

Folklife Today

November 2019: "The Candidate's a Dodger": An American Folksong from Oral Tradition to Aaron Copland and Beyond

Announcer: From the Library of Congress in Washington DC

Theme Music: "Bonaparte's Retreat" played on fiddle by William Hamilton Stepp.

Stephen Winick: Welcome to the Folklife Today podcast. I'm Stephen Winick, the editor in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, and the creator of the Folklife Today blog, and I'm here with Thea Austen, who is our public programs coordinator at the Center. She's filling in for John Fenn, who has a bad cold.

Thea Austen: Hello. The American Folklife Center is home to an archive containing documentation of all kinds of amazing folk culture, from photos of quilts to videos of storytelling. It's an incredibly rich and diverse body of materials. Today, we're also joined by Jennifer Cutting, who will help us talk about one of our favorite folksongs, which is called "The Dodger."

Jennifer Cutting: Hey, everyone! Thea is quite right that the archive is very diverse today, but it got its start over 90 years ago with a much narrower focus. Originally, it was an archive of folk song. We've got folksongs documented in every format you can imagine, from manuscripts to wax cylinders to tape recordings and wire recordings, and of course the latest digital formats. The Dodger is a song from our disc-era recordings, and was collected from the mid-1930s through the late 1950s.

Stephen Winick: The Dodger is a really interesting song for the American Folklife Center's Archive for a few different reasons. For one, we have several versions of it, which emphasize different ideas. For another, one of our versions went on to be popular in the folk revival and also in American art music, with an arrangement by Aaron Copland. And for a third, there's a political aspect to the song that made it a hot potato here on Capitol Hill back in the 1930s.

Thea Austen: And if that weren't enough, when Steve was looking into the song, he unearthed an undiscovered source for some of its features, didn't you?

Stephen Winick: That's right, and we'll hear about that too.

Thea Austen: So let's get started. What should we say first?

Jennifer Cutting: Well, the Aaron Copland connections are probably the way most people hear about the song, so maybe we should start there.

Stephen Winick: Great idea! And luckily, we have some audio of a Library of Congress Music Specialist named Wayne Shirley talking a bit about those connections, so let's start with the Copland version and its traditional source in the archive. We'll just have Wayne introduce the field recording:

Wayne Shirley: In 1950, Aaron Copland published a set of "Old American Songs Newly Arranged for Voice and Piano." He published a second set in 1952. The songs include folksongs, minstrel songs, sacred songs from various sources, even a parlor ballad; thus the catchall title "Old American Songs." I'd like to talk a bit about "The Dodger," which is from the first set. Copland described "The Dodger" as a campaign song. It is a folksong, collected in 1936 from Emma Dusenbury of Mena, Arkansas. A dodger in late 19<sup>th</sup> century American slang is a confidence man.

Only the first verse of Dusenbury's song would have been appropriate as a campaign song. It declares "Yes, the candidate's a dodger, he's a well-known dodger." The other verses of the song, as sung by Dusenbury, describe six other kinds of dodger: The Lawyer, The Doctor, The Preacher, The Merchant, The Farmer, and, finally and inevitably, The Lover.

Emma Dusenbury:

Yes, the candidate's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes, the candidate's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger too.  
He'll meet you and treat you and ask you for your vote  
But look out, boys, he's a-dodgin' for your note

Yes, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Yes, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Yes, the lawyer he's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes, the lawyer he's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger, too.  
He'll plead your case and claim you for a friend  
But look out, boys, he's easy for to bend.

Yes, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Yes, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Yes, the merchant he's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes, the merchant he's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger, too  
He'll sell you goods at a double price,  
But when you go to pay him you'll have to pay him twice.

Yes, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Yes, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Yes the doctor, he's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes the doctor he's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger, too.  
He'll doctor you and cure you for half you possess  
Look out, boys, he's a-dodgin' for the rest.

Yes, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Yes, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Yes the preacher he's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes the preacher he's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger, too  
He'll preach you the gospel and tell you of your crimes,  
But look out, boys, he's a-dodgin' for your dimes.

Yes, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Yes, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Yes, the farmer he's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes, the farmer he's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger, too  
He'll plow his cotton, he'll hoe his corn  
And he'll make a living just as sure as you're born.

Yes, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Yes, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Yes, the lover he's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes, the lover he's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger, too  
He'll hug you and kiss you and call you his bride  
But look out, girls, he's easy for...telling you a lie.

Yes, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Yes, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

That's all of THAT dodger!

Sidney Robertson: where'd you learn that song?

Emma Dusenbury: Bud Allen learned it to me. I don't know...I don't know where it comes from or nothing about it. Bud Allen, he sung it and I learned it from him.

Thea Austen: That was Emma Dusenbury with "The Dodger." So, I notice that at the end there, she says right on the disc that she doesn't know anything about the song. But Wayne Shirley said it was a campaign song. How did he know?

Stephen Winick: That's an interesting question. Wayne retired from the Library some years ago, so that recording of him giving a curator talk is actually several years old. We wanted folks to hear his voice and some of his insights, so we're going to use more of his talk, but that particular claim is something we haven't been able to substantiate. We'll talk more about the claim itself and where it came from later.

