

CHAPTER ONE

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## Social Movements, Music, and Race

On December 23, 1938, the left-wing magazine *New Masses* sponsored a concert in New York's Carnegie Hall titled "From Spirituals to Swing," featuring some of America's now-legendary African American performers, including Count Basie, Sister Rosetta Tharp, Sonny Terry, and the Golden Gate Quartet. The program notes put the music in social context: "It expresses America so clearly that its readiest recognition here has come from the masses, particularly youth. While the intelligentsia has been busy trying to water our scrawny cultural tree with European art and literary movements, this thing has come to maturity unnoticed" ("From Spirituals to Swing" program). One of the songs, "I'm on My Way," could be heard a quarter century later in freedom rallies in places like Albany, Georgia. Commentators again embraced the sounds of African American culture as the music of America. Other parallels are found. The 1938 concert and 1961 Albany musicking each occurred during a peak of social movement activity, the communist-led Old Left that resulted in the unionization of America's core industrial sector, and the civil rights movement that crippled the insidious system of legalized racial segregation. In both, African Americans and whites joined to make music, challenging the dominant racial order that infected all aspects of social life. The aspirations of both movements to bridge racial boundaries with music were explicit—wedding black music (spirituals) and black-inspired white music (swing) in one event and invoking a universal principle (freedom) in the other. And both were but one moment of many in larger cultural projects that have used music in pursuit of social change.

But the contrasts were equally important. Most important, "From Spirituals to Swing" was a performance. One group of people sang and played for another, who participated as an audience. As such it succeeded, parlaying the popularity of such stars as Benny Goodman to launch performers like the Golden Gate Quartet and inject popular music with African American sensibilities. Still, the larger leftist movement was not able to change the musical tastes of their core target constituency, the American working class. Freedom songs, on the other hand, though made familiar by media coverage of the movement, had relatively little commercial impact. They did, however, have a huge impact on the movement, affording racially diverse activists the opportunity to join together in a

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somatic experience of unity. This distinction is the theme of this book: the social form of music—specifically the relationship between those who sing and those who listen—reflects and shapes the social relationship between social movement leaders and participants, conditioning the effect that music can have on movement outcomes.

## THE PROBLEM

I demonstrate the effects of the social relationships *within* music on the social effects *of* music with a comparison of the Old Left/communist-led movement of the 1930s and 1940s with the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Both movements self-consciously adopted folk music as a cultural project, both motivated by the potential of folk music to bridge racial boundaries, but with very different effects. The Old Left succeeded in boosting folk music from an esoteric genre meaningful to academics and antiquarians into a genre of popular music familiar to ordinary Americans. But it was never embraced by their rank-and-file constituents, especially the African Americans they aspired to mobilize. The civil rights movement, in contrast, had little interest in putting freedom songs on the charts. Even those that eventually became universally known, such as “We Shall Overcome,” were never commercial hits. But participating in the movement meant doing music. The impact of “We Shall Overcome” and other freedom songs was less important for their mass appeal than in the activity of blacks and whites joining arms and singing together. Thus the thesis of the book is that the effect of music on social movement activities and outcomes depends less on the meaning of the lyrics or the sonic qualities of the performance than on the social relationships within which it is embedded. This implies that music is fundamentally social. Accounts and perspectives that focus solely on textual meaning or sonic qualities disregard a profound sociological dimension of how music operates in social interaction. Music is a social relationship, and glossing over the interaction of people around music clouds over the explanatory power that sociological analysis can bring.

## FOLK MUSIC IN AMERICAN CULTURE

Folk music has played a special role in twentieth-century politics and culture. In contrast to Europe, where folk music is characteristically associated with nationalist sentiment, American folk music carries a distinctively leftist tinge. If any American style is associated with the left as a genre, not just songs with radical lyrics, it is folk music. Alan Lomax,

perhaps the most influential definer of what American folk music is, explained folk music's appeal: "first, in our longing for artistic forms that reflect our democratic and equalitarian political beliefs; and second, in our hankering after art that mirrors the unique life of this western continent—the life of the frontier, the great West, the big city. We are looking for a people's culture, a culture of the common man" (2003a: 86). These themes—the political, the nostalgic, and the populist—have been intertwined, weaving a consistent symbolic thread through the music's history. The combination is powerful. Many Old Leftists remember Woody Guthrie and Paul Robeson more vividly and fondly than any Communist Party official. Ask any graying veteran of the civil rights movement to recall the era and it is often the recollection of "We Shall Overcome" that makes him or her choke up.

The political meaning of folk music is based on its "ownership" by the left. The Old Left activists in the 1930s and 1940s and the civil rights activists of the 1960s claimed folk music as their own. As we shall see, American folk music had originally more of a nationalist, even racial connotation. The nostalgic meanings of folk music initially had more affinity with a conservative critique of modernism, affirming simple, rural life in the face of industrialization and urbanization. But the Old Left redefined the genre, tapping its populist overtones as "the people's music" on behalf of radicalism. This was music (supposedly) unspoiled by phonographs or radios, music from people who made a living by honest toil, who retained the pioneer spirit that made America great. It was music based not on the banalities of "June, croon, and spoon" but the rugged experiences of logging, sailing, children dying, and outlaws. And it was music that came from the heart and spoke to the heart. Rather than a song written to sell records, folk music was seen as music that reflected the real-life experiences of real people, singing about things that mattered. Ballads told stories of people's lives, work songs set the rhythm of toil, spirituals voiced sorrow and hope, and reels offered a respite from the toil.<sup>1</sup>

The meaning of folk music, its appeal, and the social relationships it reinforces or erodes are not inherent features of the genre. The concept of folk music is socially constructed, in the sense that its origins must be explained historically. It is the result of specific cultural projects—coordinated, self-conscious attempts by specific actors to create or reshape a genre. As elaborated below, the projects that shaped American folk music endowed it with a political message, appealed to a specific constituency, and set it within particular social relationships. Among the most contested issues was the definition of who constituted "the folk" of folk music. In the American context that means that race hovered over these projects, as activists struggled to include or exclude racial minorities, especially African Americans.

But before we get to the story, we need to clarify the issues at stake. The thesis that the Old Left was less successful than the civil rights movement at using folk music to bridge racial boundaries but more successful in making it a permanent part of American popular music intersects three areas of sociology: social movements, the sociology of music, and the sociology of race.

## SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

A social movement can be defined as a form of contentious politics with three elements: (1) there are campaigns of collective claims against targets, usually powerful organizations like governments or corporations; (2) these campaigns draw on a widely shared repertoire of organizational forms, public meetings and demonstrations, marches, and so forth; and (3) the campaigns make public representations of their worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment. Social movements are contentious insofar as they make claims, which if realized would adversely affect the interests of some other group (Tilly 2004b).

