

## Jump Down

“Jump Down,” aka “Jump Down, Turn Around” and “Pick A Bale Of Cotton” was written by Huddie Leadbetter (Leadbelly). An African American folk tune from the Slave Plantation, an original version of the song is referenced in the first of the “Select CD Recordings – MP3 Downloads” below. However, Leadbelly’s version is the standard. Alan Lomax was a noted folk music historian who chronicled Leadbelly’s life. Brian Lewis arranged the SATB Choral Version.

This report is divided into the following sections:

Lyrics

I. Lyrics

II. Leadbelly

III. Leadbelly

IV. Cotton Picking in the Slave South

V. Slave Songs

VI. Alan Lomax

VII. The Leadbelly Foundation

VIII. Brian Lewis

Audio Links and Discography

References

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### Lyrics

**Note: There are many variations of the lyrics. These are the lyrics which most closely resemble the original composition and performance by Leadbelly.**

Great God Almighty I can pick a bail of cotton  
Great God Almighty I can pick a bail a day  
Great God Almighty I can pick a bail of cotton  
Great God Almighty I can pick a bail a day

[Chorus]

Oh lordy, pick a bail of cotton.

Oh lordy, pick a bail a day x2

Me and my wife, we pick a bail of cotton.

Me and my wife, we pick a bail a day. x2

[Chorus]

Me and my sister, we pick a bail of cotton.

Me and my sister, we pick a bail a day. x2

[Chorus]

Jump down, turn around, pick a bail of cotton.

Jump down, turn around, pick a bail a day. x2  
[Chorus]  
Me and my wife, we pick a bail of cotton.  
Me and my wife, we pick a bail a day.  
[Chorus]  
Me and my buddy, we pick a bail of cotton.  
Me and my buddy, we pick a bail a day. x2  
[Chorus]  
Me and my poppy can pick a bail of cotton  
Me and my poppy can pick a bail a day. x2  
Gonna pick-a pick-a pick-a pick-a pick a bale o' cotton  
Gonna pick-a pick-a pick-a pick-a pick a bale a day  
Gonna pick-a pick-a pick-a pick-a pick a bale o' cotton  
Jump down, turn around, pick a bail of cotton.  
Jump down, turn around, pick a bail a day. x2  
We're gonna jump down turn around pick a bale a day.

*[Chorus getting faster every time]*

*Lomax said it was sung medium slowly in the field, but Ledbetter "made a party song out of it by speeding it up & adding guitar."*

Additional lyrics sung by others include:

I b'lieve to my soul I can ...  
Went to Corsicana to ...  
That nigger from Shiloh can ...

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## **I. Leadbelly**

Huddie William Ledbetter (January 1888 – December 6, 1949) was an American folk and blues musician, notable for his clear and forceful singing, his virtuosity on the twelve string guitar, and the rich songbook of folk standards he introduced.

He is best known as Leadbelly or Lead Belly. Though many releases list him as "Leadbelly," he himself spelled it "Lead Belly." This is also the usage on his tombstone, as well as of the Lead Belly Foundation.

Although he most commonly played the twelve string, he could also play the piano, mandolin, harmonica, violin, concertina, and accordion. In some of his recordings, such as in one of his versions of the folk ballad "John Hardy", he performs on the accordion instead of the guitar. In other recordings he just sings while clapping his hands or stomping his foot. The topics of Lead Belly's music covered a wide range of subjects, including gospel songs; blues songs about women, liquor and racism; and folk songs about cowboys, prison, work, sailors, cattle herding

and dancing. He also wrote songs concerning the newsmakers of the day, such as President Franklin Roosevelt, Adolf Hitler, Jean Harlow, the Scottsboro Boys, and Howard Hughes.

Lead Belly's date of birth is uncertain. He was probably born in January 1888, although his gravestone gives his year of birth as 1889. The earliest year given for his birth has been 1885, although other sources stated either 1888 or 1889. According to the 1900 census, Hudy (the spelling given in the census) is one of two listed children (the other is his stepsister, Australia Carr), of Wes and Sallie (Brown) Ledbetter of Justice Precinct 2, Harrison County, Texas. Wesley and Sallie were legally wed on February 26, 1888, shortly after Lead Belly's likely date of birth, even though they had lived together as husband and wife for years. The 1900 census, differing from the usual census in that it lists the month and year of birth, rather than just the age, states the birth year of 'Hudy' Ledbetter to be 1888 and the month listed as January; Huddie's age is listed as twelve. The census of 1910 and the census of 1930 confirm 1888 as the year of birth.

The day of his birth has also been debated. The most common date given is January 20, but other sources suggest he was born on January 21 or 29. The only document we have that Ledbetter, himself, helped fill out is his World War II draft registration from 1942 where he gives his birth date as January 23, 1889.