Thea Austen: Fair Enough! Is there any more we should know about Mrs. Dusenbury?

Jennifer Cutting: Emma Dusenbury was born in Georgia, but moved to the Arkansas Ozarks at the age of 10. She learned most of her songs there, before moving to Mena, which is not in the Ozarks but in the Ouachita mountains. Still, she is considered one of the greatest of all Ozark

folksingers, having contributed over a hundred songs to the American Folklife Center's Archive.

Stephen Winick: When "The Dodger" was collected in 1936, Mrs. Dusenbury was a widow, and had been blind for decades. She lived with her daughter Ora, who managed the farm and raised chickens and ducks. She's mostly in two collections, the Resettlement Administration collection and also the Vance Randolph collection. There are also some great photos of her and Ora, which you can see on the blog.

Thea Austen: Steve mentioned the Resettlement Administration, so let me explain that this was a government agency set up in the aftermath of the Dust Bowl to resettle struggling families into planned communities, many of them in California. It later became the Farm Security Administration. So I guess a natural question is: why did they collect folksongs?

Jennifer Cutting: One of the things The New Deal in general understood was the fact that the arts are necessary for a happy life. So the Resettlement Administration had a music program, to make sure migrants had music in their lives, and the program was run by Charles Seeger. One of the things he did was to send Sidney Robertson Cowell out collecting folksongs, with the intention of disseminating the best songs among the resettled workers. And it was Sidney Robertson Cowell who recorded Mrs. Dusenbury.

Thea Austen: so, what did Charles Seeger and Sidney Robertson Cowell do with the song?

Stephen Winick: They published it in the form of a leaflet, and we have copies in the folklife reading room of the Library of Congress, or you can see scans on the blog at [blogs.loc.gov/folklife](http://blogs.loc.gov/folklife). One kind of neat thing about the leaflet is the cover art, which shows a jackrabbit. It's an engraving by Charles Pollock, who was at that time a graphic artist and muralist in the social realism style who had studied with Thomas Hart Benton. He later became an abstract expressionist. His little brother Jackson Pollock followed in his footsteps, although their expressionist styles were actually quite different.

Thea Austen: Yes, it's a nice piece of graphic art and a pretty interesting artifact, so we encourage listeners to look for it on the blog. And the leaflet was also the source of the political firestorm you alluded to at the beginning of the episode, isn't that right?

Stephen Winick: Yes, that's right. So let's hear Wayne tell us about that!

Wayne Shirley: "The Dodger" itself was collected in 1936. It first appeared in print the next year, as part of a handsome series of 4-page leaflets issued by the Resettlement Administration. Each of the leaflets contains a single folksong. The first page is an illustration. Pages 2 and 3 contain the song, words and music (melody only). The back page comments on the song and explains the purpose of the leaflets. They were "a series of American songs to supplement popular collections."

The cover of "The Dodger" played it safe: no con-man candidate here, but rather a dodging rabbit. Nonetheless, "The Dodger" got the Resettlement Administration in trouble. Charles Seeger, head of its music section, recalled in 1972 a phone call to his boss from the powerful Congressman Carl Vinson. Quote: "He demanded to know before the next morning how it was that the Resettlement Administration had published a song called "The Candidate's a Dodger." He said this was an insult not only to the elected officials in the United States, but to the American government as a whole and the American people thereby; unless satisfactory explanation of the song was given, the Resettlement Administration budget would be reduced from \$14,000,000 to \$1,000,000."

Thea Austen: so what happened?

Stephen Winick: Well, that's the curious thing! The source for this story, which Wayne was reading from, is an oral history interview with Charles Seeger over 35 years later, and he finishes the story like this:

Fortunately, we had the knowledge that this song...was a Democratic campaign song of the election of 1884, between Cleveland and Blaine, which was a very dirty election in which Blaine was charged with having been a dodger in the Civil War—that is, paying somebody to take his place in

the army. The explanation assuaged the senator, who was a staunch Democrat.

Thea Austen: Aha! So that's the source for Wayne's earlier statement.

Stephen Winick: Right. But I just couldn't find any evidence of this outside of Seeger's claim. And the thing is, it's not that plausible for a few reasons. First, both Cleveland and Blaine had paid other people to serve in the army for them, which was legal at the time. But Cleveland was more often seriously criticized for it.

Thea Austen: wasn't Blaine a Congressman during the war and one of Lincoln's staunchest supporters in the House?

Stephen Winick: exactly, so it was hard to argue that he didn't do his part to win the war, and therefore no one seriously objected to his having paid a surrogate to take his place. I did find that both Cleveland and Blaine were often called "dodgers," which was a common term for someone who was hard to pin down politically—nowadays we use terms like waffler and flip-flopper, and "dodger" was their version of that in the 1880s. The problem is, a jingle that says "the candidate's a dodger" but doesn't say which candidate, wouldn't be too effective if they were both known as dodgers. Also, 1880s political discourse just wasn't that subtle. A real taunt about Blaine from the time was "James G Blaine, James G. Blaine, Continental Liar from the State of Maine." "The Candidate's a Dodger" is pretty tame by comparison.

Thea Austen: it sounds like you're skeptical.