Sociologists began to pay serious attention to social movements after they, like just about everyone else, failed to anticipate the proliferation of social movements in the 1960s. The issue garnering the largest share of attention has been why social movements arise when and where they do and why people join them. In response to scholars who explained social movements as non-rational responses to social strain, most sociologists in the 1960s and 1970s emphasized organizational processes, the mobilization of resources, and the opportunities afforded by the political context. In the 1980s and 1990s scholars broadened the agenda to examine cultural factors (Alexander 1996; Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Jasper 1997; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Kane 1997; Snow et al. 1986). But the agenda remained focused on why social movements arise and why people join them.

Less common until recently has been work on what social movements actually do, especially with culture, and what consequences have ensued. What social movements actually do comprises not just the activities such as demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, and strikes that presumably achieve goals but also the mundane activities of meeting, chatting, debating, and deliberating. Most of the literature on what social movements do assumes that activities are designed either to achieve the official goals of the movement, “social change” of some sort, or to recruit and retain members.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have long examined how internal relations affect the achievement of goals.<sup>3</sup>

While social movements do mobilize organizations to recruit members and carry out collective actions, much of the time is spent hanging out and meeting. As the title of Polletta's book on participatory democracy succinctly puts it, "freedom is an endless meeting." Polletta shows that social movements construct their internal social relationships on implicit or analogical templates of other social relationships. American movements that intentionally organized themselves around participatory democracy evoked familiar analogies to guide their practices. For some, a social movement was like a religious fellowship in which those with conscience were invited to deliberate until a consensus was achieved. Pacifist movements often followed this mode. Other movements followed a model of tutelage or tutorial, in which leaders or organizers elicited the concerns and aspirations of political novices to empower grassroots upheaval. Finally, many movements operated as groups of friends in which trust and personal commitment solidified the arduous work of setting goals and making decisions.

People who create social movements shape the social relations within them—both with constituents and with targets—on the basis of taken-for-granted templates from their experience tempered by the kinds of goals they are pursuing. Social movements are constructed not only in the image of other social movements but in the image of other institutions. Social movements can be modeled on quasi-political parties, churches, families, schools, clubs, armies, and even firms. These templates influence the kind of leadership, hierarchy, and authority, whether the movement organization has membership, and, if so, the openness of membership and obligations of membership.

These relationships within an organization are one of the main determinants of what social movements do with culture. A movement patterned after a political party is more likely to use culture to recruit and educate a targeted constituency than one patterned after a church, in which culture plays more of an expressive function reinforcing solidarity and commitment. When culture is used for recruitment and education, the emphasis is more on the political content than the form. In contrast, a movement using culture to fortify solidarity is more likely to attend to the social relations within the cultural practices. This is the pattern found in the use of music by the Old Left in the 1930s and 1940s and the civil rights movement in the 1960s. The former used music, as they used theater, dance, poetry, fiction, and art, as a weapon of propaganda, a vehicle to carry an ideological message. Even though the people who promoted music in that musical project hoped that members and constituents would fully participate in music and developed a new form of participatory music, the hootenanny, the social relations inside the movement did not

foster broad cultural participation.<sup>4</sup> The fundamental relationship of culture remained performers and audiences. The musical activities of the Old Left were inspirational and supplied many of the songs for the civil rights movement, but they were refracted through a different set of social relations. The civil rights movement was rooted in a social institution used to doing music collectively, the church. The meetings where new members were recruited, where decisions were made, and where collective action was planned evoked religious services in both form and function. Most of the people were used to singing together when they gathered in groups. The social relationships were more like congregational singing than performers and audiences. Dr. Martin Luther King explicitly made the analogy between the movement and the church: “The invitational periods at the mass meetings, when we asked for volunteers, were much like those invitational periods that occur every Sunday morning in Negro churches, when the pastor projects the call to those present to join the church. By twenties and thirties and forties, people came forward to join our army” (1963: 59).

What does this tell us about social movements and music? First, it tells us that social movements mobilize around culture. Culture is not just something that movements have; it is something they do. What movements do with culture is just as important as the culture they have. Most of the literature on culture and social movements treats culture as a mental characteristic of the participants, asking either how the mental modes by which participants handle symbols affect their propensity to act or what meanings actions have for participants (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Jasper 1997; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Kane 1991; Steinberg 1999). Social movements develop identifiable organizations that bring people together, employ resources, and seek goals. Without organizations that have erected apparatuses and mobilized resources, social movements will either fail to develop culture or lose control of the culture, as happened with the New Left of the 1960s.

My concept of culture differs somewhat from the best-known book on the topic, Eyerman and Jamison’s excellent *Music and Social Movements* (1998). They frame their analysis around the concept of “cognitive praxis,” which they define as knowledge-producing activities that are carried out within social movements (1998: 7). This is consistent with their view that social movements are basically knowledge-bearing entities and that their main consequence is cultural change. Culture is treated as a symbolic and discursive realm existing at the social level but operationally found in individual expression. That is, culture is treated as something “out there” in the society but internalized in individuals, who provide a window on society. Insofar as culture is a system, it is a system of symbols and meanings. Analysis thus focuses on the content of that sys-

tem more than the concrete social relations that embed it. Thus, cognitive praxis focuses on the relationship between the social movement and the mind of the activist.

Eyerman and Jamison open their book telling about a 1995 memorial celebration for folk music activist Ralph Rinzler at the Highlander Center (which is discussed in chapter 7): “We saw, and felt, how songs could conjure up long-lost social movements, and how music could provide an important vehicle for the diffusion of movement ideas into the broader culture” (1998: 1). This interpretation misses one of the most fundamental differences between the musical achievements of the Communist Party and those of the civil rights movement.

Diffusing cultural content or cultural forms is not the same as developing a rich cultural life within a movement. Movements vary in the extent to which they develop a distinctive cultural life in contrast to or at odds with the broader culture. Just as the literature on framing problematizes the consonance or dissonance of ideological or discursive worldviews between movements and broader audiences, analysts of culture must problematize the alignment of aesthetic content and form. A movement’s ability to contribute to and even shape culture in the larger public is analytically and often empirically different from its ability to sustain a vibrant cultural world within its own ranks. Moreover, when movements do develop their own cultural vitality they differ in the extent to which their aesthetic tastes align with those of their constituencies. In contrast to the Communist Party, which was more successful at diffusing movement culture into the broader culture, the civil rights movement was more successful at facilitating music as an integral part of collective action that actually informed movement practice.

## CULTURAL PROJECTS

The work that social movements do to use culture on behalf of movement goals can be called a cultural project. For social movements, a cultural project is a self-conscious attempt to use music, art, drama, dance, poetry, or other cultural materials, to recruit new members, to enhance the solidarity of members, or to persuade outsiders to adopt the movement’s program.<sup>5</sup> Often carried out by specialists in the movement, they typically deliberately decide which genres to adopt, the cultural forms that are appropriate, how culture contributes to the goals of the movement, and what makes culture political. They also to some extent develop a cultural infrastructure, producing, distributing, and promoting their cultural work. Both the Old Left in the 1930s and 1940s and the civil rights movement in the 1960s adopted American folk music as a cultural

project. They not only extolled the music but built organizational infrastructures and adopted specific practices to use folk music in their collective action. But they did so in different social relations with different consequences.