Lead Belly was born to Wesley and Sallie Ledbetter as Huddie William Ledbetter in a plantation near Mooringsport, Louisiana, but the family moved to Leigh, Texas, when he was five. By 1903, Lead Belly was already a 'musicianer', a singer and guitarist of some note. He performed for nearby Shreveport, Louisiana audiences in St. Paul's Bottoms, a notorious red-light district in the city. Lead Belly began to develop his own style of music after exposure to a variety of musical influences on Shreveport's Fannin Street, a row of saloons, brothels, and dance halls in the Bottoms.

At the time of the 1910 census, Lead Belly, still officially listed as 'Hudy', was living next door to his parents with his first wife, Aletha "Lethe" Henderson, who at the time of the census was seventeen years old, and was, therefore, fifteen at the time of their marriage in 1908. It was also there that he received his first instrument, an accordion, from his uncle, and by his early 20s, after fathering at least two children, he left home to find his living as a guitarist (and occasionally, as a laborer). Lead Belly would later claim that as a youth he would "make it" with 8 to 10 women a night.

Influenced by the sinking of the RMS Titanic in April 1912, he would go on to write the song "The Titanic", which noted the racial indifferences of the time. "The Titanic" was the first song he ever learned to play on a 12-string guitar, which was later to become his signature instrument. He first played it in 1912 when performing with Blind Lemon Jefferson (1897-1929) in and around Dallas, Texas. Lead Belly noted that he had to leave out the verse about boxer Jack Johnson when playing before a white audience.

### **Prison years**

Lead Belly's volatile nature sometimes led him into trouble with the law. In 1915 he was convicted "of carrying a pistol" and sentenced to do time on the Harrison County chain gang,

from which he miraculously escaped, finding work in nearby Bowie county under the assumed name of Walter Boyd. In January 1918 he was thrown into prison for the second time, this time after killing one of his relatives, Will Stafford, in a fight over a woman. In 1918 he was incarcerated in Sugar Land, Texas, where he probably learned the song "Midnight Special". In 1925 he was pardoned and released, having served seven years, or virtually all of the minimum of his seven-to-35-year sentence, after writing a song appealing to Governor Pat Morris Neff for his freedom. Lead Belly had swayed Governor Neff by appealing to his strong religious values. That, in combination with good behavior (including entertaining by playing for the guards and fellow prisoners), was Lead Belly's ticket out of jail. It was quite a testament to his persuasive powers, as Neff had run for governor on a pledge not to issue pardons (pardon by the governor was at that time the only recourse for prisoners, since in most Southern prisons there was no provision for parole). According to Charles K. Wolf and Kip Lornell's book, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* (1999), Neff had regularly brought guests to the prison on Sunday picnics to hear Lead Belly perform.

In 1930, Lead Belly was back in prison, after a summary trial, this time in Louisiana, for attempted homicide — he had knifed a white man in a fight. It was there, three years later, that he was "discovered" by musicologists John Lomax and his eighteen-year-old son Alan Lomax during a visit to the Angola Prison Farm. They were enchanted by Lead Belly's talent, passion, and singularity as a performer and recorded hundreds of his songs on portable aluminum disc recording equipment for the Library of Congress. They returned to record in July of the following year (1934). On August 1, Lead Belly was released (again having served almost all of his minimum sentence), this time after the Lomaxes had taken a petition to Louisiana Governor O.K. Allen at Lead Belly's urgent request. The petition was on the other side of a recording of his signature song, "Goodnight Irene." A prison official later wrote to John Lomax denying that Lead Belly's singing had anything to do his release from Angola, and state prison records confirm that he was eligible for early release due to good behavior. A descendant of his has also confirmed this. For a time, however, both Lead Belly and the Lomaxes believed that the record they had taken to the governor had hastened his release from Angola.

There are several, somewhat conflicting stories about how Ledbetter acquired his famous nickname, though the consensus is that it was probably while in prison. Some say his fellow inmates dubbed him "Lead Belly" as a play on his last name and reference to his physical toughness; others say he earned the name after being shot in the stomach with shotgun buckshot.<sup>[5]</sup> Another theory has it that the name refers to his ability to drink homemade liquor, which Southern farmers, black and white, used to make to supplement their incomes. Blues singer Big Bill Broonzy thought it came from a supposed tendency to lay about "with a stomach weighted down by lead" in the shade when the chain gang was supposed to be working. (This seems unlikely, unless it was ironic, given his well-known capacity for hard work.) Whatever its origin, he adopted the nickname as a pseudonym while performing, and it stuck. Regarding his toughness, it is also recounted that during his second prison term, another inmate stabbed him in the neck (leaving him with a fearsome scar that he subsequently covered with a bandanna), and he took the knife away and in turn almost killed his attacker with it.

Bob Dylan once remarked, on his XM radio show, that Lead Belly was "One of the few ex-cons who recorded a popular children's album."