Steve. I am. I'm not sure what "we had the knowledge" means, and that seems a strangely vague way to phrase it, especially for a scholar used to citing his sources. I found another curious thing: Elsewhere, Seeger gives a different origin for the song, saying that it came from agrarian reform movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But then when confronted by Vinson, he has this suddenly-acquired knowledge that it's actually a Democratic campaign song!

Thea Austen: so what are you suggesting?

Stephen Winick: well, it occurs to me that if you're confronted by a staunch Democrat who is mad about a political song making fun of a candidate, one way you could try to mollify him is to claim it's making fun specifically of a Republican candidate.

Thea Austen: so you think Charles Seeger lied?

Stephen Winick: Well, maybe not lied. I think he guessed in a way that got him out of a political jam. I mean, he may have suspected, and then exaggerated his certainty. But I don't think there ever was any good evidence for it being an 1884 campaign song. I would love it if someone turned up some evidence, though, and listeners can contact me through comments on the blog at [blogs.loc.gov/folklife](http://blogs.loc.gov/folklife)

Thea Austen: well, thinking like a folklorist, I'd say another thing we should do is look for other versions to see what they might tell us about the song.

Stephen Winick: That's a great idea. In fact, we have three other versions in the archive that seem independent of Mrs. Dusenbury's.

Thea Austen: and do they make it seem more likely or less likely that it's a campaign song?

Stephen Winick: Definitely less likely. In fact, none of them mentions politics or candidates at all.

Thea Austen: Let's hear one of them!

Jennifer Cutting: OK, here's one from Myra Pipkin. Mrs. Pipkin was recorded by Charles Todd and Robert Sonkin in the Arvin camp run by the Farm Security Administration in California in 1941; the Farm Security Administration basically was the new name for the Resettlement Administration after 1937, and its main task was housing and taking care of migrant workers. Mrs. Pipkin's family had come from Arkansas, where Emma Dusenbury also lived, but they moved to Oklahoma in 1898, when she was a child. They moved by wagon train, and in an interview she recounted vivid memories of a near-disaster when stampeding cattle almost overturned her wagon. In the wake of the Dust Bowl, she moved to California with her husband and children. She was in the camps when John

Steinbeck did his research for a series of articles about migrant workers, which led to him writing the novel "The Grapes of Wrath." A lot of people think Myra Pipkin was one of the models for Ma Joad. She did not tell the collectors where she learned "The Dodger," but it seems to have been most common in Arkansas, so it may have gone to Oklahoma with her family or neighbors.

Thea Austen: Let's Hear it!

Myra Pipkin: O the bachelor's a dodger, he's a long corn dodger  
And he's a dodger all the way through the world  
He'll comb his hair  
He'll court a little here and he'll court a little there  
O he is a dodger, he's a long corn dodger  
And he's a dodger, dodger too.

O the girls are a dodger, they're a long corn dodger  
And they're a dodger all the way through the world  
They'll get a new dress and take a spell of paintin'  
If they can't catch a beau they'll take a spell of faintin'  
O they're a dodger, they're a long corn dodger  
And they're a dodger, dodger too.

O the boys are a dodger, they're a long corn dodger  
And they're a dodger all the way through the world  
They'll go to see the girls and tell 'em they all love 'em  
And the next thing you know, they're makin' fun of 'em  
O they're a dodger, they're a long corn dodger  
And they're a dodger, dodger too.

O the merchant he's a dodger, he's a long corn dodger  
And he's a dodger all the way through the world  
He'll start around the counter and he'll go a trottin'  
And its, now old friends ain'tcha got a patch of cotton  
O he's a dodger, he's a long corn dodger  
And he's a dodger, dodger too.

O the miller he's a dodger, he's a long corn dodger  
And he's a dodger all the way through the world  
He'll mill your corn, he'll mill it to the letter  
And the next thing you know, he'll mill it a little better  
O he's a dodger, he's a long corn dodger  
And he's a dodger, dodger too.

O the Doctor he's a dodger, he's a long corn dodger  
And he's a dodger all the way through the world  
He'll go to see the patient and roll out the pills  
And the next thing off, he's a makin' up big bills  
O he's a dodger He's a long corn dodger  
And he's a dodger, dodger too

Thea Austen: Again, Myra Pipkin's version of "The Dodger." So, as you said, no candidates or politicians. What else jumps out at you?

Stephen Winick: It has six verses. Three are about courting lovers, "The Bachelor," "The Girls," and "The Boys." Three are about professionals and how they try to cheat you: "The Merchant," "The Miller," and "The Doctor." Of course, Mrs. Dusenbury's song is also about cheating professionals and lovers. So it's clearly the same song with some of the same ideas.

Thea Austen: yes, I noticed that there are some of the same professions and some different ones, and it strikes me that it's the kind of song that's easily adaptable: if there's a crooked bartender in your town, you can write your own verse for that. A lot of traditional folksongs work that way.

Jennifer Cutting: Exactly. Another neat thing is that in Myra Pipkin's version, they're not just dodgers but "corn dodgers."

Thea Austen: yeah, what does that mean?

