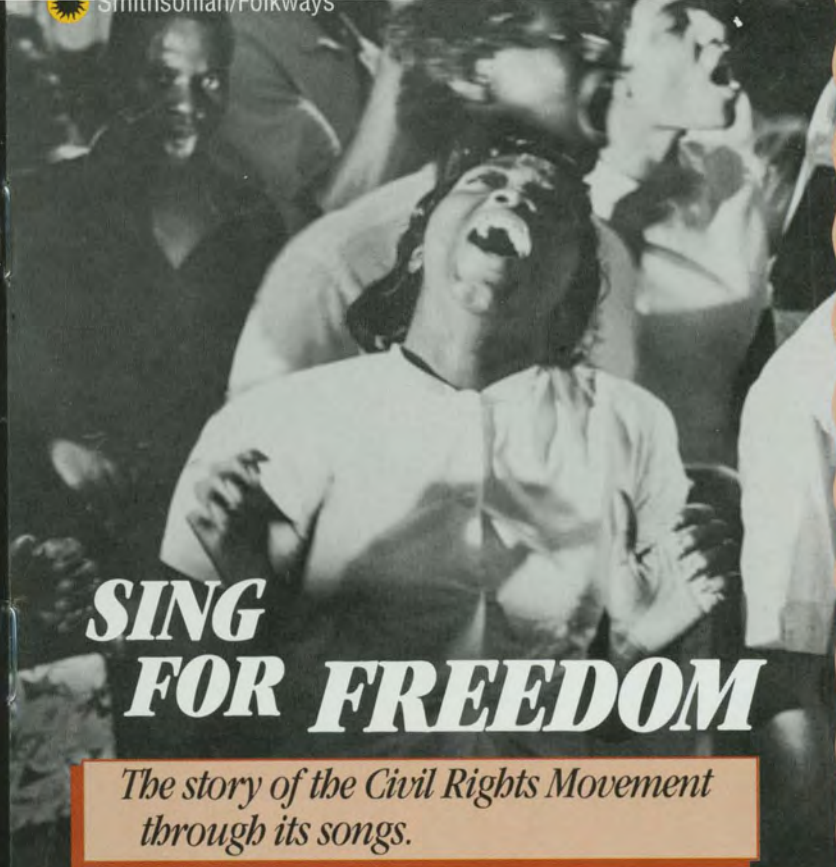


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SING FOR FREEDOM

*The story of the Civil Rights Movement
through its songs.*

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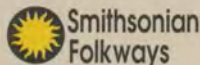
1. We Are Soldiers in the Army 2:31
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3. This Little Light 2:12
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18. Rev. Ralph Abernathy 1:31
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21. Ninety-nine-and-a-half Won't Do 2:15
22. Get on Board 4:53
23. No Danger in the Water 1:23
24. Medgar Evers Speaking 1:10
25. Keep Your Eyes on the Prize 1:10
26. We Shall Overcome 2:42



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Hymns, spirituals, gospel songs, prayers and speeches have been a unifying force in the struggle for civil rights throughout the United States. These early 1960s field recordings from campaign centers such as Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama; Albany and Atlanta, Georgia; Greenwood, Mississippi; and Nashville, Tennessee testify to the irrepressible power of song in the civil rights movement.

These performances were originally issued on Folkways Records. Extensive notes with complete discographical information are enclosed.



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SING FOR FREEDOM

The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through Its Songs

Compiled with notes by Guy and Candie Carawan

The civil rights movement was the greatest singing movement this country has experienced. The songs that grew out of campaigns across the South in the early 1960s built on the rich culture of African American communities, particularly the black church. There were songs to fit every mood from sorrow to joy, from determination to irony and humor.

We were fortunate to live in the South during those years and to be based at the Highlander Center, one of the gathering places for civil rights activists to share information and to strategize. Particularly interested in the cultural expression of the movement, we travelled to many communities and recorded peoples' songs and stories. We collected the freedom repertoire into two songbooks and produced six documentary albums of songs, testimonies and mass meetings. This collection is drawn from those six albums. It is an impressionistic history of

the civil rights movement from Montgomery through Nashville, Albany, Birmingham and Mississippi tracing the development and spread of the freedom repertoire.

