

## **A Working Model for Developing and Sustaining Collaborative Relationships Between Archival Repositories in the Caribbean and the United States**

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Forty-seven years ago, noted folklorist and musicologist, Alan Lomax, conducted a sweeping survey of the musical traditions of the Eastern Caribbean and Lesser Antilles islands. This survey, funded in part by support from the John D. Rockefeller Foundation, and sponsored by the University of the West Indies, consisted of 180 days of fieldwork on twelve different islands, including Grenada, Anguilla, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, Carriacou, Dominica, Martinique, St. Barthelemy, and Guadeloupe. The remarkable body of materials documented during the summer of 1962 captured a brilliant array of musical styles, genres, customs, and traditions emanating from the diversity of cultures represented on these islands. While the focus of the fieldwork was on music and dance, Lomax's work documented a remarkable panorama of cultural activity that was rooted in the everyday life activities of the people, such as work songs, children's game songs, and lullabies, as well as a collection of cultural traditions that were more formally-organized and appropriately categorized as ceremonial and/or ritualistic. This 1962 Caribbean music fieldwork, which consists of almost 2,000 field recordings and over 1,000 documentary photographs, provides a glimpse into cultural life as it existed on these islands over four decades ago and presents a revealing vista into the ways that people incorporated music and dance into their lives and commemorated their most significant events.

This article reports on the digital repatriation of the 1962 Caribbean materials, a project that is part of a global and more ambitious dissemination mission of the Association for Cultural Equity/Alan Lomax Archive. Presented at the 2008 IASA conference as an example of a working, collaborative model involving several archives and repositories on an international scale, this project has three salient themes: 1) it focuses on a lesser known yet significant aspect of Alan Lomax's work—his recordings in the Caribbean; 2) it speaks to the potential for archives to design and implement collaborative projects; and 3) it explores the benefits of a strategic approach to providing access to collections, with a specific focus on thinking beyond the Internet as an access provider. A collaborative effort between the Association for Cultural Equity (ACE, also known as the Alan Lomax Archive) and the Center for Black Music Research (CBMR) of Columbia College Chicago, the specific project goals of this repatriation project are:

- to identify repositories located in the areas of the Caribbean where the 1962 materials were originally recorded and to assess the ability of the repositories to hold, preserve, manage, and provide access to the materials;
- to repatriate digital copies of Alan Lomax's Caribbean field recordings, photographs, and notes (now physically located in New York, NY and Washington, DC) to those locations that meet the assessment criteria; and
- to lay the groundwork for the establishment of ongoing relationships by partnering with these cultural repositories in the delivery of these materials and in the promotion of the materials to the local communities.

The primary objective of the project relates to the concept of persistence—the aim to make these sources of intangible cultural heritage accessible to present and future generations in

the places and among the people that created them. The broader goals are to provide wide accessibility and to promote circulation of cultural heritage collections, as well as to foster preservation of these same collections and to cultivate resource sharing between nations, institutions, and individuals. This presentation was included as part of a session themed, “interconnection and cooperation,” at the 2008 IASA Annual Conference.

### **The Association for Cultural Equity**

The Association for Cultural Equity oversees the intellectual legacy of Alan Lomax, whose long and productive career as a folklorist, anthropologist, author, radio broadcaster, filmmaker, concert and record producer, and television host left a legacy of field recordings, writing, and research that the Library of Congress on its website refers to as “one of the most important collections of ethnographic material in the world (<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/lomax/>, accessed on November 25, 2008).”