Social movements have typically done cultural work for two purposes: to persuade outsiders to adopt new beliefs or ideologies while recruiting new members (culture-in-content), and to galvanize the solidarity of existing members or deepen the boundaries between insiders and outsiders (culture-in-relations) (Denisoff 1983; Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Roscigno and Danaher 2004; Rosenthal and Flacks 2009). Scholars have analyzed culture-in-content more closely, especially by examining the process of framing by which social movements align their messages with the broader culture and attempt to bring audiences closer to themselves (Benford and Snow 2000; W. Gamson 1992; Snow et al. 1986; Tarrow 1998). The Old Left, especially the Communist Party, primarily conceived of culture as a propaganda weapon in an ideological war to jolt the working class out of their false consciousness.<sup>6</sup> The Composers Collective vividly demonstrated their orientation toward culture in their 1934 *Workers Songbook*.

Music Penetrates Everywhere  
 It Carries Words With It  
 It Fixes Them In the Mind  
 It Graves Them In the Heart  
 Music is a Weapon in the Class Struggle  
 (Lieberman 1995: 28)

The cultural work that enhances solidarity is often quite different from culture for recruitment because the dynamics of in-group and out-group affiliation can clash (Simmel 1955). In-group solidarity is often cultivated by engaging in practices that reinforce boundaries between members and non-members. Social movements, like all organizations, often find they can increase commitment by emphasizing how different (how much smarter, enlightened, moral, committed, or important) members are from others. Cultural work can thus take the form of rituals that are meaningful primarily to the initiated, with specialized symbols, language, and activities. This is one of the dynamics that facilitates the marginalization of sectarian organizations in which members become increasingly committed and peripheral. It is a special problem in stigmatized movements that must offer members compensating structures of meaning to replace what their stigma has denied them. Lieberman has described the rich cultural life of Communist Party members in New York after World War II when membership often came at the price of friendship, jobs, housing, and even



family ties. She has argued that the project of using culture to reach broader audiences for persuasion and recruitment increasingly turned inward to build solidarity within the movement (Denning 1996; Lieberman 1995; Reuss and Reuss 2000).<sup>7</sup> The civil rights movement had less need to convince people of the legitimacy of their goals than did the Old Left. The country was polarized between those who supported racial segregation and those who opposed it. The movement's constituency needed little persuasion to support the movement but much nurturing to become active and persevere against intimidation. Especially before it developed other cultural projects, music was absolutely critical to the movement.<sup>8</sup>

Different social movements not only adopt different genres for cultural projects and seek different goals through their projects; they do cultural work through different kinds of social relationships. To fully fathom how the social relations in the movement shaped the effect of their musical activities, it is necessary to determine what is sociological about music.

#### WHAT IS SOCIOLOGICAL ABOUT MUSIC?

In a field as underdeveloped as the sociology of music, there is still little consensus about fundamental questions of theory and method. Scholarship conducted under the rubric of sociology of music draws on a broad variety of assumptions about how music enters into social interaction, how it relates to social boundaries such as race, gender, and class, how it expresses meaning (or does not), and even what we mean by music. The differences run deeper than the ordinary divisions between conventional schools of thought such as symbolic interactionism, identity-based theories, or network analysis because the nature of music itself is at stake.

The sociological salience of music can be framed in terms of three sets of questions. (1) Ontology: in terms of social relations, what *is* music? (2) Meaning: how do people create meaning from or in relationship to music? (3) Function: what does music do in social relationships and what do people do with music? While I cannot offer a grand theory of the sociology of music, it will help clarify the analysis of social movements, race, and music to concisely situate my perspective relative to others. The purpose is less to thoroughly vet, much less adjudicate, different perspectives than to frame my analysis within a broader context. The Old Left and the civil rights movement adopted very different implicit orientations toward these issues. While neither overtly theorized music in these terms, their different assumptions about the social nature of music help explain the different consequences of their doing music.

*Ontology: What Music Is*

At the most basic level scholars differ over what music is. Assumptions about what music is are related to what one does with music, the social relationships in which music is done, and the relationship between activity and context. Bohlman (1999) has identified three ontological approaches to music, conceptualizing music as an object, as a process, and as being embedded.<sup>9</sup>

First, most commonly, at least in the West, music is treated as an object, a *thing* that has the characteristics we attribute to objects, such as a moment of creation, stability of characteristics over its lifetime, stability of characteristics between contexts, and consistency of cause-and-effect relations. Rather than debating whether music should be treated as an object or not, it is more fruitful to problematize music's "objectness." Institutional settings that produce musical objects such as orchestras, record companies, publishers, and critics all continually render music as an object by asserting that what they are doing is independent of context. Institutional practices such as copyright and technologies such as notation and recording constrain musicians to concretize performances into singular, repeatable, named pieces of music called songs. Thus early blues singers, used to cobbling a performance from a standard repertoire of lines, riffs, and embellishments, were told by recording companies to perform "songs" that could be labeled on the records and copyrighted by the company. The institution of the market and the technology of recording then enabled the commodification of the music so that listening could become a specialized activity in a context independent from performance. In contrast, actors who explicitly embed music in contexts such as dancing, religion, sports events, or social movements weaken music's objectness.

The two social movements examined here treated music differently in terms of its objectness. While the Old Left emphatically rejected the extreme objectification of music embodied in the commercial definition that made music an item of property, and despite their ambitions to make music a spontaneously recurring event in the progressive movement, for the most part they treated music as an object, a set of songs distributed by the technologies of notated print and recorded sound. Their success in introducing folk music to broad audiences depended on the development of institutional structure with record companies, magazines, books, and live performances organizationally similar to commercial music. While the civil rights movement also treated music as a thing to some extent, codifying songs such as "We Shall Overcome" and distributing books and magazines, relative to the Old Left they treated music more as a process, training song leaders at places like the Highlander School, using "zipper

songs” that could be adapted for the purpose at hand, and incorporating the folk process into their activities.

Bohlman’s second ontological orientation to music is process. Rather than an object with fixed qualities, music can be treated as something always becoming that never achieves full objective status, something unbounded and open. When music is shared by a collectivity, its evolution is more readily observable and the mechanisms that objectify it are typically weaker. Shared music, as seen in the folk music process, passes from hand to hand and mouth to mouth, adapting, elaborating, unfolding, and simplifying. Christopher Small advocates treating music as a verb—*musicizing*—rather than a noun, highlighting process in contrast to a noun’s objectness.

Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing “music” is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely. This habit of thinking in abstractions, of taking from an action what appears to be its essence and of giving that essence a name, is probably as old as language; it is useful in the conceptualizing of our world but has its dangers. (1998: 2)

This perspective is more inherently sociological, shifting the agenda to what people are doing when they compose, perform, listen, discuss, dance to, worship to, or imagine music. It is especially germane to folk music, which is often treated in process terms, highlighting the folk process.

Even more sociological is Bohlman’s third aspect of ontology, focusing on its embeddedness, treating it as part of another social activity, inseparable from it (1999). Here music is treated in terms of its function for a social activity. A hymn becomes something other than a hymn when taken out of a religious setting, as does a folk song when piped into an elevator.<sup>10</sup> Based on the ethnomethodological concern with problematizing how order is achieved, in this perspective music “is” what it does and its salient features are defined in terms of the social relationships within which it is embedded. Commercial music created, produced, and distributed through monetary exchange is treated as fundamentally different from religious music that fuses individual worshipers into a congregation collectively creating the social presence of a deity. The music is seen not only as influencing the event, as though the event could exist without it, but helping constitute the event itself. For many, a religious service without hymns does not feel fully like a religious service, nor does an aerobics class without music feel quite real. Music helps order the pace, feel, and energy of interaction that make the events “really” what they are. Thus music helps order the events both in the sense of providing a proper sequence (confession before redemption, warm-up before intense exercise)

and the deeper sense of social order—how people relate to each other through precognitive structuring (DeNora 2000). Music thus *entrains* interaction, coordinating how people interact, whether the mutual silence of the classical concert, the cool ambiance of the jazz club, the solitary bubble of the student walking with earphones, dancers at the disco, or worshipers at a religious service (Blacking and Byron 1995; Clayton, Sager, and Will 2005).

Embeddedness is especially important for social movements. This book argues that the extent to which movements treat music as an object, a process, or an embedded activity helps constitute the movements themselves and affects what they achieve. The Old Left treated music primarily as an object, while being mindful of musical processes. Most often for them music meant performers singing for and with audiences to heighten consciousness and foster solidarity. The civil rights movement conceptualized music more as embedded in collective action and adopted processes to facilitate its use in such settings. Their vision was of people singing on picket lines and demonstrations, a vision shared by many Old Left activists but rarely achieved.

### *Meaning*

Beyond the ontological question of what music *is*, the sociology of music presents distinctive challenges for questions of meaning, offering insights often neglected in sociological discussions of meaning in general. The question posed here is the extent to which meaning is to be located in the music, whether lyrics or sonic qualities, or in the context. And insofar as meaning is created in context, to what extent is it constructed in concrete social activities or in the discourse about it?<sup>11</sup> The analysis in this book runs against the grain of most musical scholarship, focusing on context more than the music itself.

Rather than engage in the voluminous debates about what meaning is, I will simply state my definition: meaning is the system of symbols by which people make sense of the world in the context of interaction. It is more a set of activities—interpretation, exchange, reflection—than a product. Meaning is fundamentally sociological insofar as it happens through interaction and makes interaction possible. I agree with DeNora (2003) that the question of *how* musical meaning is achieved is more sociologically interesting than the question of what it *is*.

The semiotic approach of analyzing musical meaning is typically studied by putting the analyst in the role of the listener, decoding meanings just as one does in language (Cooke 1959; Feld and Fox 1994; Shepherd and Wicke 1997; Treitler 1997). For some, the meaning is found in music's sonic qualities. Cerulo, for example, has offered a sociological ac-

count of how meaning can be interpreted from the semiotic structure of music in the relationship of notes to each other, simultaneously (harmony) and temporally (melody). In this perspective, “Music is a form of communication, and like other forms of communication—language, numbers, pictures—it is a symbol system by which senders convey thoughts, emotions, and information to receivers” (1995: 43–44).

When scholars discuss the political meaning of music, they typically refer to the lyrics. Political sentiments have often been expressed musically. People with political commitments have certainly turned to music as a means of expressing their ideals, often with the expectation that listeners might be persuaded by the lyrics. And movements have often embraced songs that crystallize their core beliefs.

There is increasing debate about how effectively lyrics carry messages and how persuasive they are, especially for people who do not agree with their message. Frith asserts that there is no evidence that the content of lyrics affects beliefs (or even reflects them). The words of songs, he says, are not about ideas but about expression: “It is not that love songs give people a false, sentimental, and fatalistic view of sexual relationships, but that romantic ideology requires such a view and makes love songs necessary” (1996: 164; Frith, Hall, and Du Gay 1996).<sup>12</sup>

This book has little to say about the lyrics of songs in the movements. To the extent that meaning matters, I believe sonic qualities are at least as important as lyrics, both because performers and listeners generally pay more attention to sound than words and because the impact of sound is deeper and less conscious than that of words.<sup>13</sup> The Old Left’s greater focus on lyrics is part of the explanation for why their musicking less effectively bridged racial boundaries than did the civil rights movement. The music that energized collective action was not the music with the most meaningful lyrics but the music that fit its ritual use, from “Solidarity Forever” in the 1930s to “We Shall Overcome” in the 1960s. Many of the freedom songs in fact had little obvious political content.

The semiotic approach that finds meaning in music’s sonic qualities or lyrics is challenged by contextualists, who argue that meaning resides less in the notes than in the social relations of those involved in doing music. DeNora, for example, charges that semiotic approaches “often conflate ideas about music’s affect with the ways that music actually works for and is used by its recipients instead of exploring how such links are forged by situated actors” (2000: 22). Feld similarly advocates going beyond semiotic readings of music to investigate “the primacy of symbolic action in an ongoing intersubjective life world, and the ways engagement in symbolic action continually builds and shapes actors’ perceptions and meanings” (1984: 383). The most explicit argument for a contextual view of music comes from Christopher Small.

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world. (1998: 13)

This implies that the meaning is never purely in the music because there is never *a* meaning. Meanings emerge in interaction as people do music (including listening and discussing) and are often about music. Political meanings develop from modes of musical interaction in composing, adapting, performing, listening, singing along with chanting, picketing, passing time in jail, and recollecting about music. Thus the meaning of “We Shall Overcome” is very different when sung at an organizing meeting in Albany, Georgia, in 1961, played as background music in a documentary about the civil rights movement, sung by Joan Baez on a commercial album, or played in a college class on twentieth-century American history. The sounds of the first two and last two examples may be identical, but the meaning is not because the relationship of the performers and audiences is very different. The kinds of social relationships within the various groups in the musical worlds of the Old Left and the civil rights movement embodied different modes of making meaning and different structures of mediating meaning to action.