Sing For Freedom is also available in book form. The book represents a reissue of two classic collections of freedom songs, *We Shall Overcome* (Oak, 1963) and *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle* (Oak, 1968). The new edition includes 115 freedom songs (including all the songs on this recording), over 135 stirring photographs of the civil rights movement, extensive first-hand accounts, and a new essay by Guy and Candie Carawan on the role of song in this movement. This 312 pp. book can be ordered for \$17.50 postpaid directly from the publisher, Sing Out Publications, at P.O. Box 5253, Bethlehem, PA 18105. It is also available from Roundup Records, P.O. Box 154, N. Cambridge, MA 02140.

Montgomery, Alabama is considered the birth place of the modern civil rights movement. In December of 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus, sparking the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which came to national attention. As a local movement grew in Montgomery, singing became a strong force in unifying people in their struggle. The churches were the meeting place for the movement and singing was a central ingredient of mass meetings that took place night after night.

Many commonly known hymns, spirituals and gospel songs began to take on a new meaning when they were part of a mass meeting. Soon small adaptations were made which gave even sharper focus to traditional words. "We've got the light of freedom, we're gonna let it shine... deep down in the South, we're gonna let it shine..."

The trio heard on this recording was already singing together as teenagers in a youth gospel choir when they became involved in the movement. Mary Ethel Dozier explains: "I was in elementary school in 1954. I was ten years old. After the first mass meetings in 1955 we started

singing for the Montgomery Improvement Association. All the songs I remember gave us strength to go on."

The Montgomery Gospel trio came to a workshop at Highlander in 1959. They met Guy there and when a benefit concert for Highlander was planned for Carnegie Hall in 1961, he invited them to take part. This was perhaps the first time singers directly involved in the civil rights movement had a hearing in the northern setting. They appeared in the concert with Pete Seeger, Guy, Willie Dixon and Memphis Slim and a quartet of freedom singers from Nashville.

The three songs are traditional gospel songs with very slight adaptations to suit the new mood of challenge and change in the South. They were recorded in a rather impromptu session by Moe Asch of Folkways Records just before the trio returned to Montgomery. You can hear Guy's guitar accompaniment and a bass voice—that of Sam Collier of the Nashville quartet.

Guy wrote in the original notes to the Folkways album:

"The three teens from Montgomery know

what it is to live in one of the most brutal Jim Crow cities in the South. They have witnessed the historic happenings of the 1955 bus boycott, the mob violence in reaction to the sit-ins and the freedom rides. The Montgomery Improvement Association has carried on the struggle in spite of constant harrassment by the police and threats of violence from white hate groups. These young women who sing spiritual and gospel songs that express the spirit of freedom have sung often for this organization and for many other groups in Montgomery. They are used to the fact that these meetings may be harrassed by police or white hoodlums and that they have to be careful about where they go, what they do and what they say. Songs like "We Are Soldiers," "Hold On" and "This Little Light" are some of their best and have helped to lift the spirits of many people in Montgomery."

Songs and Testimonies:

Montgomery Improvement Association trio of high school students: Mary Ethel Dozier, Minnie Hendrick, Gladys Burnette Carter:

- 1) **We Are Soldiers in the Army**
- 2) **Keep Your Hands on the Plow**
- 3) **This Little Light**

In 1960 **Nashville, Tennessee** was a center of student demonstrations against segregated public facilities. The sit-in movement spread rapidly through southern cities. Sit-ins at downtown lunch counters resulted in mass arrests and jailings and the entire black community rallied in support of the students. Again the mass meetings were central to the campaign.

Along with the church songs that were an integral part of the meetings, some new freedom songs grew out of the Nashville movement. The songs included here are from a talented quartet of students from the American Baptist Theological Seminary. They drew upon contemporary rhythm and blues songs and the soul music of Ray Charles for their clever commentary on segregation. Their music

was full of humor and satire and especially helpful for relieving the fear and anxiety of students going to jail for the first time.