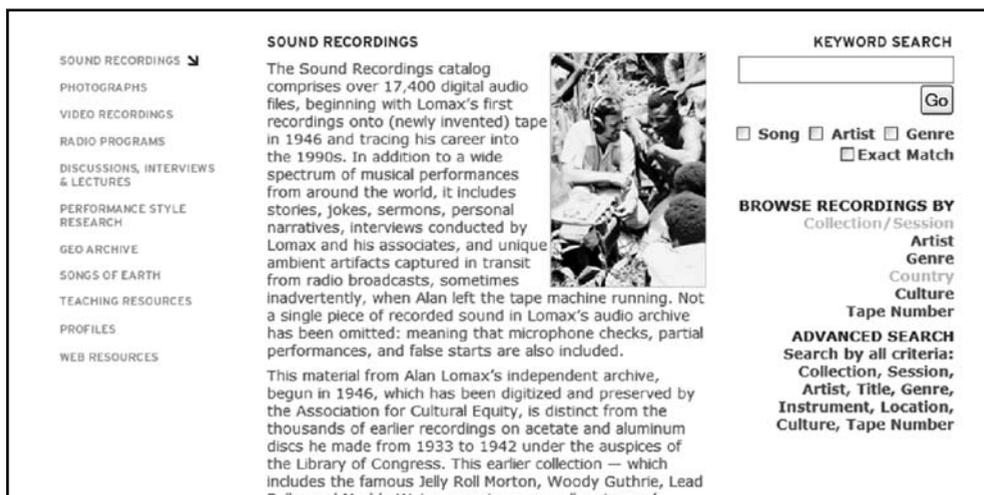
**Photo 1: Alan Lomax at the Association for Cultural Equity, New York, 1986. Photo by Peter Figlestahler.**

The American Folklife Center, which is a branch of the Library of Congress, the official Federal-level cultural institution of the United States, now holds the original copies of Lomax’s collected works. However, the Association for Cultural Equity (ACE) maintains the digital preservation and reference copies of these materials and holds authority to publish and distribute them in creative ways. In this sense, ACE now exists as a transitional archive, in the process of assuming a new role as steward of a digital-only collection, a role that straddles the philosophical fence that exists between preservation and access, and between being sedentary and being mobile. This is a move towards a state of hybridity and a new level of functionality in the interstices of cultural heritage and cultural collaboration.

## History of the ACE Repatriation Project

In 1998, ACE began efforts to organize and preserve Alan Lomax's accumulated work, which includes over 5,000 hours of sound recordings, 400,000 feet of motion picture film, and thousands of videotapes, scholarly books and journals, photographic prints and negatives, databases, and unpublished manuscripts. The Caribbean materials that ground the Caribbean Dissemination project represent about 300 hours of recordings and just over 1,000 photographs.

Through comprehensive and meticulous preservation efforts, digital masters of each audio and visual item in the collection were captured and created, and sub-masters and reference copies were made for each. Databases were developed to hold descriptive, technical, and administrative metadata about each digital file created in the process. This process revealed that from these basic elements—the raw materials—any number of interfaces could be created to accommodate the needs and profiles of different audiences and it also highlighted the value of creating an online catalog, which is now available on ACE's website, located at <http://www.culturalequity.org/rc/index.html>.



**Photo 2: Screenshot from the Research Center on ACE's website where the Alan Lomax sound recording catalog resides.**

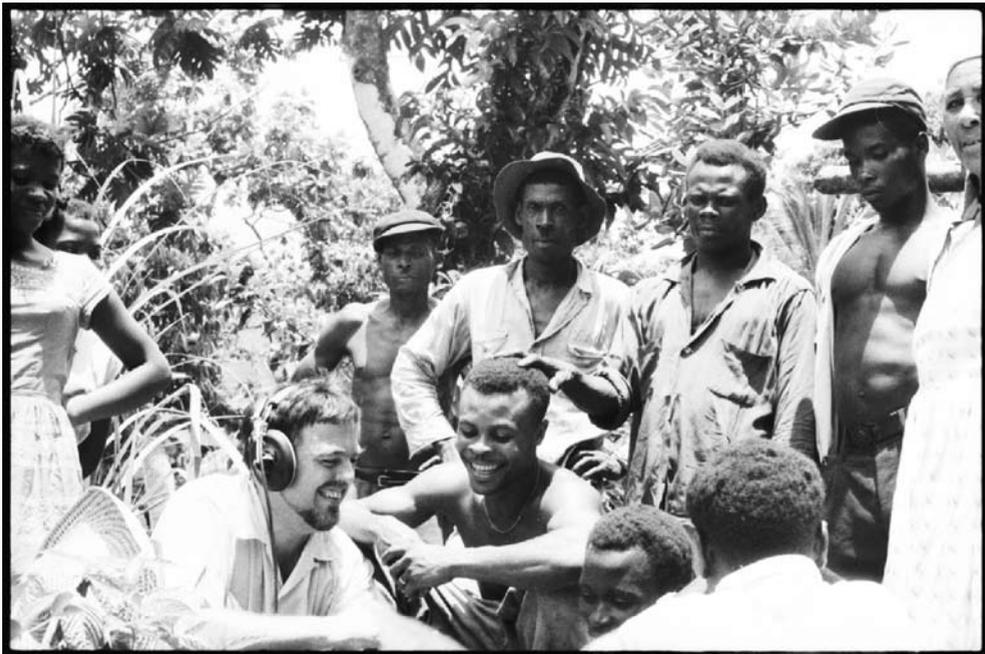
The catalog provides 45-second access to all of the digitized sound recordings in the collection, as well as access to Lomax's collection of over 5,000 photographs. It is openly accessible online and makes these materials available in a passive manner to anyone with Internet access. We are, however, also in the fortunate position to be able to share these resources in an active manner with other archives, which is the purpose served by the dissemination project.