Jennifer Cutting: Corn Dodger is a traditional name for a small cake of cornbread, either baked in a skillet or fried. They can be more like traditional cornbread or more like hush puppies, depending on whose recipe you follow. No one knows why the food item got this name, but

someone thought it was fun to make the “dodgers” in the song into “corn dodgers.” So it’s kind of an extension of the original metaphor of dodging.

Thea Austen: That’s neat! What other versions do we have?

Stephen Winick: We’ve got another one from 1941, this one from Texas. It was sung by Nancy Humble Griffin. According to an obituary posted online by her great-granddaughter, Nancy Humble Griffin, who was born in 1855, was originally from Louisiana but moved to Texas when she was two years old. She was a first cousin of Jim Bowie, who died at the Alamo. She was well known as a traditional singer in her Texas community, and she was naturally sought out by fellow Texans John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax in 1941. In this case, Alan went ahead without to scout while John was collecting elsewhere with the disc recorder, but he shot some very expressive photos, which you can see over at the blog, [blogs.loc.gov/folklife](http://blogs.loc.gov/folklife). His father John then returned a few months later with the recorder and recorded 38 songs from her, including “The Dodger.” The collections don’t reveal where Mrs. Griffin learned the song, and it’s the only version in our archive that’s not directly connected to Arkansas in some way.

Thea Austen: OK, let’s hear it!

Nancy Humble Griffin:

Oh, Men are dodgers, yes they’re known dodgers  
Oh, men are dodgers, and they’re dodgers too  
Raise up a crop of boys, they’ll do their very best  
And when they get grown they’re sure to run away

Refrain: (And) we’re we’re all a dodgin’, dodgin’ dodgin’ dodgin’  
And we’re all a dodgin’ our way through the world

Oh, Ladies they’re dodgers, yes they’re known dodgers  
Oh, Ladies they’re dodgers, and they’re dodgers too  
Raise up a crowd of girls, and they’ll do their very best  
And when they get grown they’re sure to do their worst

Old Maids they’re dodgers, yes they’re known dodgers  
Old Maids they’re dodgers, and they’re dodgers too

They'll get before the looking glass, a chalkin' and a paintin'  
And when a boy comes, they'll take a spell of faintin'

Young men they're dodgers, yes they're known dodgers  
Young men they're dodgers, and they're dodgers too  
They'll go out to preachin' and they'll look might nice  
Look out girls, they're a dodgin' for a wife

Young ladies they're dodgers, yes they're known dodgers  
Young ladies they're dodgers, and they're dodgers too  
They'll go out to preachin' and they'll make a great show  
Look out boys, they're a dodgin' for a beau

Oh, the Preacher he's a dodger, yes, he's a known dodger  
The Preacher he's a dodger, and he's a dodger too  
He'll get up in the pulpit he looks might solemn  
He'll pass around the hat, he's a-preachin' for your dollar

Oh, the Lawyer he's a dodger, yes, he's a known dodger  
The Lawyer he's a dodger, and he's a dodger too  
He'll convict you on your crimes boys and won't go your bail  
Look out boys, he will dodge you off to jail

Oh, the Devil he's a dodger, yes, he's a known dodger  
The Devil he's a dodger, and he's a dodger too  
He'll pick up his shovel, he'll rake that coal  
Look out sinners, he's a dodgin' for your soul.

Thea Austen: I notice again, some of the same verses as previous versions, and some different ones.

Jennifer Cutting: Yes, so this version has eight verses. Four are about courting: Men, Old Maids, Young Men, and Young Ladies. There's also a "ladies" verse, which is the only verse in all the versions that has to do with raising children. And then there are two professions, lawyer and preacher, and finally the Devil!

Stephen Winick:

He'll pick up his shovel, he'll rake that coal  
Look out sinners, he's a dodgin' for your soul.

Thea Austen: Great version! So I guess there's one more archival version?

Jennifer Cutting: Yes, there's one more, and it's from Neal Morris. Neal Morris, who was born in 1887, was an Arkansas farmer, musician, dance-caller, and kind of a quintessential Ozark mountaineer. He said he was related to Lewis Morris, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and his half-brother Gouverneur Morris, signer of the U.S. Constitution. He was full of songs and stories, and passed his love of songs along to his son James Corbett Morris, who became a professional singer-songwriter and used the stage name Jimmy Driftwood.

Thea Austen: So he was Jimmy Driftwood's dad?

Stephen Winick: exactly. He was one of Alan Lomax's best Ozark informants during his Southern Journey of 1959-1960, which were some of the first American field recordings done in stereo.

Thea Austen: Great, let's hear Neal Morris's "The Dodger."