In the early summer of 1960, following a period of several months of demonstrations, a boycott of the downtown area by the black community, negotiations by a bi-racial committee established by the mayor of Nashville, and finally some desegregation of public facilities, Guy recorded a documentary album for Folkways called "The Nashville Sit-In Story." These two selections are from that album.

One of the student participants, Peggy Alexander, wrote in the notes to the album:

"On February 27th students were called vulgar names, cursed, kicked, beaten, rolled down steps and arrested. The students had strength in the belief that no sacrifice was too great in order to attain freedom. As one group was put into the paddy wagon, other students stood on the sunny sidewalks of Nashville waiting their turn.

The arrests aroused a sleeping community and nation and revealed the seriousness of the problem of segregation. They helped eradicate the idea that the Negro was content with his second-class citizenship."

Following the sit-ins of the spring of 1960, young people of the Nashville movement became central participants in the Freedom Rides, carrying on when the original rides were cancelled because of violent attacks. During the summer of 1961, about 350 freedom riders spent more than a month in jail together in Mississippi. This was a fertile period for the creation and the spread of freedom songs. Once they were released from jail, these singing freedom riders fanned out to their home communities or to their new assignments as organizers.

Songs and Testimonials:

Nashville Quartet from American Baptist Theological Seminary: James Bevel, Bernard Lafayette, Joseph Carter, Samuel Collier:

- 4) **You Better Leave Segregation Alone**
- 5) **Your Dog Loves My Dog**

In **Albany, Georgia** the civil rights movement matured in several ways. The adult community participated in equal strength with the students in marches and demonstrations, and singing grew richer as the wealth of expression of the older people was tapped. When mass meetings first started in Albany, following arrests at bus and train stations, only a few people turned out. But as the arrests continued and news of mass meetings with exciting singing spread to the community, the meetings became packed and two churches had to be used to hold everyone. The meetings started with old time unaccompanied singing and prayer. The older people expressed years of suffering and hope through their songs. The young people followed with newly adapted freedom songs.

Out of the Albany movement came the first group of freedom singers to travel nationally. Cordell Reagon had come to Albany from Nashville following the freedom rides, as a field secretary for SNCC (the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee). He organized the group of four singers who became the SNCC Freedom Singers. Pete and Toshi Seeger arranged their first concert and fundraising tour of northern cities.

In the Albany section you hear "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around," a traditional song first adapted to the movement in Albany, sung by the Freedom Singers. This is followed by the sound of a mass meeting which includes a lined-out long meter hymn, a bit of the sermon by Rev. Ben Gay, and a more modern freedom song. There are comments by two SNCC workers about the Albany movement and a song written about the mayor and the chief of police. Most of this material comes from a documentary album recorded by Guy in 1962 in Albany and edited and produced by Guy and Alan Lomax. The album was mastered and released with the assistance of Vanguard Records for SNCC and has long been out of print.

Songs and Testimonials:

The SNCC Freedom Singers: Cordell Reagon, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Rutha Harris, Charles Neblett:

6) Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around

Albany mass meetings: Rev. Ben Gay:

7) I Woke Up This Morning with My Mind on Freedom

Charles Jones and Cordell Reagon:
Comments

8) Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

Bertha Gober, Rutha Harris, Charles Sherrod, Jamie Culbreath:

9) Oh Pritchett, Oh Kelly

In 1964 in **Atlanta, Georgia** there was an important gathering of song leader/activists from across the South. It was called a "Sing for Freedom" workshop. This was one of a series of music workshops that helped to spread the growing repertoire of the movement. Guy, through his work for Highlander, was instrumental in pulling these workshops together, and he had help from cultural organizers from both SNCC and SCLC (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference). At these workshops, singers from many places talked of their local movements and taught their songs. There was much creative singing together and new verses were added to songs on the spot. There was also a focus on older musical traditions from African American communities. Such outstanding carriers of traditions as the Georgia Sea Island Singers, the Moving Star Hall Singers

from Johns Island, South Carolina, Doc Reese from the Texas prison system, Ed Young, a cane fife player from Mississippi, took part in these workshops. For some young freedom fighters it was a revelation to hear some of the songs and history that had gone before.