For many people the meaning of music comes at least as much from talk about music as how they hear music. People do not just do music, they talk about it. They talk about it a great deal. The discourse about music is one of the most important ways that music is sociological, a social activity that cannot be explained from only the music itself, either the sonic qualities or the lyrics. The way that people talk about music—what they say, what it means to them, and how discourse underlies social relationships—is inseparable from how people hear music and what it means to them. Cruz, for example, describes how white abolitionists embraced slave spirituals in a discourse that reflected their ambivalence toward African Americans. In discourse studies, the social importance of music lies less in music itself than in how people talk about it. As he puts it, “Music is prophetic only in *post hoc* accounts, by after-the-fact outcomes that appear to validate human desires and anticipation. In such cases it is not music, but the social movements upon which music rides that matter. . . . It is not music’s ‘prophetic’ capacities that warrant examination, but

rather the complex processes by which social relations and social disruption are sounded and heard through music's noisiness" (1999: 64).

While musical discourse cannot be reduced to the music itself, discourse cannot be separated from the meaning or experience of music. DeNora emphasizes that discourse is not just *about* music but coproduces the meaning. Social significance is not pre-given but is apprehended within specific circumstances. She advocates a reflexive conception of meaning that considers aspects of the music itself, its context, and the discourse about it. Frith similarly discusses how the social bonds created by music come from talking about it and making judgments. Thus the racial and sexual connotations of rock and roll, he argues, arose more from the discourse around them than from the sonic qualities of sound. Blacks are discursively associated with the body and whites with the mind. Sonically the upbeat rhythms of rock and roll are less evocative of the sex act than is the lush sensation of seduction music. It was the racist discourse against rock and roll, he argues, more than the music itself that accounts for its sexual cultural connotation. Musical meaning is thus refracted through the discourse about it: "To grasp the meaning of a piece of music is to hear something not simply present to the ear. It is to understand a musical culture, to have 'a scheme of interpretation.' . . . The 'meaning' of music describes, in short, not just an interpretive but a social process: musical meaning is not inherent (however 'ambiguously') in the text" (Frith 1996: 249–50).

### *Function*

While meaning is essential to a sociological analysis of music, I will contend that the uses of music were more important than its meaning in explaining why the Old Left and civil rights movement had different effects.<sup>14</sup> But such programmatic statements still do not tell us what is sociological about how music is used. For that we turn to Schutz's concept of the precommunicative basis of interaction. By precommunicative interaction, he means interaction that is based not on the semantic content of symbols but on the temporally structured mutual orientation through gestures, coordination, turn taking, and so forth. To interact, people must orient toward others, not only in terms of intention but also in terms of what is going on. Precommunicative interaction is especially clear in nonverbal interaction such as team sports, dancing, walking on a busy sidewalk, making love, and doing music. "Tuning in" thus underlies the relationship in specific dimensions of time (Schutz 1964). By this logic music is not a non-social activity in social context but is context in and of itself (A. Seeger 2004). Just as turn taking, repairing interruptions, and the mutual reinforcement of grammatical rules make conversation pos-

sible, music is based on synchronized interaction and organization of sound. The interactions around musicking are critical not only to what it means but to what it does. Playing music, listening to it with others, dancing to it, or protesting with it are very different activities (DeNora 2000).

The social impact of music happens not only through a common understanding of it or the discourse around it but also through the experience of simultaneity. The mutual synchronizing of sonic and bodily experience creates a bond that is precommunicative and perhaps deeper than shared conscious meaning. This can happen through the interaction of composers and performers, performers and performers, performers and listeners, and listeners and listeners. The more involved a person is in doing music, whether in composing, performing, or listening, the tighter the bond is.

McNeill has documented the effects of temporally coordinated bodily activities on group functioning. Marching, calisthenics, chanting, singing, dancing, religious ritual, and other synchronized actions foster a form of solidarity richer and more robust than cognitive agreement: “Moving our muscles rhythmically and giving voice consolidate group solidarity by altering human feelings” (1995: viii). He describes his experience in basic training during World War II: “Words are inadequate to describe the emotion aroused by the prolonged movement in unison that drilling involved. A sense of pervasive well-being is what I recall; more specifically, a strange sense of personal enlargement; a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than life, thanks to participation in collective ritual” (1995: 2). It was something felt, not talked about; that is, it was precommunicative. Emotion created a basis for social cohesion. The coordinated activities engendered a “boundary loss,” the submergence of the self in the flow, the feeling of being part of a larger collectivity. Muscular bonding—whether the rigors of boot camp or making love—can fuse a relationship so deeply that people can be willing to risk life for it. McNeill even attributes the success of European armies over others partly to their drilling.

Thus bonds forged by musicking together can afford (but not necessarily create) other kinds of bonds. The bonds forged by musicking together may thus explain why the civil rights movement was more effective at bridging racial boundaries than was the Old Left.<sup>15</sup> Processes that redefine boundaries are especially important in situations involving conflict. Social movements attempt to redraw or reinforce boundaries. When redrawing boundaries they seek to eliminate cleavages of privilege, demarginalize the marginal, and bring together groups previously considered distinct. Whether they are redrawing or reinforcing boundaries, they seek to create solidarity among contenders, forge new identities, and enhance the feeling of belonging.



If music entrains social relations among people doing it, it is sociological, not just as a cultural object that people react to but as an activity that helps constitute other activities. As DeNora has discussed at length, we need to study what people do *to* music (do while musicking), what activities music is an element of. With music we play (in the sense of playing games, not playing music), shop, work, exercise, walk, make love, relax, dance, socialize, worship, drive, read, write, protest, and pass time (DeNora 2000). Small has ethnographically described how putatively “pure” listening in a classical concert is a carefully choreographed activity with precise expectations for its physical setting, the behavior of its performers, and the behavior of listeners, demanding a monopoly of everyone’s body, if not their mind (1998). The experience for the audience involves not just hearing the sounds but sitting in neat rows as part of a crowd in an expansive, ornate hall, focusing on a conductor reproducing the intentions of the composer. All the actions we do *to* music involve interaction or the avoidance of interaction (passing time, working). We select music (or the music is selected for us) to do whatever we are doing the way we (or someone else) want to do it. You can shop quickly or leisurely, work intensely or at a steady pace, make love in frenzy or in lush sweetness, worship reflectively or magisterially. Music does not single-handedly determine the mood or the terms of interaction around activity, but it does, along with the physical context, interactive scripts, understanding of roles, and prior history, help shape the definition of what is being done and how it is done.

Three social functions of music are especially salient for this study: bounding, bridging, and ranking. The complex and at times paradoxical effects of music on reinforcing social distinctions, reaching across them, and facilitating or inverting hierarchy pose a challenge to sociology. “The trumpet’s loud clangour / Excites us to arms,” wrote Dryden in the seventeenth century, but Congreve rejoined that “Music has charms to soothe a savage breast.” This duality is less a debate than a reflection of music’s implication in a wide variety of social effects. Social distinctions are built and undermined; either process can, under different conditions, exacerbate or ease inequality. Music can play all these roles.

