed in the style of the classic British popular ballad. John Henry is a ballad about work, not a work song.

For a transcription of this song, see page 258 of John A. and Alan Lomax, *Our Singing Country*, The Macmillan Company, 1941. For further background, see L. W. Chappell, *John Henry, A Folk-Lore Study*, Walter Biedermann, Jena, Germany, 1933.

A. L.

1. Well, every Monday mornin',
When the bluebirds begin to sing,
You can hear those hammers a mile or more,
You can hear John Henry's hammer ring, O Lordy!
Hear John Henry's hammer ring.
2. John Henry told his old lady,
"Will you fix my supper soon?
Got ninety miles o' track I've got to line,
Got to line it by the light of the moon, O Lordy!
Line it by the light o' the moon."
3. John Henry had a little baby,
He could hold him out in his hand;
Well, the last word I heard that po' child say,
"My daddy is a steel-drivin' man, O Lordy!
Daddy is a steel-drivin' man."
4. John Henry told his old captain,
Said, "A man ain't nothin' but a man;
Before I let your steel gang down
I will die with the hammer in my hand, O Lordy!
Die with the hammer in my hand."
5. John Henry told his captain,
"Next time you go to town
Uh-jes' bring me back a ten-pound maul
For to beat your steel-drivin' down, O Lordy!
Beat your steel-drivin' down."
6. John Henry had a old lady,
And her name was Polly Ann.
John Henry tuck sick and he had to go to bed;
Pauline drove steel like a man, O Lordy!
'Line drove steel like a man.
7. John Henry had a old lady,
And the dress she wo' was red.
Well, she started up the track and she never looked back,
"Goin' where my man fell dead, O Lordy!
Where my man fell dead."
8. Well, they taken John Henry to Washington,
And they buried him in the sand.
There is peoples from the East, there's peoples from the West
Come to see such a steel-drivin' man, O Lordy!
See such a steel-drivin' man.
9. Well, some said-uh he's from England,
And some say he's from Spain;
But-uh I say he's nothin' but a Lou's'ana man,
Just a leader of the steel-drivin' gang, O Lordy,
Leader of the steel-drivin' gang.