We have included here some recordings from the Sing for Freedom Workshop in 1964. "Up Above My Head" led by Betty Mae Fikes of Selma, is followed by an exciting version of "This Little Light" with singers from many communities and led by Rutha Harris from Albany, Betty Mae and others. You can hear the distinctive gospel piano of Carlton Reese, director of the Birmingham Movement Choir. Cordell Reagon does a beautiful version of Oscar Brown's song, "Brown Baby."

Songs and Testimonies:

Betty Mae Fikes:

10) Up above My Head

Rutha Harris, Betty Mae Fikes and others:

11) This Little Light

Cordell Reagon:

12) Brown Baby

In many ways **Mississippi** represents the most difficult arena for the civil rights movement where the most entrenched system of segregation and oppression was kept in place with the worst violence. The fact that the movement flourished there and eventually brought about dramatic change is remarkable. We have included two sections of recordings from Mississippi.

"Which Side Are You On?" with verses adapted for Mississippi is sung by the Freedom Singers. The original song came out of the labor movement, composed by Florence Reece in the Kentucky coalfields in the late 1930's. The version of "I'm Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table" is done by Hollis Watkins from Mississippi at a festival in West Virginia in 1985. He combines verses from the civil rights movement with commentary on struggles in the coalfields in the mid-1980s. Next you can hear Hollis speaking at a mass meeting in Mississippi in 1964. "Guide My Feet" is a song common to black congregational singing throughout the South. It is associated with Mississippi during the civil rights years — perhaps because the race was so long and dangerous in Mississippi. (... "Lord, I don't want to run this race in vain.")

Songs and Testimonials:

Charles Neblett, Rutha Harris, Cordell Reagon:

13) **Which Side Are You On?**

Hollis Watkins:

14) **I'm Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table**

15) **Mass Meeting and Prayer**

Doc Reese and congregation:

16) **Guide My Feet**

The movement in **Birmingham, Alabama**, a broad based attack on segregation, led directly to the Civil Rights Bill of 1964. The bill finally passed by Congress followed graphic news coverage of dogs and fire hoses set on demonstrators, some of them school children. More than 2000 people had been to jail. The Birmingham churches favored modern gospel music, and once the movement was underway, a high-powered choir under the direction of Carlton Reese, sang for forty nights running at mass meetings throughout the city. No wonder the Birmingham Movement Choir sounds so fervent and unified.

The selections here, which include both singing and preaching, were part of an

album called *Birmingham Mass Meeting*, 1963. We recorded this album under somewhat difficult circumstances. As we tried to enter New Pilgrim Baptist Church to join in the singing in support of the movement, we were arrested by Sheriff Bull Conner and told that no blacks and whites would be singing together in Birmingham. We were released two days later just in time to get to the mass meeting we had planned to record. Guy managed to maneuver himself onto the speaker's platform and had to shift from speaker to speaker and singer to singer with our single microphone to capture the spirit of the meeting.

Songs and Testimonials:

Mamie Brown with Carlton Reece & the Birmingham Movement Choir:

17) **I'm on My Way**

18) **Rev. Ralph Abernathy speaking**

Cleo Kennedy & Carlton Reece:

19) **Yes, We Want Our Freedom**

20) **Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. speaking**

Carlton Reece & the Birmingham Movement Choir:

21) **Ninety-nine-and-a-half Won't Do**

The movement in **Greenwood, Mississippi**, taking place at the same time as Birmingham, was much more rurally based. Greenwood was the center of a major drive to register black voters and it meant overcoming generations of fear.

Bernice Reagon is the preeminent historian on the music of the civil rights movement. Her introduction to a fine collection of material released by the Smithsonian in 1980 includes these comments which are appropriate to Mississippi:

"The movement spread throughout the South. Initial organizers were Black college students who set aside their studies to work in segregated rural and urban communities. They received support from local leaders who listened to them, housed and fed them. Sharecroppers, ministers, hairdressers, restaurant owners, independent business people, teachers: these were the first to try to register to vote, apply for a job or use a public facility previously reserved for whites. The response was swift and brutal: economic reprisals, jailings, beatings and killings.