Neal Morris:

Well, the doctor, he's a dodger, he's a long corn dodger  
And the doctor, he's a dodger, and he's a dodger, too  
He'll go to see his patients and give a dose of pills  
And the next thing you know, he's a-dodging for his bill

Refrain: And it's all a dodgin, it's a long corn dodger  
And it's all a dodgin—that's the way with the world

And the lawyer, he's a dodger; he's a long corn dodger  
And the lawyer, he's a dodger, and he's a dodger, too  
He'll plead your case and he'll wish you well,  
And the next thing you know, he'll wish you in — — — —

And the Methodist's a dodger; they're a long corn dodger  
And the Methodist a dodger, and they're a dodger, too

They'll talk about Hell and Heaven on high  
And the next thing you know, they're a-dodging for the pie

And the Baptists they're a dodger; they're a long corn dodger  
And the Baptists they're a dodger, and they're a dodger, too  
They'll drink their wine and their liquor, too  
They'll drink it all up and say, "There ain't none for you"

Well a Campbellite's a dodger; he's a long corn dodger  
And a Campbellite's a dodger, and he's a dodger, too  
He's got his religion, and he don't know where he got her,  
And he'll swear the way to Heaven is through a hole of water

And the Holiness a dodger; they're a long corn dodger  
And the Holiness a dodger, and they're a dodger, too  
They'll jump and roll and whoop and yell  
For everybody else is a-going to Hell

Well, the young girl's a dodger; she's a long corn dodger  
And the young girl's a dodger, and she's a dodger, too  
She'll spend half her time with the powder and the paint  
To make a boy think he's a-getting what he ain't

Well the old maid's a dodger; she's a long corn dodger  
And the old maid's a dodger, and she's a dodger, too  
She'll spend half her time a primping and a-painting  
If she can't catch a beau, she'll catch a spell of fainting

And, the boys, they're a dodger; they're a long corn dodger  
And the boys, they're a dodger, and they're a dodger, too  
They'll go to see the girl, and they'll tell that they love her  
And the next thing you know, they're a-dodging for another

And the infidel's a dodger; he's a long corn dodger  
And the infidel's a dodger, and he's a dodger, too  
Swear they ain't no Hell, nor Heaven on high  
But he'll get a shaking up in the sweet bye and bye

Thea Austen: Again, that was Arkansas farmer Neal Morris with “The Dodger.” And wow, that was pretty different!

Jennifer Cutting: Yes, it’s a great version. The main difference between his version and others is that he’s expanded his comments on religion. Two of the other versions have a preacher, but Neal Morris has different denominations: Methodist, Baptist, Campbellite, and Holiness. He makes fun of each one according to some real aspect of their religion. For example, Campbellite refers to a member of a Restoration movement like the Churches of Christ, which heavily emphasize adult baptism by immersion. So the song says “He’ll swear the way to heaven is through a hole of water.”

Stephen Winick: And to make sure he’s equally offensive to everybody, he includes the atheist or “infidel,” by saying:  
Swear they ain’t no Hell, nor Heaven on high  
But he’ll get a shaking up in the sweet bye and bye

Thea Austen: In other words, he THINKS there’s no heaven and hell, but he’s in for a surprise when he dies!

Stephen Winick: Right. And one thing that always makes me laugh is that Neal Morris censors himself from saying “Hell” in the lawyer verse, and then proceeds to say it three more times in the rest of the song!

Thea Austen: I also notice some classic courtship verses, young girl, old maid, and boys. And of course the most common professionals, doctor and Lawyer. So how did all the religious denominations get in the song?

Stephen Winick: well, there’s actually a brief interview with Neal Morris in the Lomax Collection, in which he says he’d always known the song, and that his father and his grandfather sang it. He admits that he added the Holiness verse himself. He doesn’t fully say so, but I think it’s likely he added the other denominations as well. And I think that because he knew a generic “preacher” verse, which he sang for Lomax separately, but not as part of the song. So it seems likely he replaced the generic preacher with Baptist, Methodist, Campbellite, and Holiness, just to make it more specific whom he was poking fun at.

Thea Austen: OK, we've talked a lot about Copland's version but we haven't actually heard it yet, so let's hear that. And we have some more of Wayne Shirley's talk to introduce it. So here's Wayne, followed by Thomas Hampson singing "The Dodger."

Wayne Shirley: In 1941, "The Dodger" gained wider notice as part of *Our Singing Country*, a volume of American folksongs compiled by John A. and Alan Lomax. Copland got "The Dodger" from *Our Singing Country*, which had already given him the principal tune for the "Hoedown" section of his ballet *Rodeo*. Copland pares the song down to its three most effective verses: "The Candidate," who gives the song its purpose, "The Preacher," and "The Lover." Copland fashions a jocular but driving piano part: "heavy staccato, banjo style" it directs. The music sweetens and slows in the second and third verses, as it describes how the preacher and the lover present themselves, then snaps back to its original style when it tells us what they really are!

Thomas Hampson (sings with piano):

Yes, the candidate's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes, the candidate's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger too.  
He'll meet you and treat you and ask you for your vote  
But look out, boys, he's a-dodgin' for your note

Yes, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Yes, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Yes the preacher he's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes the preacher he's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger, too  
He'll preach you a gospel and tell you of your crimes,  
But look out, boys, he's a-dodgin' for your dimes.

Yes, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Yes, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Yes, the lover he's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes, the lover he's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger, too

He'll hug you and kiss you and call you his bride  
But look out, girls, he's a-tellin' you a lie.

Yes, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Yes, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Thea Austen: That's the great baritone Thomas Hampson and his accompanist Wolfram Rieger playing Aaron Copland's arrangement of The Dodger. And one thing I notice is that the three most common recurring themes throughout the archival versions of the Dodger are professions, religion, and courtship, so Candidate, Preacher, and Lover sums it up as briefly as possible.