## Life after prison

It was the Great Depression and jobs were very scarce. A month after his release and in need of regular work in order to avoid having his release canceled and being sent back to prison, in September 1934, Lead Belly met with John A. Lomax and begged him to take him on as a driver. For three months he assisted the 67-year-old John Lomax in his folk song collecting in the South. (Alan Lomax (then 19) was ill and didn't accompany them on this trip.)

In December, Lead Belly participated in a "smoker" (group sing) at an MLA meeting in Bryn Mawr College in PA., where John A. Lomax had a prior lecturing engagement. He was written up in the press as a convict who had sung his way out of prison. On New Year's Day, 1935, the pair arrived in New York City, where John Lomax was scheduled to meet with his publisher, Macmillan, about a new collection of folk songs. The newspapers were eager to write about the "singing convict" and *Time* magazine made one of its first filmed newsreels about him. Lead Belly attained fame (though not fortune).

The following week, he began recording with the American Record Corporation (ARC), but achieved little commercial success with these records. Part of the reason for the poor record sales may have been because ARC insisted on releasing only his blues songs rather than the folk songs for which he would later become better known. In any case, Lead Belly continued to struggle financially. Like many performers, what income he made during his lifetime would come from touring, not from record sales.

In February 1935, he married his sweetheart, Martha Promise, who came north from Louisiana for the purpose.

The month of February was spent recording his and other African-American repertoire and interviews about his life with Alan Lomax for their forthcoming book, *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly* (1936). Concert appearances were slow to materialize, however, and in March 1935, Lead Belly accompanied John A. Lomax on a two-week lecture tour of colleges and universities in the Northeast, culminating at Harvard. These lectures had been scheduled before John Lomax had teamed up with Lead Belly.

At the end of month, John Lomax decided he could no longer work with Lead Belly and gave him and Martha money to go back to Louisiana by bus. He gave Martha the money that Lead Belly had earned from three months of performing, but in installments, on the pretext that Lead Belly would drink it all if given a lump sum. From Louisiana Lead Belly then successfully sued Lomax for the full amount and for release from his management contract with Lomax. The quarrel was very bitter and there were hard feelings on both sides. Curiously, however, in the midst of the legal wrangling Lead Belly wrote to John A. Lomax proposing that they team up together once again. But it was not to be. Nor was the book the Lomaxes published that year about Lead Belly financially successful.

In January 1936, Lead Belly returned to New York on his own without John Lomax for an attempted comeback. He performed twice a day at Harlem's Lafayette theater in a live dramatic recreation of the *Time Life* newsreel (itself a recreation) about his prison encounter with John A.

Lomax, in which he had worn stripes, even though by this time he was no longer associated with Lomax.

*Life* magazine ran a three-page article titled, "Lead Belly - Bad Nigger Makes Good Minstrel," in the April 19, 1936 issue. It included a full-page, color (rare in those days) picture of him sitting on grain sacks playing his guitar and singing. Also included was a striking picture of Martha Promise (identified in the article as his manager); photos showing Lead Belly's hands playing the guitar (with the caption "these hands once killed a man"); Texas Governor Pat M. Neff; and the "ramshackle" Texas State Penitentiary. The article attributes both of his pardons to his singing of his petitions to the governors, who were so moved that they pardoned him. The article's text ends with "he... may well be on the brink of a new and prosperous period."

Lead Belly failed to stir the enthusiasm of Harlem audiences. Instead, he attained success playing at concerts and benefits for an audience of leftist folk music aficionados. He developed his own style of singing and explaining his repertoire in the context of Southern black culture, taking the hint from his previous participation in John A. Lomax's college lectures. He was especially successful with his repertoire of children's game songs (as a younger man in Louisiana he had sung regularly at children's birthday parties in the black community). He was written up as a heroic figure by the black novelist, Richard Wright, then a member of the Communist Party, in the columns of the *Daily Worker*, of which Wright was the Harlem editor. The two men became personal friends, though Lead Belly himself was a-political — if anything, a supporter of Wendell Willkie, the centrist Republican candidate, for whom he wrote a campaign song.

In 1939, Lead Belly was back in jail for assault, after stabbing a man in a fight in Manhattan. Alan Lomax, then 24, took him under his wing and helped raise money for his legal expenses, dropping out of graduate school to do so. After his release (in 1940-41), Lead Belly appeared as a regular on Alan Lomax and Nicholas Ray's groundbreaking CBS radio show, *Back Where I Come From*, broadcast nationwide. He also appeared in night clubs with Josh White, becoming a fixture in New York City's surging folk music scene and befriending the likes of Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, Woody Guthrie, and a young Pete Seeger, all fellow performers on *Back Where I Come From*. During the first half of the decade he recorded for RCA, the Library of Congress, and for Moe Asch (future founder of Folkways Records), and in 1944 headed to California, where he recorded strong sessions for Capitol Records. Lead Belly was the first American country blues musician to see success in Europe.

