Civilization is spread more by singing than anything else, because whole big bunches can sing a particular song where not every man can join in on the conversation. A song ain’t nothing but a conversation fixed up to where you can talk it over and over without getting tired of it. And it’s this repeating the idea over and over that makes it take a hold. If the conversation is about good crops, or bad, good politics or bad, good news or bad, good anything else or bad, the best way to circulate it amongst the people is by singing it.

— Woody Guthrie

This course will be an exploration of leadership in the arts and will examine that subject from three different perspectives. First, we will be considering figures in traditional, old-time, and folk music whose contributions were, in many ways — sometimes great, sometimes small — transformative; that is to say, we will be looking at those without whom American music arguably would not be what it is today. Second, we will be considering their songs as a variety of American political thought, as expressions of their ideas about human nature and the politics of their day. Finally, we will be evaluating the power of song as a rhetorical means of spreading, and perhaps inculcating those ideas in the minds of the people, taking seriously Woody Guthrie’s claim that folk music “ain’t nothing but a conversation fixed up to where you can talk it over and over without getting tired of it” with the result that it is “this repeating the idea over and over that makes it take a hold.”

Since many of the figures we will be studying may be unknown to you, or only slightly known, we will be reading the major studies of their lives and contributions. But this will not just be a reading course; it will be — especially — a listening course. Each session will be a combination of discussing the readings, listening to the original recordings of these artists, and not infrequently viewing documentaries that will help to put their music and their contributions into context.

Assessment for the seminar will consist of class participation (20%); a research paper on a topic to be agreed (40%); and a final take-home examination (40%). The possible range of topics for your papers will be broad and could include the study of a particular artist that we have not covered in depth or the history of a particular song that captures your attention. The paper will develop over the course of the semester according to the schedule included as the addendum to
this syllabus.

Required Texts

Ed Cray, *Ramblin’ Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie*

Hazel Dickens and Bill C. Malone, *Working Girl Blues: The Life and Music of Hazel Dickens*

Bob Dylan, *Chronicles: Volume One*

Bill C. Malone, *Music from the True Vine*

Alec Wilkinson, *The Protest Singer*

Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*

Mark Zwonitzer (with Charles Hirshberg), *Will You Miss Me When I’m Gone?: The Carter Family and their Legacy in American Music.*

Class Assignments

I. January 17: By Way of Introduction — The Great Themes

A. Despair and Hope

Stephen Foster, “Hard Times Come Again No More”

Blind Alfred Reed, “How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?”

Bradley Kincaid, “Two Little Orphans”

Woody Guthrie, “I Ain’t Got No Home”

James King, “Thirty Years of Farming”

Ginny Hawker, “Sunshine in the Shadows”

The Carter Family, “Keep on the Sunny Side”

Bob Dylan, “When the Ship Comes In”

John Hartford, “Big Rock Candy Mountain”

Hobart Smith, “Uncloudy Day”
B. Home, Hearth, and Heaven

The Carter Family, “Homestead on the Farm”

Connie and Babe and the Backwoods Boys, “Dreamin’ of a Little Cabin”

The Blue Sky Boys, “If I Could Hear my Mother Pray Again”

Whitstein Brothers, “Shake my Mother’s Hand for Me”

Gillian Welch and Alison Krauss, “I’ll fly Away”

C. Notes on Influence and Adaptability

1. “No Depression in Heaven” — Three Versions
   a. Sheryl Crow
   b. The New Lost City Ramblers
   c. The Carter Family

2. From A. P. Carter to Woody Guthrie
   b. Woody Guthrie, “This Land is Your Land”

II. January 24: The Appalachians and their Music

A. The Appalachians (viewing of episode three of the documentary)

B. Hills, Hollers, and Industrialization: Trains, Mines, and Disasters

Doc Watson, “Dream of the Miner’s Child”

Bill Clifton, “Springhill Disaster”

John Prine, “Paradise”

Elizabeth Cotten, “Freight Train”

Vernon Dalhart, “Wreck of the Old ‘97"
Johnny Cash, “Engine 143”

III. January 31: The Carter Family

A. Reading:

Zwonitzer and Hirshberg, *Will You Miss Me When I’m Gone: The Carter Family and their Legacy in American Music*

B. The Carter Family: Will the Circle be Unbroken (viewing of the documentary)

C. Bristol and Ralph Peer: The First Recordings

  “Bury Me Under the Weeping Willow”
  “Little Log Cabin by the Sea”
  “Wandering Boy”
  “Single Girl, Married Girl”
  “The Storms are on the Ocean”
  “Poor Orphan Child”

D. The Carter Family Canon: A Sampling

  “Wildwood Flower”
  “My Clinch Mountain Home”
  “Worried Man Blues”
  “Can the Circle be Unbroken”

IV. February 7 and 14: Woody Guthrie and the Urban Folk

A. Reading:

  Cray, *Ramblin’ Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie*

B. Woody Guthrie: Ain’t Got No Home (viewing of the documentary)

C. A Musical Sampling

  1. Tough Times
“Goin’ Down the Road Feelin’ Bad”

“Hard Travelin’”

2. Hollow Dreams

“Pastures of Plenty”

“Do-Re-Mi”

“Deportees”

3. Search for True Values

“Jesus Christ”

“Pretty Boy Floyd”

“This Land is Your Land”

V. February 21 and 28: Pete Seeger and the Music of Politics

A. Reading:

Wilkinson, *The Protest Singer*

B. *Pete Seeger and the Power of Song* (viewing of the documentary)

C. A Musical Sampling

1. Society and its Ills

“Little Boxes”

“What did You Learn in School Today?”