Nonetheless, the movement grew, pulling recruits from all segments of the Black community and forcing change in legal, political and social processes. But its essence lay in the transformation of a people."

In the Greenwood section of this collection you hear Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, the courageous sharecropper who gave up her job and her home of many years to become a registered voter. She eventually ran for Congress on the Mississippi Freedom Democratic ticket. She was a powerful singer and speaker. You also hear Medgar Evers, recorded shortly before he was assassinated. Bob Moses, a young organizer who came south from Harvard, helps tell the story of the Greenwood movement along with two local citizens.

Songs and Testimonials:

Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, Bob Moses:

22) Get on Board

Bob Moses and a Greenwood woman:

23) No Danger in the Water

24) Medgar Evers Speaking

25) Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

The collection ends with the singing of "We Shall Overcome," the great song of hope that grew out of the civil rights movement and has gone around the world as part of peoples' struggles. It was recorded at a reunion concert of the SNCC Freedom Singers in Washington, D.C. in 1988, and was part of the soundtrack for the film on the history of the song. "We Shall Overcome" produced by Jim Brown and Ginger Productions won an Emmy in 1989 for the best news documentary.

Songs and Testimonials:

Cordell Reagon, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Rutha Harris, Charles Neblett with Dorothy Cotton, Pete Seeger and the audience:

26) We Shall Overcome

Guy and Candie Carawan
New Market, Tennessee
October 1989

We recommend the following additional resources:

Discography

Voices of the Civil Rights Movement, Black American Freedom Songs, 1955-1965. 1980, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution. A 3-volume record set with excellent notes prepared by Bernice Johnson Reagon.

Everybody's Got a Right to Live: Jimmy Collier & Rev. Frederick Douglas Kirkpatrick, Broadside, BR 308.

Freedom Songs: Selma, Alabama, Folkways, FH 5594.

The Sit-In Story: The Story of the Lunchroom Sit-Ins, Folkways, FH 5502.

We Shall Overcome: Documentary of the March on Washington, Folkways, FH 5592.

WNEW's Story of Selma, Folkways, FH 5595.

Movement Soul, Sounds of the Freedom Movement in the South, 1963-64, recorded by Moses Moon, Folkways, FD 5486.

Matt Jones Then and Now, Relevant Records.

Sit-In Songs: Songs of the Freedom Riders, CORE. Dauntless

Documentaries collected by Guy & Candie Carawan

The Nashville Sit-In Story, Folkways, FH 5590.

We Shall Overcome, Songs of the Freedom Riders and the Sit-Ins, Folkways, FH 5591.

Freedom in the Air, Albany, Georgia, SNCC Records.

Birmingham, Alabama, 1963, Folkways, FD 5487.

The Story of Greenwood, Mississippi, 1965, Folkways, FD 5593.

Sing for Freedom, 1964, Folkways, FD 5488.

Sing for Freedom, 1990. A new 70-minute compilation of songs from the above recordings is available on Smithsonian/Folkways 40032. It is available on CD, cassette or LP.

All Folkways titles listed above are available on high quality chrome audio cassettes with the original notes. For information about these and other African American titles available on Folkways, write to:
Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies
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Films and Video

We Shall Overcome, PBS special on the history of song, by Jim Brown, 1988.

Eyes on the Prize, six part series on the history of the Civil Rights Movement, Blackside Productions, 1986.

Books and Articles

Carawan, Guy & Candie, *Sing for Freedom, The Story of the Civil Rights Movement told through Music*, Sing Out Publications, Bethlehem, PA, 1990.

Branch, Taylor, *Parting the Waters, America in the King Years 1954-63*. Simon & Schuster, New York, 1988.

Reagon, Bernice Johnson, *Songs of the Civil Rights Movement 1955-1964: A study in culture history*. Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 1975.

Reagon, "Let the Church Sing "Freedom" in *Black Music Research Journal*, vol.7, 1987. Center for Black Music Research, Columbia College, Chicago, IL.

Reagon, *Contemporary Black American Congregational Song and Worship Traditions*, booklet from a conference at the Smithsonian Institution, February 1989.