In 1949 Lead Belly had a regular radio broadcast on station WNYC in New York on Sunday nights on Henrietta Yurchenko's show. Later in the year he began his first European tour with a trip to France, but fell ill before its completion, and was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease. His final concert was at the University of Texas in a tribute to his former mentor, John A. Lomax, who had died the previous year. Martha also performed at that concert, singing spirituals with her husband.

Lead Belly died later that year in New York City, and was buried in the Shiloh Baptist Church cemetery in Mooringsport, 8 miles (13 km) west of Blanchard, Louisiana, in Caddo Parish.

## *Technique*

Lead Belly styled himself "King of the 12-string guitar," and despite his use of other instruments like the concertina, the most enduring image of Lead Belly as a performer is wielding his unusually large Stella twelve-string. This guitar had a slightly longer scale length than a standard guitar, slotted tuners, ladder bracing, and a trapeze-style tailpiece to resist bridge lifting.

Lead Belly played with finger picks much of the time, using a thumb pick to provide a walking bass line and occasionally to strum. This technique, combined with low tunings and heavy strings, gives many of his recordings a piano-like sound. Lead Belly's tuning is debatable, but appears to be a downtuned variant of standard tuning; more than likely he tuned his guitar strings relative to one another, so that the actual notes shifted as the strings wore. Lead Belly's playing style was popularized by Pete Seeger, who adopted the twelve-string guitar in the 1950s and released an instructional LP and book using Ledbetter as an exemplar of technique.

In some of the recordings where Lead Belly accompanied himself, he would make an unusual type of grunt between his verses, best described as "Haah!" Many of his songs, such as, "Looky Looky Yonder", "Take this Hammer", "Linin' Track" and "Julie Ann Johnson" feature this unusual vocalization. Lead Belly explained that, "Every time the men say 'haah', the hammer falls. The hammer rings, and we swing, and we sing", an apparent reference to prisoners' work songs. The grunt represents the tired deep breaths the men would take while working, singing and pausing in cadence with the work.

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## **II. Leadbelly**

(This article was written by Alan Lomax)

Born in 1885 near Shreveport, Louisiana, he was christened Huddie Ledbetter. Later his buddies on southern workgangs gave him the nickname which stuck to him for the rest of his life: they called him Lead-or-tough-belly, because he could set the pace for the cotton-picking gangs all day and make music for the barrel-house dances all night.

Leadbelly had the strength of a tiger and the heart of a champion. He was born a champion and died one, struck down by the same disease which paralyzed the great Lou Gehrig. When Leadbelly boasted that he was "king of the twelve-string guitar players of the world," he meant that he had bested every other twelve-string player he had ever met. Like any other master musician, he acquired and polished his technique by hours of daily practice. When his cue came, he sprang rather than walked on stage, his handsome face alight with passion, his whole being dedicated to the conquest of his audience. Professor George Lyman Kittredge, dean of American folklorists, heard him at Harvard in 1934, and whispered, "He's a demon, Lomas, a demon!"

In the Greek sense he was demonic, that is, a man inspired by music and rhythm. Pat Neff, the no-pardon Texas governor, heard him sing and broke all his campaign promises to set Leadbelly free. My father and I recorded him in the Louisiana pen in 1933 and we, too, became possessed

by Leadbelly. We carried his pardon appeal record to the Governor of Louisiana, who promptly paroled him. Then we devoted ourselves to his career for twelve months. We were hunting ballads and had met a great folk artist.

His voice in those days was clear, sweet and far-carrying, like a powerful jazz trumpet. Under his magic fingers his battered, green twelve-string guitar “talked like a natural man. The twelve-string had come to him from Mexican street singers in Dallas, but the music Leadbelly created for it was a folk history of East Texas and backwoods-Louisiana slave dance tunes, children’s games, songs, cotton-picking chants, field hollers, early ragtime, the western Negro ballads, the early blues. His was the flower of the Southwestern folksong tradition, refined and recreated by a true creative artist.

His first white audiences could not understand a syllable of his broad southern dialect, but he set them on fire with sheer power. When he learned to compromise with Northern ways and “bring his words out plain,” the fire was dimmed a bit, but his folk poems seized the imaginations of his hearers and he became the central figure of the developing American folk song movement. Leadbelly was the performer everyone thought of when they wanted honest, authenticity and power.

His scores of recordings inspired a whole generation of young people in England, where song was a dead art, to take up their guitars and sing again. English “skiffle” is, to a very large extent, a trans-Atlantic reflection of Leadbelly. His favorite songs – “**Pick a Bale O’ Cotton**” and “Goodnight, Irene” – are sung all over the world in scores of languages.

The purpose of this collection is to bring all his songs before that world audience. Certainly, his legend will continue to grow – the legend of a man whose music melted prison bars – the legend of a musician who, more than anyone else in this century, has brought honest and passion back into the mainstream of popular song.