### Underlying Philosophy

Cultural equity and cultural feedback are two of the fundamental ideas grounding this work. The Association for Cultural Equity—as its name suggests—was created by Alan Lomax through his belief in “cultural equity,” which is the idea that the expressive traditions of all

local and ethnic cultures should be equally valued as representative of the multiple forms of human adaptation on the Earth. It is a belief that all cultures should have equal time in educational settings and in mass communication systems. This concept of cultural equity serves as one of the underlying philosophies of the project's goals in sharing the diverse cultural resources held at ACE.

Another important thread is Lomax's concept of "cultural feedback," which embodies the idea, championed early by a number of folklorists including Alan Lomax, that folklore and primary documentation of culture should be put into the hands of the original cultural creators, rather than remain the sole province of scholars, archivists, and entertainment giants. As a practical application of this concept, Lomax, on his trips to the Caribbean in the 1960s, brought with him the largest stereo speakers he could fit on the plane, hauled them to every recording locale, no matter how remote, and made it a practice to play back recording sessions to the musicians and the entire community each time he recorded them.



**Photo 3: Alan Lomax recording in Dominica, 1962.  
Photo by Antoinette Marchand.**

The commercial mass communication system was always loud, overshadowing the un-amplified voice of cultural expression. Lomax sought to even the playing field. At the end of his 1962 Caribbean recording trip, Lomax deposited analog tape copies of his recordings at the University College of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica, with the hope of beginning a pan-Caribbean cultural archive.

Today we take up this same thread of cultural feedback by saying, "let's deposit/return copies of intangible cultural heritage and primary documentation in our collections to the places and people nearest their original creation, where these testimonials of cultural history and

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continuity will be accessible to local communities and can be brought into school curricula, music education programs, and can be used creatively through other public programming.” To do this, we invite collaborations with repositories, prepare formal Acts of Donation, coordinate deliveries of data, and work with repositories to deliver the materials in the form that will be most useful to them.

From an archivist’s perspective, it seems important to note that not only is the goal of providing meaningful access to these collections being attained, the materials are also being safeguarded through the deposit of multiple copies in multiple places. We are, in fact, proliferating the digital existence of these collections by creating sub-master preservation backup copies in every participating repository. Thus, it is important to note that this method of resource sharing is useful for both access as well as preservation.

### **The Process**

Originally, the project was designed on a theoretical model that consisted of three basic steps:

- 1) Capture digital source materials to preservation standards
- 2) Create partnerships with interested repositories
- 3) Deliver standard digital packages to each repository

In practice, however, it became necessary to modify this model in the following manner:

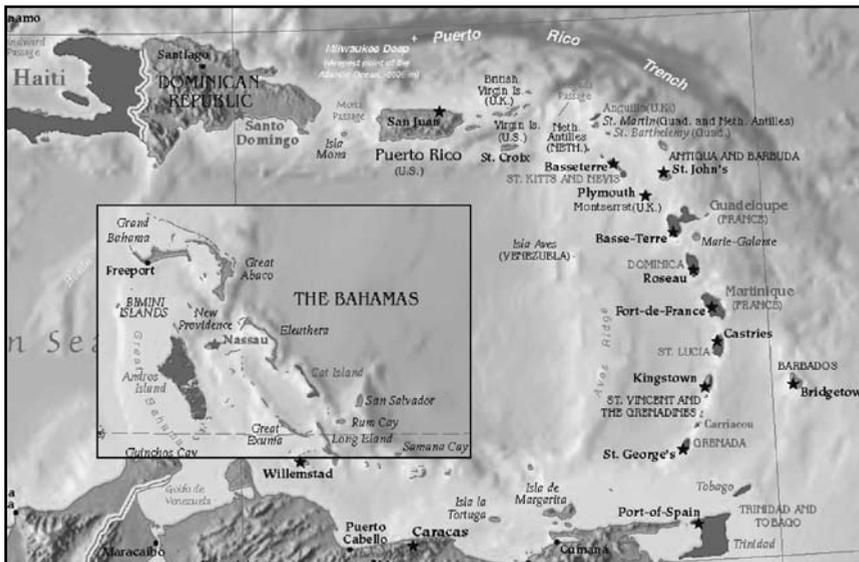
- 1) Capture digital source materials to preservation standards
- 2) Create partnerships with interested repositories
- 3) Assess the technological compatibility level of each repository
  - a. Are computers available? Is the Internet readily accessible?
  - b. What level of database knowledge and operability is held by individuals responsible for maintaining the materials?
  - c. How will their users access the material locally?
  - d. What will work most effectively and efficiently for the repository over the long-term?
- 4) Develop digital delivery to suit practical needs, capabilities, and uses of each repository
- 5) Maintain collaborative relationships with repositories to handle changing technical needs (as repositories develop new technological capabilities, ACE can re-deliver content in different formats).

While the modified process has proven to be flexible and effective, there are some important lessons that have been learned along the way. Throughout our work, the aim has been to

adhere to international preservation standards, metadata standards, open-source formats, and other digital best-practices. We recognize the value in standardization, interoperability, and trusted-digital-repositories; we also strive to stay abreast of current technological advancements and research. In the process of implementation, it has become apparent that open-source formats and widespread online availability do not always translate into universal accessibility. In reality, these criteria result in accessibility only for those who have the necessary technological resources in place and the requisite technological knowledge and assistance available. We have come to understand that our efforts, in fulfillment of the dissemination project, must recognize and be sensitive to the inequities that exist in the world, particularly as they relate to technological capabilities of worldwide archival and cultural institutions. It is also evident that flexibility and creativity are necessary in the short term to overcome small inequities in order to foster and facilitate the long-term goal of engendering greater equality.

The question may well be asked: why disseminate at all? Why not put the materials online for everyone to access? Our response to those questions is that while the materials are made available online, our dissemination strategy rests solidly on the conviction that online accessibility alone is not enough to achieve our goals. Often, the communities where we plan to deposit this material do not have consistent or widespread internet access or are not comfortable with the Internet as a sole access point. Depositing the materials in local repositories in the most flexible manner makes it possible for each repository to share these resources with their constituents, with their communities, in the most useful and appropriate fashion.