Stephen Winick: good point! That was certainly Copland's intention, I think.

Thea Austen: Another thing to let people know is that Wayne mentioned Copland's use of a tune from Our Singing Country for the ballet "Rodeo." That's the tune we use as our theme song at the beginning of the episode, "Bonaparte's Retreat." But, getting back to "The Dodger," what can we say about the history of the song?

Jennifer Cutting: well, like all folksongs, "The Dodger" consists of words and a tune, and each of these has a separate history. So let's talk about the tune. Musicologists have been pretty successful in tracing the tune back to an old Scottish song called "We're All Noddin'." And we can hear another clip of Wayne Shirley discussing that a bit.

Wayne Shirley: The tune of "The Dodger" comes from a chorus published in 1839 in The Boston Glee Book, a collection of secular choral music for young people wanting something to sing other than the psalm tunes which made up the musical fodder of earlier New England singing schools. The piece which furnishes the tune for "The Dodger" is a one-pager called "We Are All Noddin'." Its text informs us that "we're all noddin', and dropping off to sleep." It's a brief chorus, probably designed as an ender for informal sings. Behind this chorus is an even earlier source for the words and music for the opening and closing refrains of "We Are All Noddin'." This source is Scots rather than American, a poem and tune contributed by Robert Burns

in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to The Scots Musical Museum. The verse to Burns's song bears no relation to the verse of The Boston Glee Book. But the words of Burns's refrain are extremely similar to the Glee Book refrain, and the tunes of the two refrains are close relatives.

Thea Austen: So Wayne points out that the tune is documented in the late eighteenth century in Scotland, and had made it into the United States by 1838. And the implication is that the words were composed here in the United States using that tune.

Jennifer Cutting: right.

Thea Austen: And what do you think about that theory?

Jennifer Cutting: well, it was a viable theory until Steve did his research on the song's text. But Steve turned up something very surprising!

Thea Austen: Okay, so let's go back to the text. Steve has pointed out that Charles Seeger asserted two different theories of the origin of the Dodger: the 1884 presidential campaign, and the agrarian reform movements of the 1860s.

Stephen Winick: Right, and I should point out that his two theories aren't mutually exclusive, because on the one hand he said the song was and I quote, "a parody of that type of thing which was probably produced in one of the early agrarian reform movements in the country; it might have been the Grange, it might have been any farmers' organization." You know, I'm an editor, and this is hard to parse, because using the word "which" instead of "that" makes it hard to tell if he's saying "The Dodger" was produced at the time of the Grange, or that it's a parody of something that was produced at the time of the Grange. But if he meant the latter, he could have been saying there was a lost song created by the Grange or a similar organization, and that would be in the 1860s or so, and then that song could have been parodied in 1884 for the Cleveland-Blaine election. That's a possible scenario, so again, he didn't contradict himself. The problem for me was, there's no evidence for that at all...no indication of a close antecedent in the agrarian reform movements, no evidence of a connection to the campaign. So I went looking for other possibilities.

Thea Austen: And where do you look for folksong antecedents?

Stephen Winick: Well, the first place I looked was broadsides and song sheets, and Jennifer can tell us a bit about those.

Jennifer Cutting: Back in the days when books were hard to produce, it was common to print songs and other short texts on single sheets of paper and sell them individually. We call these broadsides or song sheets, and the Library of Congress has thousands of them, many of which are scanned and online.

Thea Austen: and did that provide any leads?

Jennifer Cutting: Yes, there was a whole subgenre of songs about cheating professionals in both Britain and America. In Britain the most common titles were “A Chapter of Cheats” and “The Rigs of the Time.” In America, the common title was “Hard Times.” And we’ve got several of these up on the blog, and even more on the Library’s website at loc.gov. They describe all kinds of tradesmen, from butchers and bakers to blacksmiths to barbers, all cheating you out of money.

Thea Austen: and are there doctors, lawyers, merchants, millers, and preachers in there?

Jennifer Cutting: there certainly are. All of those and more. There’s a song sheet of “Hard Times” on the Library’s website which has 30 verses, each listing a tradesman who cheats you in some way. It’s listed as being by Leonard Deming, though it incorporates traditional verses. Deming died in 1853, so this one is likely to predate the agrarian reform movements that Charles Seeger cited as the origin of the song.

Stephen Winick: we even have an audio recording of “Hard Times” sung by Minnie Floyd. It’s hard to hear, so we’ll just play you one verse: “The Doctor.”

Minnie Floyd:

There is an old doctor I like to forgot  
I believe he is surely the worst of the lot  
He says he will cure you for half you possess

And then if you die, he's after the rest  
And it's hard times, boys.

Thea Austen: So, I heard "He says he will cure you for half you possess, and then if you die he's after the rest." And Emma Dusenbury sang "He'll doctor you and cure you for half you possess, Look out, boys, hes a-dodgin' for the rest."

Stephen Winick: Right. So that's kind of the smoking gun that the "Hard Times" genre of songs about cheating tradesmen made a textual contribution to "The Dodger."

Thea Austen: Wow, that's interesting sleuthing. But Jennifer also alluded to something surprising that you turned up.