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### **III. Cotton Picking in the Slave South**

Blackland cotton pickers of all ethnic groups were legendary for their high levels of productivity. An 1896 U.S. government study reported that nine-year-old girls sometimes picked two hundred pounds of cotton a day, while first class pickers averaged more than five hundred pounds per day. Blues singer Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly) sang of a husband-and-wife team that could pick a bale of cotton in a day:

Me an’ my wife can  
Pick a bale o’ cotton  
Me an my wife  
Can pick a bale a day.

Leadbelly exaggerated, of course; it took 1,500 to 1,600 pounds of cotton with its seeds still in (known as seed cotton) to make one 500-pound bale of ginned cotton, far beyond the combined

abilities of even the best pickers. As the song reveals, many women of the Blacklands prided themselves on their abilities to perform the job well, in defiance of the culture that frowned on their work. Czech immigrant Frances Podsednik recalled, "I worked hard. I picked five hundred pounds of cotton a day, not pulled, picked. I was so strong, I could swing a sack of 150 pounds on my shoulder like nothing. I was strong.

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#### **IV. Slave Songs**

Slaves attempted to preserve the culture that they had brought with them from Africa. A Southern woman recalled: "During my childhood my observations were centered upon a few very old Negroes who came directly from Africa, and upon many others whose parents were African born, and I early came to the conclusion, based upon Negro authority, that the greater part of the music, their methods, their scale, their type of thought, their dancing, their patting of feet, their clapping of hands, their grimaces and pantomime, and their gross superstitions came straight from Africa."

"When Africans were brought here, at first they were allowed to keep their drums and use them. After the Cato salve rebellion when slaves "called" to other slaves to join them along the Atlantic coast, drums were confiscated as the slave owners were afraid that the slaves would use the technique of "talking" drums again to organize another revolt. Once the drums were taken away, they turned to stamping out the ancient tribal rhythms in the dirt, so as not to lose this important part of their culture and retain what little original identity they had left.

As the same time, the United States was also importing indentured servants from Ireland and Scotland. These indentured servants brought with them the "hard" shoe dancing from their native lands. Now, it isn't quite clear how the two forms of dance met and blended, specifically, but, it is clear that at some point they did, and the result was tap dance. When tap dance first emerged is questionable. Some think it emerged as late as the 1890s, others as early as the 1830's. Unfortunately, there is no filmed documentation of it's emergence, and as it wasn't necessarily an upper class dance form."

Slaves would often sing while at work. In his autobiography, Frederick Douglass recorded how slaves "would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness." The songs told of the slave's loves, work and floggings and served as rhythmic accompaniment to labor.

The Lomaxes and other collectors of their time and even much later found some of the most powerful vernacular music of the American South in the region's oppressive and violent prison system. The songs they found there, John and Alan Lomax wrote, "or songs like them were formerly sung all over the South. With the coming of the machines, however, the work gangs were broken up. The songs then followed group labor into its last retreat, the road gang and the penitentiary"

Bruce Jackson, who recorded in Southern prisons in the 1970s, comments: “Southern agricultural penitentiaries were in many respects replicas of nineteenth-century plantations, where groups of slaves did arduous work by hand, supervised by white men with guns and constant threat of awful physical punishment. It is hardly surprising that the music of plantation culture – the work songs – went to the prisons as well.” These tie-tamping and wood-cutting chants, field hollers, and the occasional blues, recorded by Alan Lomax on Magnacord paper tapes at Mississippi’s notorious Parchman Farm state prison in 1947 and on February 9, 1948, became the basis for the *Negro Prison Songs*.

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## **V. Alan Lomax**

No individual has done as much to catalog and preserve traditional American music as American folklorist Alan Lomax (1915–2002). A folklorist, publisher, author, and part-time musician, Lomax was a driving force in the folk and blues boom of the 1950s and 1960s, and helped the world discover such artists as Leadbelly, Pete Seeger, and Muddy Waters.

If ever a man was born into the field of folklore and musicology, it was Lomax. Born January 31, 1915, in Austin, Texas, he was the son of John Avery Lomax, a onetime banker who became the preeminent collector of cowboy songs and Southwestern American folklore. Growing up in Texas, the younger Lomax listened to his father's many findings and became a confirmed advocate of America's true music. Along with his brother John, Jr., and sisters Bess and Elizabeth, young Alan often acted as an assistant, and learned his trade firsthand on many expeditions with his father. In a 1960 article for *HiFi/Stereo Review*, reproduced in Rounder's 1997 edition of *The Alan Lomax Sampler Collection*, Lomax wrote about his first major Library of Congress trip with his father. "In the summer of 1933, Thomas A. Edison's widow gave my father an old-fashioned Edison cylinder machine so that he might record Negro tunes for a forthcoming book of American ballads," he wrote. "For us, this instrument was a way of taking down tunes quickly and accurately; but to the singers themselves, the squeaky, scratchy voice that emerged from the speaking tube meant that they had made communicative contact with a bigger world than their own."

