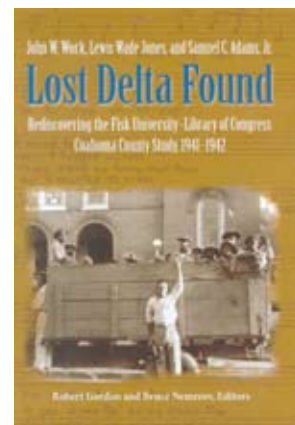


Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-1942.

By John W. Work, Lewis Wade Jones, and Samuel C. Adams, Jr.,
(eds. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov)
Vanderbilt University Press, 2005



In 1941 and 1942, African American scholars from Fisk University in Nashville, among them noted composer and musicologist John W. Work, sociologist Lewis Wade Jones, and graduate student Samuel C. Adams, joined folklorist Alan Lomax from the Library of Congress on research trips to Coahoma County, Mississippi. Coahoma County is in northwestern Mississippi in the heart of the Mississippi delta. Its county seat, Clarksdale, was the center of a thriving cotton-based economy. The study produced great recordings, excellent field transcriptions, and detailed documentation of the people and their lifestyles in the Clarksdale area.

The researchers collected countless folk songs from the local black culture of the county, including a great many children's songs as well as religious songs, blues songs, and other folk songs of the area. One of the most

significant outcomes of the project was the first recording of the blues singer Muddy Waters.

Although Work and the other Fisk researchers were the instigators of the venture, Alan Lomax took over leadership of the project and seemed not to hold their work in high esteem. Work's field notes were lost until the 1990s; when Lomax published a book drawing on the project in 1993, he gave scant credit to Work and the others for their contributions.

Of interest to music teachers are the nearly one hundred pages of transcriptions (in Work's hand). Children's songs are mixed in with gospel songs and the blues, but it's easy to go through the pages and find great variants of pieces that children sang to the researchers. There's a good deal of discussion of texts and other aspects of the music. Several lengthy sections of the book discuss life in the area at the time,

and there are a number of photos of the residents. Of special interest to me is the section on children's game songs. There is a comparison of the same songs as sung in black culture versus white culture and even some black versions of simple play party games like "We're Marching Round the Levee" and "Needle's Eye."

For the teacher who is looking for authentic variants of African American songs to use with their children, *Lost Delta Found* is as good as it gets. The discussion of the lives of the people is priceless, and the fact that Work's field notes were finally found, allowing the book to be published, is most fortunate for us seventy years later. ■

Alan L. Spurgeon is a professor of music, director of music education, and graduate coordinator of music at the University of Mississippi.

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