Bounding refers to the social mechanisms that create and sustain consequential categorical distinctions among people (Bowker and Star 1999; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Roy 2001; Tilly 2004a; Zerubavel 1991). Music helps both create and mark consequential distinctions such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, generation, and region. The music that people perform and listen to, the way that they perform and listen, the meanings they attach to music and the contexts in which they do music are often signs that mark people as members of groups and that create or reinforce those distinctions. Anthony Seeger

explains that for the Suyá of Brazil, music gives the individual identity, constitutes social relationships of village, and “re-creates, re-establishes, or alters the significance of singing and also of the persons, times, places, and audiences involved. It expresses the status, sex, and feelings of performers, and it brings these to the attention of the entire community” (2004: 65). It is not so very different in our society. Music does not just “reflect” race, gender, class, age, and so forth but helps create them. Part of doing race or doing gender is doing music, captured in the way that people perform, listen, and talk about music in particular ways that help make people white, black, Latino, or Asian, or male and female.

Music is equally important sociologically in its ability to reach across boundaries and bridge social relationships. It is not just Longfellow who has felt that “Music is the universal language of mankind.” Some would explain music’s universal qualities from its abstract form, assuming that it has no literal meaning that can link it to social groups. They would say that any racial, ethnic, gender, class, or generational meaning is arbitrary and relatively plastic. It is thus relatively easy for people to embrace music across boundaries, as seen in the diffusion of classical music beyond Europe or the popularity of World Music within it. Others find in music universal meaning—love, anguish, awe, beauty, and redemption.

Bounding and bridging are two mechanisms that shape a society’s system of alignment between cultural boundaries (genre distinctions in arts, music, literature, etc.) and social boundaries. At one end of the continuum, a situation that can be described as heterology, we can imagine societies where genre distinctions have no relationship to non-cultural social distinctions.<sup>16</sup> Since heterology is merely a hypothetical possibility, sociologists have not addressed it. They have, however, widely discussed homology, the other end of the continuum (DeNora 2002; Frith 1996; Frith 1989; Lipsitz 2000; P. Martin 1995; Shepherd 1989; Shepherd and Wicke 1997). Homology is the principle that the structure of music parallels the structure of society.<sup>17</sup> The relationships between cultural distinctions like genres and social boundaries like race are said to be homologous to the extent that they align along similar dimensions of difference. If some genres are considered black, white, or Latino, or male or female, or high status or low status, or young or old, the cultural and social structures are homologous.

Because the groups that are bridged and bounded by music are rarely socially equal, music plays an important role in sustaining and reconfiguring social hierarchy. The relationship of music to social inequality has been the focus of some of the theoretically richest and most widely discussed sociological work on music. From mass society theory that dominated American sociology of culture in the 1950s and 1960s to more re-

cent theories of cultural capital to a smaller literature on music as a form of social control, scholars have investigated the role that music plays in creating and sustaining inequality (Adorno 2000; Bourdieu 1984; Bryson 1996; DiMaggio 1982a; Levine 1988; McClary 2000; Peterson 1997b; C. Seeger 1957). But more recently sociologists have focused on how music can undermine hierarchy, breaching the cultural foundations of domination, inciting social movements, and at times turning social hierarchies on their heads.

Folk music inverts the conventional relationship between cultural and social hierarchy. The cultural elite of the folk project have valorized folk music precisely because it is the music of the common folk. The more marginal, humble, and unsophisticated the makers of music the better, at least from the perspective of the educated, urban folk enthusiasts. The very qualities that ordinarily would commend music as respectable are treated as shortcomings in folk music—sophistication, virtuosity, innovation, individuality, and refinement. As elaborated in later chapters, the inversion of cultural hierarchy in folk music, especially with its racial implications, was one of the factors that attracted left-wing activists to folk music. As the “people’s music,” folk music could be used to galvanize social movements and especially to bridge racial boundaries.

This is where the topic of social movements and the sociology of music come together. Rosenthal and Flacks identify three major functions that music can play for social movements: recruitment, mobilization, and serving the committed. Recruitment can be served by drawing potential recruits to movement events, exposing them to new ideas through lyrics, and helping form network ties that can serve to draw people in. As Joe Hill said, “A pamphlet, no matter how good, is never read but once, but a song is learned by heart and repeated over and over; and I maintain that if a person can put a few cold common sense facts in a song, and dress them up in a cloak of humor to take the dryness off of them he will succeed in reaching a great number of workers who are too unintelligent or too indifferent to read a pamphlet or an editorial on economic science” (quoted in Rosenthal and Flacks 2009: 27). Mobilization, their second function for social movements, refers to the ways that music can facilitate actual collective actions, both by reinforcing commitments and by energizing a group as it prepares for action. Their third function, serving the committed, refers to the way that music enhances solidarity, increases loyalty, reinforces identities, and gives content to ritual. One especially important function, also emphasized by Eyerman and Jamison (1998), is to keep movement culture alive in times of dormancy.<sup>18</sup>

Social movements are both a class of actors that use culture and a site where culture is enacted. As a site for cultural work, the kinds of social relationships including the degrees of hierarchy, the modes of decision-

making, the social cleavages, especially race, gender, and class, and other features of interaction shape (and are affected by) the kind of cultural work that is done. As Eyerman and Jamison suggest, social movements also incubate social relationships and cultural content for the larger society. They are a site where people meet and where institutions interact, shaping both the form and content of culture (1998). For example, the American Communist Party (CP) helped develop institutions of political musicking where progressive musicians could come together to develop and disseminate a vibrant and far-reaching musical vitality. Like churches, schools, and community bands, the CP created noncommercial organizations to use music as a collective activity. In doing so, they bestowed American folk music not only as a popular genre but one with enduring left-wing political connotations (Lieberman 1995; Reuss and Reuss 2000).

## RACE

While it is hoped that this book will substantially advance our understandings of music and social movements, its contribution to the sociology of race is more limited. But I would like to clarify where I stand on the meaning and social basis of race in America. By “race” I mean a systematic and hierarchical ideology and set of practices that categorize groups of people based on imputed correlations between physical inherited characteristics and social characteristics. It is not about skin color, shape of eyes, or structure of face but about social reactions to skin color, shape of eyes, and structure of face. It is not a characteristic of a person or a group of people but a characteristic of relations between people and the imputation of groupness. It is thus socially constructed, not in the sense of being the figment of people’s imagination but in the sense of arising in particular times and places for particular social reasons (Roy 2001). Because it is socially constructed, it is a mutable object of contention. While the depth to which race permeates American social relations and institutions has made it disturbingly tenacious, there has been change. And while it pervades all aspects of life, there is variation in its operation and significance in different arenas of life.