Eventually, the Library of Congress supplied the Lomaxes with a state-of-the-art disc-cutting recorder that was mounted in the back of his father's Model T-Ford. Armed with camping gear, cots, and cooking utensils, father and son covered 16,000 miles of a southeastern section of the United States in four months. The result of this hardscrabble music archaeology was the songs they gathered for the 1934 book *American Ballads and Folk Songs*. Subsequently, the Lomax family moved to Washington, D.C., so John Lomax could work full-time for the Library of Congress. Meanwhile, Alan attended one year of college at Harvard before transferring to the University of Texas where he earned his degree in philosophy in 1936. Upon graduation, he was appointed to head the Archive of American Folk Song, which he and his father helped establish at the Library of Congress, before he and his wife left on their honeymoon to do field research in Haiti. Later that year, he joined his father—now the honorary curator for the Library of Congress—as the first federally funded employee of that government office.

Working ceaselessly, the Lomaxes put out more song collections in the ensuing years, including the revised edition of *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1938), *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Leadbelly* (1936), *Our Singing Country* (1941), and *Folk Song: U.S.A.* (1947). Together, the father-son duo changed the popular perception of folk music from archival nostalgia to a living expression of the common man and contemporary culture. In the process, they unearthed musical artists who would change the sonic landscape of the nation.

### ***Aided Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, and Pete Seeger***

Alan Lomax was with his father when he discovered legendary blues singer and guitarist Huddie Ledbetter, better known as Leadbelly, at Angola Prison in Texas. Ledbetter, who was serving time for murder, had always claimed he killed in self-defense, and the Lomaxes championed his cause. Among the seven songs they recorded by the fabled black artist upon their first meeting was an early rendition of a song that would eventually become an American standard, "Goodnight Irene." John Lomax was instrumental in securing the singer's release from prison and the whole family knew the singer well. Indeed, Leadbelly even taught young Alan, with whom he developed a genuine rapport, licks on his trademark 12-string guitar. Acting as comanagers, the Lomaxes introduced Leadbelly to other folk scholars, enthusiastic college audiences, and the mainstream music world, creating an interest in the performer and his songs that continues to this day. Moreover, their book about the singer's life and music, *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Leadbelly*, was the first published biography specifically about a folk performer.

When the elder Lomax decided he could no longer tolerate the volatile singer's antics, he severed their association with Leadbelly. However, much to his father's dismay, Alan Lomax continued a friendly relationship with the seminal folk star, and continued recording the singer on his trusty disc-cutting machine for the Library of Congress. He also temporarily dropped out of the Columbia graduate program to raise bond money when the troubled star was arrested on assault charges, and arranged for him to be signed by independent MusicCraft label, and acted in an advisory capacity until the singer's death.

Lomax was important to other emerging performers as well, including jazz pianist Jelly Roll Morton, bluesman Josh White, and the granddaddy of American folksingers Pete Seeger. Through Lomax, Seeger also met Woody Guthrie, with whom he played under many different circumstances. Yet, it was Lomax who figured strongly in the revival of Guthrie's flagging career. Besides encouraging the hardluck performer to recommit to writing and getting him to record his works for the Library of Congress, Lomax featured him on a primetime CBS radio program he produced, *Back Where I Come From*. Years later, Lomax observed that the best years of his life were spent working with Guthrie and Leadbelly.

Whether serving as producer, writer, or singing host, radio proved an important educational tool for Lomax. Some projects, such as CBS's *School of the Air*, where he attempted to have folk music orchestrated and played like a symphony, simply did not work. Others like *American Folk Songs*, *Wellsprings of Music*, and the live *Midnight Special* broadcasts from Town Hall were successful in communicating what was special about folk and blues music to mass audiences. These shows also provided valuable exposure for such artists as Guthrie, Seeger, Leadbelly, White, the Golden Gate Quartet, and up-and-coming folk revivalist Burl Ives. However, such

high profile projects did not quell his compulsive need to go out into the field and seek new recordings.

Traveling with Fisk University musicologist John Work, Lomax made a famous trek into the Deep South in 1941 and 1942, where he documented the music and stories of the fife and drum bluesmen, and conducted the first recordings and interviews with McKinley Morganfield, better known as Muddy Waters. In his 1993 book *The Land Where Blues Began*, Lomax described the sessions that would kick-start the singer's highly influential career. "I remember thinking how low-key Morganfield was, grave even to the point of shyness," he wrote. "But I was bowled over by his artistry. There was nothing uncertain about his performances. He sang and played with such finesse, with such a mercurial and sensitive bond between voice and guitar, and he expressed so much tenderness in the way he handled his lyrics, that he went right beyond all his predecessors—Blind Lemon, Charley Patton, Robert Johnson, Son House, and Willie Brown." Although he was responsible for first fixing national attention on the bluesman, Lomax did not see Muddy Waters again for another ten years. When they met the former cotton chopper was driving a Cadillac, while Lomax was still driving an old Ford.