### History of the Caribbean Collection

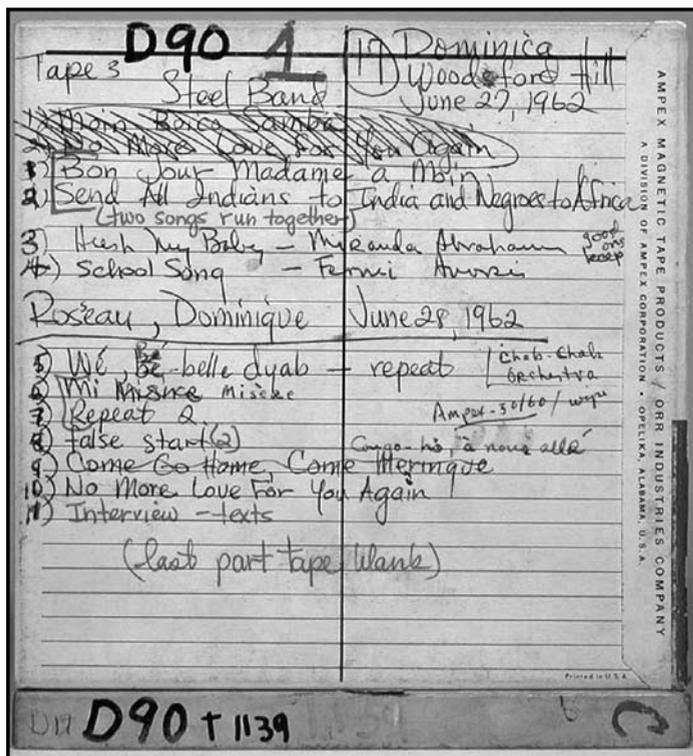


**Photo 4: Caribbean recording locations, 1935–1967.**

In 1935, Alan Lomax completed his first recordings in the Bahamas for the Library of Congress. There he documented anthems, chanteys, and old story-songs from sponge industry

workers and fishermen on Andros, Cat Island, and Nassau. In 1937, still with the Library of Congress, Lomax recorded in Haiti where he encountered a great panoply of music — ritual traditions and work songs from the countryside, rare 16<sup>th</sup> century French ballads, and a variety of emerging urban forms. In 1962, no longer with the Library of Congress, Lomax worked in the Eastern Caribbean, making almost 2,000 field recordings and a little over 1,000 documentary photographs in twelve Caribbean islands, including Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Carriacou, St. Lucia, St. Bart's, Anguilla, Nevis, and St. Kitts. Principal collaborators and advisors to the project were Jacob D. Elder, Dan Crowley, Roger Abrahams, Philip Sherlock (University College of the West Indies, Jamaica), and Andrew C. Pearse (St. Lucia). A complete copy on open-reel tape was deposited at the University College of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica. Later in the 1960s Lomax made recordings in St. Eustatius and the Dominican Republic.

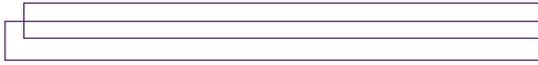
From 2003–2005, ACE processed and made digital transfers of the 1962 Caribbean sound recordings. This process required scanning each of the photographic negatives and populating databases with technical, administrative, and descriptive metadata about each file.



**Photo 5: Tape box from tapes recorded in Rampanalgas, Trinidad; Roseau, Dominica; and Le Pérou, Martinique.**

After the completion of this work, we also deposited the original materials for safekeeping with the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. This left us ready to begin the process of dissemination and to embark on the design of a project that was based on fundamental, shared beliefs about the value of documenting and preserving intangible cultural heritage.

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## The Collaboration

In 2005, ACE entered into a partnership with the Center for Black Music Research (CBMR) of Columbia College Chicago for the repatriation of the 1962 Caribbean music materials. The CBMR, at the time, maintained a remote branch, the Alton Augustus Adams Music Research Institute, which was located on the island of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. The Center for Black Music Research was founded in 1983 by Dr. Samuel A. Floyd Jr. as a research unit of Columbia College, an arts, media, and communications institution located in Chicago, Illinois. The Center's mission is to document, preserve, and disseminate information on the worldwide scope of black music, i.e., the various styles, forms, and genres of music of the African Diaspora. It is the only organization of its kind that promotes and produces research on the full spectrum of music produced by peoples of African descent, across cultures, historical time periods, and regions of the world.

The extraordinary body of research completed by Alan Lomax, particularly his documentation of black cultural traditions, presented a natural and profound synergy with the Center's goals. Because of this and the Center's interest in extending its research agenda throughout the Caribbean region, serving as a partner and collaborator in the "repatriation" of the Caribbean music materials was recognized and valued for its reciprocal benefits for each of the partnering entities.

In 2005, the Center was designated as the repository for the entire Caribbean music materials and as a partner in the distribution of copies of the materials to the respective islands from whence they were collected. Because the bulk of this collection had not been previously-published nor had been widely-available for use by scholars or researchers, it represented a significant contribution to the body of research on Caribbean music-cultures and to the field of black music research, in general. In essence, these materials represent aural and visual snapshots of music and dance activities as they were practiced over 45 years ago in twelve distinct, yet fundamentally-connected island communities.