Stephen Winick: Yes, I have to say that I got lucky. There is so much older published material going online on the internet and becoming searchable that sometimes if you're the first person to have looked into something in a few years, you'll turn up something that was recently digitized and sheds whole new light on your subject. And that happened to me with "The Dodger."

Thea Austen: so what did you find?

Stephen Winick: Well, I was just googling phrases from the song, and I turned up a play called "The Artful Dodge," written by E. L. Blanchard, and first performed in London at the Royal Olympic Theatre on February 2, 1842. The play is described as "a farce in one act," and features a title character called Demosthenes Dodge, Esq.

Thea Austen: And what's its connection to the song?

Stephen Winick: The song, or a version of it, is actually part of the play. Although only the words of the song were published as part of the play, instructions are given that the tune is "We're all Nodding." The chorus is "We are all dodging, dodge, dodge, dodging, We are all dodging in country and in town." It has some differences from the typical American "Dodger" song, but it does have a parade of characters identified as "dodgers," including "The Debtor," "The Lover" and "The Manager."

Thea Austen: The Manager? No fair!

Stephen Winick: Well, it was an inside joke. When the play was first shown, Demosthenes Dodge, who sang the song, was played by George Wild, who was also the manager of the theater. The audience would have known this. So that gives you a sense of the insular nature of this theater world.

Jennifer Cutting: So was there any connection to politics in this version of the song?

Stephen Winick: Yes, that's the other thing! The very first person mentioned is "The Politician."

Thea Austen: was the play successful?

Stephen Winick: It was. It was well thought of and often performed. Blanchard was mostly known for farces and pantomimes rather than serious dramas. But he was a beloved figure on the theater scene, and when he died in 1889 the whole London theater community staged a production to benefit his widow. The play they chose, out of all of his work, was "The Artful Dodge," which had debuted 47 years earlier. So that's how long it remained popular.

Thea Austen: So it's looking very much like this theater song is at the root of the American Dodger song. But how did it get here to America?

Stephen Winick: It turns out it came here as part of the play. Once I knew what to look for, I was able to find several advertisements for the play in America. In America, they tended to call the play "The Artful Dodger."

Jennifer Cutting: Any connection to the Dickens character from Oliver Twist?

Stephen Winick: That's a good question, and it's hard to know for sure. Blanchard knew Dickens personally. But both the ideas of the "Artful Dodge" and the "Artful Dodger" were part of London slang at the time. So it's possible they influenced each other directly, or it's possible they just drew on the same cultural background.

Thea Austen: And how do we know the play advertised in America as “The Artful Dodger” was Blanchard’s play?

Stephen Winick: Well, the ads helpfully tell you that it’s the story of Demosthenes Dodge, which confirms that it’s at least a version of the same play. And one ad from 1845 even tells us it features the song “We’re all Dodging,” which has the contraction “we’re” instead of the play’s formal text “we are all dodging.” And this suggests that the transformation from Blanchard’s text to the folksong may already have been underway in 1845.

Jennifer Cutting: So, remember Wayne Shirley’s theory of the tune coming over here first via the Boston Glee Book, and the words being written in America by someone who knew the tune? That’s not quite right, it turns out. This new discovery shows that the song came here as a set of words already associated with that tune. After that, of course, it was further adapted here in America.

Thea Austen: Wow! As folklorists, we really don’t like to talk about finding a single origin for any item. But what you’ve found is at least a point of origin for some of its key features.

Stephen Winick: Right. In fact there are three main strands of tradition that we’ve identified now in the Dodger song. One was the tune “We’re all noddin’,” which is older than 1797, but we’re not sure how much older. The second was verses from the “Hard Times” family of songs, which was probably around by the 1830s, but again we don’t have a specific point or date of origin. And then there’s the crucial combination of the “We’re All Noddin’” tune with the “We’re all Dodgin’” chorus and a list of dodgers, which seems original to Blanchard, so we can date it to 1842. Note that all of this suggests the song had already taken much of its shape before the agrarian reform movements, so none of Charles Seeger’s speculations seem to have been quite correct.

Thea Austen: Wow, we’ve sorted out a lot of the song’s history. I also know that we have one more interesting recording of it to play.

Jennifer Cutting: yes, back in 2007 Steve organized a symposium here at the Library of Congress to honor the Seeger family, and as part of that Thea

produced a concert of Pete, Mike, and Peggy Seeger here in the Coolidge auditorium, and we held an offsite concert as well with the Folklore Society of Greater Washington. Those turned out to be the last concerts the three would play together before Mike died in 2009. At the concert here in the Coolidge Auditorium, they played “The Dodger.” It’s interesting historically, because Pete Seeger’s group the Almanac Singers had been the very first group ever to record the song, way back in 1941. So this was more than 65 years later and Pete was still playing it.

Stephen Winick: a funny thing is that most people who write about The Almanac Singers’ recording of “The Dodger” say that the band learned it from the leaflet put out by Charles Seeger, which made sense since Pete was a member of the band and also was Charles’s son. But it turns out “The Dodger” came to the band with another band member, Lee Hays. If you read the collected writings of Lee Hays, you find that he came from Arkansas, and that in 1938 he was teaching drama at Commonwealth College near Mena. He heard about Mrs. Dusenbury and went to visit, and he found out her maiden name was Hays, and she was a distant cousin of his! He invited her to the college to sing her ballads, and learned “The Dodger” directly from her.