“The Clearwater”

2. Unions and Labor

“Which Side are You On?”

“Union Maid”

3. Peace

“Where have all the Flowers Gone?”
“Study War No More”

4. Civil Rights

“If You Miss Me at the Back of the Bus”

“Oh, Freedom”

“We Shall Overcome”

VI. March 7: Huddie William Ledbetter — Leadbelly

A. Reading:

Wolfe and Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*

B. A Vision Shared: A Tribute to Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly (viewing of the documentary)

C. A Musical Sampling

1. Tough Times

“We’re in the Same Boat, Brother”

“Pick a Bale of Cotton”

“TB Blues”

“Bourgeois Blues”

“New York City”

“Mr. Hitler”

2. A Little Bit of Hope

“In New Orleans”

“Blood Done Sign My Name”

“Rock Island Line”

“The Midnight Special”

“Goodnight, Irene”
VII. March 21: Bill Monroe and the Rise of Bluegrass

A. Bill Monroe: Father of Bluegrass (viewing of the documentary)

B. A Musical Sampling

“I’m Going Back to Old Kentucky”
“New Mule Skinner Blues”
“My Little Georgia Rose”
“Uncle Pen”
“Get Down on Your Knees and Pray”
“Gotta Travel On”
“Live and Let Live”
“Long Black Veil”
“Midnight in the Stormy Deep”
“What Would You Give in Exchange for Your Soul?” (with Doc Watson)
“Foggy Mountain Top” (with Doc Watson)

VIII. March 28: Mike Seeger, the New Lost City Ramblers, and Music from the True Vine

A. Reading:

Malone, *Music from the True Vine*

B. *New Lost City Ramblers: Always been a Rambler* (viewing of the documentary)

C. A Musical Sampling

1. A Nearly Forgotten Tradition

“Sales Tax on the Women”
“How can a Poor Man Stand such Times and Live?”
“Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Back Again”
“No Depression in Heaven”

“On Some Foggy Mountain Top”

2. Recovering the Carters (with Mother Maybelle Carter at Newport Folk Festival)

“Gold Watch and Chain”

“Worried Man Blues”

“Little Darlin’ Pal of Mine”

“Wildwood Flower”

“The Old Gospel Ship”

IX.  April 4 and April 11: Bob Dylan and Joan Baez

A. Reading:

Dylan, Chronicles

B. Bob Dylan: No Direction Home (viewing of the documentary)

C. Joan Baez: How Sweet the Sound ((viewing of the documentary)

D. A Musical Sampling

1. Dylan

“A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”

“Blowin’ in the Wind”

“The Times They are A-Changin”

“Song to Woody”

“Only a Pawn in Their Game”

“When the Ship Comes In”
2. Baez

“Joe Hill”

“Last Night I had the Strangest Dream”

“With God on Our Side”

X. April 18: Hazel Dickens

A. Reading:

Dickens and Malone, *Working Girl Blues: The Life and Music of Hazel Dickens*

B. *Hazel Dickens: It’s Hard to tell the Singer from the Song* (viewing of the documentary)

C. A Musical Sampling

1. Remembering Home

“A Few Old Memories”

“Beyond the River Bend”

“Hills of Home”

“Mama’s Hand”

“West Virginia, My Home”

2. An Old Slant on New Themes

“Busted”

“It’s Hard to tell the Singer from the Song”

“Coal Tattoo”

“Working Girl Blues”

“TB Blues (with Alice Gerrard)”

“Let that Liar Alone” (with Alice Gerrard)

XI. April 25: Bringing the Music to Life
Research Paper Schedule

I. Proposed Research Project and Preliminary Bibliography (15%): Due February 14

The formal proposal should be a 2-3 pp. statement of what the main thesis of the research paper will be. Attention should be given to making the case for the importance of the topic, explaining how it will be carried out, and demonstrating how this will contribute to a better understanding of the subject. This should be accompanied by the preliminary, not necessarily the final, bibliography. You should assemble those sources most likely to benefit your researches as outlined in the project statement. This bibliography should include scholarly articles and books, as well as any discography that will likely be a part of your research. This proposal and bibliography will be assessed on the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of the listings, not simply the number included. This exercise should reflect careful consideration on your part as to what sources would appear to be most helpful to your making the case for your thesis.

II. Review of the Literature (15%): Due March 7

This should be a 3-4 pp. essay on the materials you have selected for use in your project. It should display a keen familiarity on your part with the works discussed, an appreciation for how they help define the existing scholarly understanding of your area of interest, and an awareness of the areas in which they might be deficient. In short, it should be a critical assessment of both the scholarly research to which you are turning to complete your project and how your thesis fits within that existing body of literature.

IV. Research Paper (70%): Due April 18

Your paper should conform to all scholarly conventions of style, be supported by a proper system of footnote citations, and be accompanied by a comprehensive bibliography. The paper should be 15-18 pp. in length, including footnotes or endnotes but not including the final bibliography.

Note: Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date indicated. Late submissions will be reduced one grade point each day (including weekends) that the assignment is late.