### ***Innovated and Educated***

When the Library of Congress decided they could no longer fund Lomax's expeditions, which were mostly done on a shoestring budget, he left them in 1943. Joining the army, he served in the Office of War Information and with the Army's Special Services until the end of World War II. As a civilian, he picked up where he left off, exploring the origins of the blues with Sonny Boy Williamson, Memphis Slim, and Big Bill Broonzy, and later hosting a folk music series *On Top of Old Smokey* for the Mutual Network in 1948. More importantly, he fed the fires of the burgeoning folk music revival by signing on as the director of folk music at Decca Records. From 1951 to 1957, he served as the editor for the Columbia Records World Library of Folk and Primitive Music. Yet, he spent most of the 1950s in Great Britain, where he began his hunt for the folk music of the British Isles, eventually releasing his findings on the ten-disc set *Folksongs of Great Britain* (1961).

When he returned to the United States, Lomax revisited the Deep South where he continued documenting African-American culture. Along the way, he also rediscovered bluesman Mississippi Fred McDowell, who quickly became the darling of emerging rockers around the world. Like his father before him, Lomax was in demand as a lecturer and visiting scholar, but he also received occasional offers to record as an artist in his own right. However, the albums that featured his voice and guitar for Tradition (1958) and Kapp Records (1963) received mixed reviews at best.

Funded by numerous grants Lomax continued to travel the world, documenting music in Spain, Africa, France, the Caribbean, the West Indies, and various prisons around the world. The results of these trips have been steadily released by the Rounder label in what may be a series of 100 plus albums. In 1966, he began dabbling in film and accumulated enough footage to fill several documentary films, including the 1990 PBS series *America Patchwork*. Always innovative and forward thinking, he proposed the idea for the Global Jukebox, an interconnected database of music and dance cultures from all over world, so that people may more easily study them.

Unfortunately, the idea, which is being carried on by the Association for Cultural Equity, was nearly stopped cold when Lomax suffered two strokes at the age of 80. Yet, working with his daughter Anna, he was somehow able to continue his many works until his 2002 death. In 2004, PBS told the story of some of his extensive travels with their documentary *Lomax the Song Hunter*.

Despite the many accolades and awards Lomax received during his lengthy career, he had his detractors as well. Respected rock writer Dave Marsh is among the critics of Lomax's methods. Responding to the glowing New York Times postmortem tribute by Jon Pareles, Marsh, wrote in *Counterpunch*, "As a veteran blues observer wrote me, 'Don't get too caught up in grieving for Alan Lomax. For every fine musical contribution that he made, there was an evil venal manipulation of copyright, publishing, and ownership of the collected material.'"

Like many publishers, promoters, agents, and even disc jockeys of his time, Lomax did impose his publishing imprint on a great many public domain songs. However, when a published song made money, Lomax proudly tracked down the writer in question and paid the royalties—something few of his contemporaries did. Further, the thousands of performers he captured on recordings would have never gotten a chance to share their culture and songs if he had not sought them out.

In a 1991 interview with Charles Kuralt, an audio snippet of which appeared on the 1997 Rounder release *The Alan Lomax Collection Sampler*, Lomax spoke of his work and how it changed the lives of the many artists he recorded. "The incredible thing was, when you could play this material back to the people, it changed everything for them. They realized that their stuff and they were just as good as anybody else. Then I found out that what I was really doing—and what my father was really doing—was giving an avenue for these people to express themselves and their side of the story."

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## **VI. The Leadbelly Foundation**

The Lead Belly Foundation is a non-profit organization founded by Tiny Robinson, niece of Huddie Ledbetter to preserve and promote the musical legacy of the "King of the 12-string guitar".

The mission of the Lead Belly foundation is to preserve and promote the historical legacy of Huddie Ledbetter to the world and support young musicians through educational programs and sponsorship.

We are committed to educate and promote the creative life of Huddie Ledbetter through museum exhibitions, maintaining the Lead belly archives, sponsoring music education to children and young adults, and showcasing public programs to national and global audiences.

Goals:

Excellence in education,, Support school programs, Volunteer service to meet educational needs for students, Accountability for result, Preserve musical heritage. To assure support and long term access to Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter’s music collections, and other shared memories.

To sponsor music workshops, music institutes, summer camps and concerts in which the music of Lead Belly, his contemporaries, and successors will be performing to continue to teach and influence Lead Belly’s style in blues and folk music.

Continual enhancement and maintenance of Lead Belly’s grave in Mooringsport, Louisiana which has been a national shrine for music lovers both in the United States and abroad.

To provide music scholarships to individual school-age students who desire to study a musical instrument for the purpose of enriching their lives academically, recreationally and socially.

We will provide continual support to students who aspire to further their musical talents by attending college and create mentor relationships for them to enter into the career world successfully.

To provide support to school music programs in order to enhance academic success, and increase the understanding and enjoyment of music.