Thea Austen: Wow, there are so many stories around this song! And he later formed a band with the son of the guy who first published the song? That’s one of those “small world” stories.

Jennifer Cutting: yes, and for us, it makes the lines of oral transmission clear. Emma Dusenbury taught the song to Lee Hays, Lee Hays taught it to Pete Seeger, and Pete Seeger taught it to Mike and Peggy...so we’re hearing the folk process. We should say that it’s not a perfect performance because it seems the siblings remembered slightly different versions, so there’s some confusion at first about the words! That’s just another aspect of the folk process at work!

Stephen Winick: and one more thing we’ll hear on this recording is Pete’s own version of the Carl Vinson story, this time relayed through Henry Wallace in 1948. And you know, one thing occurred to me as I researched that story.

Thea Austen: What's that?

Stephen Winick: If my suspicion is correct, and Charles Seeger did exaggerate his certainty in order to save 13 million dollars of the Resettlement Administration budget, then he created a new origin story for "The Dodger" by dodging the wrath of Congressman Vinson. And I just love the thought that one of the founders of ethnomusicology, one of our most distinguished predecessors as a federal folklorist, and the man who first published "The Dodger," should also qualify as a magnificent dodger himself.

Thea Austen: Well, we are going to hear from Charles Seeger's three children, Mike, Pete, and Peggy, in just a moment...but first we should thank some people: All the source singers who shared their versions of the Dodger: Emma Dusenbury, Nancy Humble Griffin, Neal Morris, and Myra Pipkin, and the collectors: Sidney Robertson Cowell, John A. and Alan Lomax, Charles Todd and Robert Sonkin.

Stephen Winick: also special thanks to the Seegers: Charles for publishing the song, and Pete, Mike, and Peggy for the version we're about to hear. Thanks to our colleagues at the Library, past and present, including Music Specialist Wayne Shirley, our engineer Jon Gold, Mike Turpin and Jay Kinloch for help in the studio, and colleagues throughout the Library who help deploy this podcast. Thanks to our friend Jennifer Cutting...

Jennifer You're welcome!

Steve ...and thanks to you, Thea, for filling in while John Fenn has a bad cold!

Thea Austen: and thanks to you Steve, for your research and for co-hosting this podcast with me. And of course, thanks to all our listeners. Now, finally, to close us out, we get to hear Pete, Mike, and Peggy Seeger perform "The Dodger."

Pete Seeger: Our father was a bureaucrat here in Washington in the 1930s. And there was a folksinger in Arkansas who sang a satirical song of the 1880s, and it was so much fun that, by gosh, they thought they'd put out a

little song sheet. The younger brother of Jackson Pollock was in the New Deal at that time, Charlie Pollock, and he did the cover of the little song sheet. The name of the song sheet was "The Candidate's a Dodger." Well, years later, in 1948, I was trying to help Henry Wallace run for president, and Wallace found that...(applause)...Wallace found that I was Charlie Seeger's son, and oh, he says, I'll have to tell YOU a story. I tried to get the Resettlement Administration re-funded by Congress, I went up to Capitol Hill, and in the office of a very important senator, I was confronted with an angry man. He said "Mr. Wallace, you want me to re-fund a part of the government that puts out a song like THIS?" And he slaps the song sheet that my father had put out 15 years before! The candidate's a dodger, yes a well-known dodger! Now:

Seegers:

Oh, the candidate's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Oh, the candidate's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger too.  
He'll meet you and treat you and ask you for your vote  
But look out, boys, he's a-dodgin' for a note

Oh, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Oh, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Peggy Seeger: Oh, the merchant he's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Oh, the merchant he's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger, too  
He'll sell you goods at twice the price,  
But when you go to pay him you gotta pay him twice.

Oh, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Oh, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Mike Seeger: Me? Oh, the farmer he's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes, the farmer he's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger, too  
He'll plow his cotton, plow his corn  
And he'll make a living just as sure as you're born.

Oh, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Oh, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Pete Seeger: The woman who sang this song for the folksong collector, her name was Emma Dusenbury, in a little town in the hills of Arkansas. She said when she was a girl, she set out to learn every song in the world. Then she found out they were makin' up new songs quicker than she could learn 'em.

Peggy Seeger: Oh, the president's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Oh, the president's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger too.  
He says it's OK, out in Iraq,  
But he's sending more troops, and he won't bring 'em back  
Oh, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Oh, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Peggy Seeger: How 'bout the lover? How 'bout the lover? How 'bout the lover? Do the lover!

Pete Seeger: Oh, the lover he's a dodger, yes, a well-known dodger  
Yes, the lover he's a dodger, yes, and I'm a dodger, too  
He'll hug you and kiss you and call you his bride  
But look out, girls, he's telling you a lie.

Yes, we're all a-dodgin', dodgin', dodgin' dodgin'  
Yes, we're all dodgin' out our way through the world.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at [loc.gov](http://loc.gov)