Music has been one social arena that has been more inclusive than many other arenas in American society. Even in the depths of the Jim Crow South, black and white musicians interacted more frequently than non-musicians, learning each other’s songs, teaching each other techniques, and sharing a struggle to eke it out on the margins (Frith, Hall, and Du Gay 1996; Levine 1977; Small 1987). Such inclusion is probably due less to any inherent tendency of music to bridge social boundaries

than to specific historical conditions under slavery and after. Just as composers were considered house servants by pre-Romantic European patrons, plantation owners used slaves for entertainment. Music was one of the skills, along with smithing, carpentry, and tailoring, that slaves were groomed for. Many advertisements for slaves noted their musical talents, for example, a 1766 advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette*: "TO BE SOLD. A young healthy Negro fellow who has been used to wait on a Gentleman and plays extremely well on the French horn" (quoted in Southern 1983: 27). Notices of runaway slaves also frequently mentioned musical talents. Thus music was one of the first specifically human capacities that whites noted about slaves, leading to the persistent stereotype that blacks have a natural affinity for music. An article in *Dwight's Journal of Music* noted, "The Negro is a natural musician. He will learn to play on an instrument more quickly than a white man. They have magnificent voices and sing without instruction. . . . They go singing to their daily labors. The maid sings about the house, and the laborer sings in the field" (quoted in Levine 1977: 5). While much of the music played for the slave owners was European classical music, syncretic forms flourished, finding secure niches in minstrelsy and religion, springing forth into American popular music.

Analogous to the way that folk music inverts the association of refinement and high status, popular music inverts the ordinary hierarchy of race. "Black" is typically a term of affirmation, and "white" carries a connotation of lifelessness or dullness. Just as musical skills allowed talented slaves access to special privileges and benefits without unsettling the fundamental social relations of slavery, so the inversion of broader racial hierarchy has allowed some African Americans to achieve fame and, for a few, even wealth without threatening the basic racial hierarchy. This inversion of the dominant order is yet to be fully incorporated into prevailing sociological analyses of race. Insofar as theory is advanced by addressing anomalies that reigning theories cannot explain, this is an opportunity for the sociology of music to contribute something to our understanding of race.

One of the fundamental issues in thinking about the relationship between race and music is the extent to which music is a reflection of racial relations or a generative or transformative factor in constructing and reproducing racial relations. Insofar as music is a reflection of race, race is considered analytically and causally prior. Those studying it take racial relations as a given and show how music reflects them. This is the commonsense approach and the perspective found in most scholarly writing on race and music. The literatures on homology, appropriation, and exploitation tend to take this approach. It is assumed that people have a race and that they act on the basis of that race, selecting music, making

music, borrowing music, and talking about music. Race is taken for granted and music is treated as malleable and shaped by racial dynamics (Courlander 1992; Filene 2000; Levine 1977; Lhamon 1998; Neal 1999; Negus and RománVelázquez 2002; Ramsey 2003; Small 1987; Southern 1983; Ward 1998).

Yet the converse relationship is also important. As a form of social interaction, music can also help constitute race, help change racial relations, or reinforce racial inequality. Embracing a certain kind of music not only “reflects” race but can also help define what it means to be a member of a racial group. Eschewing one’s “own” music can make a person “less” a member of a race. When music is used to define what it means to belong to one race, it can take on an independent causative force. Radano, for example, argues that the examination of the relationship between race and music “will reveal not only music’s expressive capacities but also its generative, constitutive effects” (2003: 4). He eloquently depicts how social relationships around music helped constitute a boundary, homogenizing how African Americans were viewed within the race and reifying the sense that they were different from whites. Cruz similarly shows how Northern abolitionists sought to humanize slaves for whites by displaying their musical talents singing spirituals. When whites were debating whether slaves were full human beings, few demonstrations were more effective with white audiences than showing blacks’ capacity to make music. The viewpoint of whites was both empathetic and distanced, seeing slaves as human but different, creative but exotic, deserving of freedom though not necessarily equality. Thus were spirituals crystallized into a syncretic cultural form that combined inherited African sounds refracted through European tonal structures (Cruz 1999).

A theoretical goal of scholarship positing the reflexive relationship between race and music is overcoming essentialism, which Negus defines as “the notion that individuals of a particular social type possess certain essential characteristics and that these are *expressed* in particular cultural practices” (1996: 100).<sup>19</sup> It is the reflexive relationship of race and music that makes it possible to acknowledge the essentialism in the culture without falling into essentialism as scholars. Essentialism in the culture becomes something to explain, asking why it is that certain types of music are seen as essentially white, black, Latino, or other and why being a member of a racial group obligates a person to embrace a particular kind of music. Musical practices take place within a society permeated by race, and racial practices are often musical.

The two movements examined here—the Old Left and the civil rights movement—were each the most prominent force for racial justice for their time, but in very different ways. Both movements were essentialist in the sense that they assumed that there were naturally different kinds of

people denoted by skin color. The goal of both was to reduce the saliency of that difference, to eliminate the hierarchical dimension of difference. For the Old Left, racial inequality was fundamentally economic. African Americans were seen as the most oppressed class, whose oppression divided and dragged down the working class. In 1925, the party sponsored the American Negro Labor Congress, “For the abolition of all discrimination, persecution and exploitation of the Negro race and working people generally; . . . to remove all bars and discrimination against Negroes and other races in the trade unions; . . . and to aid the general liberation of the darker races and the working people throughout all countries” (Solomon 1998: 94). It thereby followed that the strategy for racial justice centered on bringing blacks into the vanguard of the working class, especially by opening up industrial unions. With the Popular Front era of the late 1930s when the party adopted folk music as the people’s music, race was a major issue for the party, especially in relationship to its CIO unions. CIO unions on the whole were much more racially inclusive than AFL unions (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003). But the movement’s approach was not entirely economic. Their International Labor Defense was very active in defending African Americans from legal abuse under Jim Crow judicial practices. Their role in the defense of the “Scottsboro Boys”—nine black teenagers accused of raping a white girl—brought to national attention the struggle for racial justice in the South.

In contrast, the civil rights movement’s strategy focused on ending the legal system of segregation, assuming that economic equality would follow. Even when economic equality was sought, the primary strategy was through the political and judicial systems. Issues of class were muted at best, it being assumed that equal opportunity would benefit blacks rich and poor. When the initial goals of the movement were achieved in the end of *de jure* segregation, many movement activists, including Dr. King, turned to issues of economic injustice and jobs but never won the popular support, elite allies, or legislative victories of the first phase. The end of the movement against Jim Crow coincided with a radical change in the understanding of race itself. In place of an image that depicted race as a matter of skin color only, the black nationalist movement treated race as deeply cultural. Race became not just a marker by which people categorized each other but also a matter of identity, a sense of self that demanded personal and cultural expression. White culture, with its centuries of degradation of Africans and their descendants, was to be expunged by embracing the culture of the land their ancestors had been taken from.