To establish a museum to exhibit Lead Belly archives and memorabilia to further expose the many facets of Huddie Ledbetter.

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## **VII. Brian Lewis**

Brian Lewis received his Bachelor of Music in Composition from the Baldwin-Wallace Conservatory in Berea, Ohio. Continuing his studies at Western Michigan University, Brian received his Master of Music in Conducting, as well as his teaching certification. After teaching in the Michigan public school system, Brian moved to California to attend the USC Scoring for Motion Pictures and Television program. He was recently composer in residence at Portage Northern High School in Portage, Michigan, where the choirs performed the commissioned work, Sanctus.

You can email Brian at [scoresfilm@yahoo.com](mailto:scoresfilm@yahoo.com).

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## **Audio Links and Discography**

If you subscribe to iTunes, BuyMusic, Rhapsody or a similar service, keyword in “Jump Down Turn Around” or “Pick A Bale Of Cotton” - where you can listen to a sample from each artist.

## **Select YouTubes**

*Leadbelly*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiXLl7clwJE&feature=related>

*Lonnie Donegan*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ILbUduwBkg&feature=related>

*Paul Leegan and The Legends*

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rb\\_qRYXvF38&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rb_qRYXvF38&feature=related)

*Abba*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOYqGNzNs3c&feature=related>

*Johnny Cash*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzVfbwGW1O4>

*The Vipers Skiffle Group*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raIaV6DzmL0>

*Nez*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fL57Iywohs>

## **Select CD Recordings as MP3 Downloads**

*Alan Lomax Collection – Black Texicans (Original Version!)*

[http://www.amazon.com/Pick-a-Bale-of-Cotton/dp/B0012JAOV8/ref=sr\\_f2\\_5?ie=UTF8&s=dmusic&qid=1234742330&sr=102-5](http://www.amazon.com/Pick-a-Bale-of-Cotton/dp/B0012JAOV8/ref=sr_f2_5?ie=UTF8&s=dmusic&qid=1234742330&sr=102-5)

*John Lomax*

[http://www.amazon.com/Pick-a-Bale-of-Cotton/dp/B000S3AV8U/ref=sr\\_f2\\_11?ie=UTF8&s=dmusic&qid=1234742330&sr=102-11](http://www.amazon.com/Pick-a-Bale-of-Cotton/dp/B000S3AV8U/ref=sr_f2_11?ie=UTF8&s=dmusic&qid=1234742330&sr=102-11)

*Leadbelly*

[http://www.amazon.com/Pick-A-Bale-Of-Cotton/dp/B000UXUB4C/ref=sr\\_f2\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=dmusic&qid=1234742330&sr=102-1](http://www.amazon.com/Pick-A-Bale-Of-Cotton/dp/B000UXUB4C/ref=sr_f2_1?ie=UTF8&s=dmusic&qid=1234742330&sr=102-1)

*Pete Seeger*

[http://www.amazon.com/Pick-a-Bale-of-Cotton/dp/B000V8U862/ref=sr\\_f2\\_13?ie=UTF8&s=dmusic&qid=1234742330&sr=102-13](http://www.amazon.com/Pick-a-Bale-of-Cotton/dp/B000V8U862/ref=sr_f2_13?ie=UTF8&s=dmusic&qid=1234742330&sr=102-13)

*Brownie McGee*

[http://www.amazon.com/Pick-a-Bale-of-Cotton/dp/B000S3HUPM/ref=sr\\_f2\\_21?ie=UTF8&s=dmusic&qid=1234742330&sr=102-21](http://www.amazon.com/Pick-a-Bale-of-Cotton/dp/B000S3HUPM/ref=sr_f2_21?ie=UTF8&s=dmusic&qid=1234742330&sr=102-21)

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## **References:**

The above article about the song “Jump Down” was extracted from these websites. For more information, please read the articles:

<http://www.mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=72256>

<http://www.mudcat.org/@displaysong.cfm?SongID=4674>

<http://www.kovideo.net/lyrics/l/Leadbelly/Pick-A-Blae-Of-Cotton.html>

[http://www.6lyrics.com/music/leadbelly/lyrics/pick\\_a\\_bail\\_of\\_cooton.aspx](http://www.6lyrics.com/music/leadbelly/lyrics/pick_a_bail_of_cooton.aspx)

<http://www.astortheater.org/music.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lead\\_Belly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lead_Belly)

<http://www.leadbelly.org/re-homepage.html>

<http://www.notablebiographies.com/supp/Supplement-Ka-M/Lomax-Alan.html>

[http://alfred.com/img/authors/lewis\\_b.html](http://alfred.com/img/authors/lewis_b.html)

Book: Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices, by Rebecca Sharpless: <http://tinyurl.com/d6up2w>

Book: Alan Lomax - Alan Lomax, Rondard D. Cohen, Gage Averill: <http://tinyurl.com/b52b2d>