Alan Lomax's fieldwork from 1962 is remarkable for both its breadth and scope, as it provides an expansive representation of the functions, customs, traditions, and everyday life-cycle events of the music-cultures examined. The musical-genres collected range from "baby minding tunes," lullabies, clapping games, and jump rope tunes to songs for funeral rituals and wakes. Other materials collected include hymns, wedding songs, story-songs, political and social satires, chanties, work songs, and folk dance genres present on the various islands at that time.

The dissemination process involves the identification of established, operational archives on the recipient islands. In exchange for receiving copies of the entire set of materials collected on their respective islands—photographs, recordings, and field notes—archives agree to preserve them, to make them accessible to the general public, and to make their best efforts to facilitate use of the materials by researchers, scholars, educators, and students. The dissemination to the respective islands is also viewed as the preliminary step to what we hope will materialize—ongoing collaboration amongst the various entities towards the shared goals of cultural equity and continued documentation efforts.

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Three dissemination projects have taken place to date. The first, in 2005, was the dissemination of the materials collected on the sister islands of St. Kitts and Nevis, which are located in the northern part of the Leeward Islands.



**Photo 6: Fife and drum band, Brick Kiln, Nevis, 1962. Photo by Alan Lomax.**

These materials were deposited in a public archives managed by the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society, an organization whose stated mission is “to promote effective management of the historical, cultural and natural resources of the island of Nevis for the benefit of all of its people (<http://www.nevis-nhcs.org/>).” A public ceremony for the deposit and “official reception” of the Lomax materials was held at the Museum of Nevis History. The program was attended by local government officials from the Nevis Department of Culture, including the Ministers of Youth and Sport from Nevis and St. Kitts, with a keynote address given by the Premier of Nevis and presentations by representatives of ACE and the CBMR. Over twenty individuals who had been recorded in 1962 were also in attendance at this event, in addition to the local resident who accompanied Alan Lomax to all the locations on Nevis and St. Kitts where the recordings were made.

The second dissemination took place in 2006, with the deposit of the materials collected on the island of St. Lucia, which is part of the island group in the Lesser Antilles and one of the Windward Islands.



**Photo 7: Woman performing in Au Leon, St. Lucia, July, 1962.  
Photo by Alan Lomax.**

These materials were deposited at the Folk Research Centre (FRC), a non-governmental, non-profit organization established in 1973 to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of St. Lucia. According to its Web site, the FRC has a broad mandate that focuses on culture

and folk arts as “. . . a vehicle for change and to illustrate the development potential of cultural heritage particularly in the field of education and in economic development (<http://www.stluciafolk.org/about-us.html>, accessed on November 26, 2008).” A public ceremony for the formal deposit of the materials included performances by local musicians and dancers that featured examples of traditions documented by Lomax in 1962 and a PowerPoint presentation highlighting Lomax’s work in the Caribbean and in St. Lucia.

Finally, the third dissemination was made to the Médiathèque Caraïbe Bettino Lara in Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, French West Indies.



**Photo 8: Bertolie Laussane with drums, Lasserre, Morne-à-l'Eau, Guadeloupe, July 1962. Photo by Alan Lomax.**



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Because Médiathèque Caraïbe is a library whose mission is to serve the entire Caribbean region, collected materials from neighboring countries, including Martinique, Dominica, St. Barthelemy, and St. Lucia, were also deposited there.

The response to the return of these materials to the respective islands has been appreciative and overwhelmingly enthusiastic. On the island of Nevis, where a published version of some of the materials is available, it is reported that not a day goes by without hearing somewhere on the island a recording of a song collected by Alan Lomax. On St. Lucia, where cultural work is valued on a number of levels, the return of the materials is viewed as critical not only to the “national development process [of the island],” but as well to the “understanding of local cultural heritage, identity, and the processes of local creative expression (Kennedy Samuel).”

For the Association for Cultural Equity (ACE) and the Center for Black Music Research (CBMR), this repatriation project is not solely for the benefit of the individual island repositories and their local communities. Rather, it allows a rich and fulfilling opportunity, in the words of Anna Lomax Wood, Alan Lomax’s daughter, “to interact with the people of the region whose heritage it represents.” These materials represent a cultural legacy the historical value of which can not be truly calculated, and the potential worth of which is only now beginning to be fully realized. We believe that the realization of this potential is now made possible through a strategically-designed dissemination and repatriation process that rests solidly on the spirit of interconnection and cooperation.