Reagon, "Songs that Moved the Movement" in *Perspectives, Civil Rights Quarterly*, summer 1983.

Seeger, Pete and Robert Reiser, *Everybody Says Freedom*, W.W.Norton, 1989.

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA: Recorded by Folkways in New York (1963)

- 1) **We are Soldiers in the Army** (traditional) 2:31
- 2) **Keep Your Hand on the Plow** (traditional) 2:11
- 3) **This Little Light** (traditional) 2:12

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE: Recorded by Willard Electronics in Nashville (1960)

- 4) **You Better Leave Segregation Alone** (traditional) :39
- 5) **Your Dog Loves My Dog** (words and music by James Bevel and Bernard Lafayette, Stormking Music, Inc., BMI) 1:59

ALBANY, GEORGIA: 1961-62

- 6) **Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around** (traditional, recorded by Folkways in New York) 2:30
- 7) **I Woke Up This Morning with My Mind on Freedom** (words and music by Rev. Osby and Bob Zellner, Fall River Music, Inc., BMI) 3:37
- 8) **Keep Your Eyes on the Prize** (traditional with new words by Alice Wine) 1:46
- 9) **Oh Pritchett, Oh Kelly** (traditional, adapted by Bertha Gober, Rutha Harris, Charles Sherrod and Jamie Culbreath, recorded by Guy Carawan in Albany) 2:27

ATLANTA, GEORGIA: Recorded by Guy Carawan, assisted by Theo Bikel (1964)

- 10) **Up above My Head** (traditional, adapted by Betty Mae Fikes) 1:02
 - 11) **This Little Light** (traditional) 3:46
 - 12) **Brown Baby** (traditional, words and music by Oscar Brown) 1:53
- MISSISSIPPI: 1964
- 13) **Which Side Are You On?** (original words and music by Florence Reece, Stormking Music, Inc., BMI, recorded by Guy Carawan in Atlanta) 3:46
 - 14) **I'm Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table** (traditional, recorded by Flawn Williams in Elkins, West Virginia) 1:53
 - 15) **Mass meeting and prayer** (recorded by Guy Carawan) 3:53
 - 16) **Guide My Feet** (traditional, recorded by Guy Carawan in Atlanta) 2:06

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA: Recorded by
Guy Carawan in Birmingham (1963)

- 17) **I'm on My Way**
(traditional) 3:41
- 18) **Rev. Ralph Abernathy**
1:31
- 19) **Yes, We Want Our Freedom**
(traditional, words and music by
Carlton Reece) 2:23
- 20) **Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.**
3:41
- 21) **Ninety-nine-and-a-half Won't Do**
(traditional, words and music by
Carlton Reece) 2:15

GREENWOOD, MISSISSIPPI: Recorded
by Guy Carawan in Mississippi

- 22) **Get on Board**
(traditional) 4:53
- 23) **No Danger in the Water**
(traditional) 1:23
- 24) **Medgar Evers speaking**
1:10
- 25) **Keep Your Eyes on the Prize**
(traditional) 1:10

WASHINGTON, D.C.: Recorded
by Ginger Productions

- 26) **We Shall Overcome**
(Ludlow Music, BMI) 2:42

Production Credits:

Recorded and produced by Guy Carawan.
Notes by Guy and Candie Carawan.
Mixed and mastered by Randy Kling at
Disc Mastering, Nashville, Tennessee.
Design by Nancy Jean Anderson.
Art direction by Scott Billington.

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Folkways Records was founded by
Moses Asch and Marian Distler in 1949
to document music, spoken word,
instruction, and sounds from around
the world. Benefiting from their
experience with the Asch and Disc
labels, New York City-based Folkways
became one of the largest independent
record companies in the world, with a
total of nearly 2,200 albums that were
always kept in print.

The Smithsonian Institution acquired
Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987
to ensure that the sounds and genius of
the artists would be preserved for future
generations. All Folkways recordings
are now available on high quality audio
cassettes, each packed in a special box
along with the original LP liner notes.

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tradition of releasing significant
recordings with high quality
documentation. It produces new
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companies also produces instructional
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commitment to cultural diversity,
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