For both movements, their conception of race was tied to their use of music. For the Old Left, subordinating race to class implied finding the music of the working class as a whole, that is, “the people’s music.” Re-

jecting genres such as country and western or rhythm and blues (R&B), which were identified with segments of the working class, they eventually found folk music, the closest thing America had to a true vernacular. They wanted a racially inclusive working class and sought out racially inclusive music. Because the civil rights movement was first and foremost a racial movement, activists could embed much of the same music found in African American social forms. Though both movements strategically aspired to a color-blind society, the Old Left tactically attempted to bring blacks into predominantly white unions while articulating a vision of racial justice to the broader community. The civil rights movement, in contrast, was recruiting whites to participate in integrated organizations in black communities. While music eventually helped recruit whites into the movement, its main function as a facilitator of collective action depended on the way that music was rooted in the community.

Thus neither side defined music with essential racial content but as something that could bridge racial boundaries, something that blacks and whites could share. But in some sense, the Old Left's faith in the power of music itself apart from its social form fit both their success and failure. Subordinating race to class, they thought that bringing black and white musicians together around putatively color-blind music that belonged to all the folks would help corrode racial walls. To a limited extent it did. And they helped popularize folk music, though with the connotation more of left-wing music than racially integrated music. In contrast, the civil rights movement's attention to the social form of music in collective action helped give it a connotation of racial inclusion, which became a liability when the movement bifurcated. Thus the racial dimension of music is intertwined in its use, in the kinds of social relations around doing music. Music and race are both constituted and become consequential through their doing.

## PREVIEW

The development of folk music as a genre is addressed in chapter 2. Genres—the categories that help organize the social relations around music—are often the result of particular cultural projects. Folk music is distinctive in two regards: it is categorized on the basis of who does it—the folk—rather than sonic qualities such as instrumentation, rhythm, harmony, or timbre, and it almost always refers to someone else's music. The scholars and gentlemen collectors who coined the concept, the activists who used it for nationalist or insurgent politics, and “folkies” who embrace its authenticity are rarely themselves “folk.” This chapter reflects



on what a sociology of genres might look like, emphasizing the musical and social context out of which new genres spring and the kind of agency required to hatch a new genre. The musical context, especially its racial dynamics, is highlighted, showing how the roots of American popular music grew from the complicated racial relations of minstrelsy, spirituals, and parlor music.

Chapter 3 focuses on the first folk project and addresses its origins. The concept of a musical genre that embodies the essential qualities and historical legacy of a people was originally part of European nationalizing projects. Scholars and gentlemen collectors “discovered” the premodern cultures of each of the major European nations, sacralizing and protecting from oblivion the culture of the national folk, in the process constructing boundaries along national lines. Because America lacked an ancient past and any remnant of a national peasantry, scholars initially doubted whether it had a folk culture. But as a wave of stigmatized immigrants began to diversify America in the late nineteenth century, scholars discovered what they identified as a remnant of English folk culture in remote southern mountains. American folk music was fashioned along racial lines. The “folk” of America were explicitly Anglo-Saxon. Like many other cultural constructions of the period, the first line of demarcation was between descendants of voluntary colonial settlers and everyone else. Yet the mythology of national purity contained the seeds of its own undoing. The legacy of vernacular popular music summarized in chapter 2 offered a glaring contrast to the evolving folk myth. The raw materials for a trenchant challenge to the first folk project were available for a new folk project to turn the myth of national racial purity on its head. The second folk project emerged from a most unlikely source.

In contrast to the conservative nationalist impulse that animated the first folk music project, a second project embraced folk music because they thought it could be racially inclusive. A few folklorists, most of them somewhat marginal to the original project, extended the boundaries of the folk beyond its Anglo-Saxon roots. And the correspondence of “folk” and “people” afforded the opportunity for activists to symbolically redraw the boundaries around the people by including new people in the folk. People associated with the Communist Party, searching for cultural means of mobilizing “the people,” eventually settled on folk music as “the people’s music.” Chapter 4 tells the remarkable story of how America’s most economic social movement mounted a cultural project that painted the genre of folk music pink.

Chapter 5 describes how two generations of cultural entrepreneurs shaped the genre of American folk music as it continues to be understood today. The Lomaxes and Seegers, by working in the interstice of aca-

demic, government, educational, commercial, and social movement institutions demonstrated how consequential entrepreneurship can be in fashioning subculture.

Chapter 6 focuses on the organizational facet of the Old Left cultural project, especially People's Songs, Inc., a short-lived but immensely strategic culmination of communist-inspired musicking. Between the heyday of the Old Left and the rise of the civil rights movement the political uses of folk music may have receded from the eyes of the media, but they never disappeared. Not only did remnants of the communist movement keep the spirit alive in summer camps, hootenannies, and small outlets, but a number of other left-leaning institutions continued to use music in their activism, most notably the Highlander School of Monteagle, Tennessee. Inspired by Danish settlement schools, the Highlander was a catalyst for bottom-up community development in the South, first on behalf of unions and later for civil rights. Self-consciously aware of music's potential for bringing people together and forging solidarity, especially in a region where nearly everyone regularly participated in religious singing, they spread music like Johnny Appleseed spread apple trees.<sup>20</sup> Chapter 7 describes how the Highlander developed a distinctive style of musicking, highly suitable for bringing people together and empowering those seeking a better life through collective action.

Chapter 8 describes the third folk music project, the civil rights movement. In contrast to music in the Old Left, music in the civil rights movement was part of collective itself, not just a matter of performance for audiences. As part of a movement aspiring to end racial inequality, music was especially crucial for bridging racial difference, at least for a while. Facilitated by activities and leaders of the Highlander School, set into motion by local activists, and eagerly embraced by northerners who flocked to the South, freedom songs became a public face of the movement. For many it remains the standard against which musical activism is compared.

But the heyday was short-lived. Flush with the success of ending de jure segregation, strained by the maturation of a new generation of leaders pressing for deeper change, pressed by a hungry media seeking a news story more exciting than sit-ins or bus rides, and challenged by the different needs of an urban movement, the classic civil rights movement splintered. The cry of "Black Power" drowned out the ebbing echoes of "Freedom Now" as whites were asked to attend to the roots of injustice in their own communities. With new forms of collective action unsuitable for singing and a search for a specifically black culture, freedom songs became seen as irrelevant. Chapter 9 thus shows the denouement. As the left bifurcated into black and white segments, branching then into the antiwar movement, student power movement, women's movement, gay

movement, and others, music remained an informal part of activism, but with less self-conscious attention to it. Because it made for good sound bites, the mass media both at the time and retrospectively probably exaggerated the role of music in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Some readers may be surprised at how little this book will say about what they know most about folk music—the commercial folk revival of the 1960s and 1970s. The main reason for this reticence is that the book is about the political *uses* of music. Even though there was overlap between the folk revival and especially the third project, with the likes of Pete Seeger teaching freedom songs to activists and audiences, and even though activists and folkies inspired each other, their equivalence was more a conceit of the mass media than an actual social relationship. Bob Dylan may have appeared at a few movement events, but he was not a part of the movement—one of the more reliable recollections he has shared in recent interviews—and the activists knew it. While the folk revival merits serious sociological study, this is not the book for that.