

# FIELD RECORDINGS

## VOLS. 10 & 11 • 1933-1941

ACTUAL VOICES OF EX-SLAVES (1941)

Laura Smalley, Aunt Harriet Smith – Interviews  
with Singing/Introductions by John Henry Faulk

WASHINGTON ("LIGHTNIN'") (1933)

LESTER POWELL (1940)

JOHN HANDCOCK (1937)

**\$1200**  
TO  
**1250 DOLLARS!**  
FOR NEGROES!!

THE undersigned wishes to purchase a large lot of NEGROES for the New Orleans market. I will pay \$1200 to \$1500 for No. 1 young men, and \$800 to \$1000 for No. 1 young women. In fact I will pay more for likely

**NEGROES.**

Than any other trader in Kentucky. My office is adjoining the Broadway Hotel, on Broadway, Lexington, Ky., where I or my Agent can always be found.

LEXINGTON, JULY 2, 1862. **WM. F. TALBOTT.**



**document**

**RECORDS**

DOCD-5600-1/2

2 CDs AT THE  
PRICE OF ONE

The recordings that make up the bulk of these two CDs feature material that belongs to a genre that provided some of the most significant examinations of and challenges to the hypocrisy of the notion of an existing wholly democratic America, the slave narrative. From the first appearance of the autobiographical narrative *Adam Negro's Tryall* (1703) to the notable narratives of Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Booker T. Washington, from the pre- and post-Civil War interviews to the over 2,000 interviews conducted by southern African American Universities and the primarily white male interviewers of the Federal Writer's Project of the WPA from 1929 into the 1930s, the genre of the slave narrative has been a valuable repository of African American and American history and culture, a scathing indictment of human rapacity and greed and a tribute to the human will to survive and thrive under systematic, institutional oppression. The latter sources were mined most notably by Benjamin Botkin – who was the Project's folklore editor and worked with both John Lomax and Sterling Brown collecting ex-slave narratives – in *Lay My Burden Down* (1945) and Julius Lester in *To Be a Slave* (1968). Roscoe Lewis' work collecting slave narratives in Virginia with Sterling Brown's encouragement and guidance is also of great value.

The material included herein were made by **JOHN HENRY FAULK**, an Austin, Texas native born on August, 21, 1913. Faulk initially planned to join his father's profession and become a lawyer, but a member of his schoolteacher mother's profession raised his interest in folklore and derailed Faulk into English and history studies. Upon completion of his masters degree, Faulk began collecting Afro-American folklore for the Library of Congress, and in the course of his career taught at the University of Texas, worked in radio for CBS, was a published author (*Fear on Trial*, an account of his battle against blacklisting in the 1950s), and even appeared on the syndicated show *Hee Haw*. For these recordings, Faulk "received a portable recording machine from the Julius Rosenwald Fund" in 1942 and traveled to remote areas in Texas seeking out and finding informants who remembered slavery times and recording and/or writing down their stories. Faulk himself reports that his lack of familiarity with acetate disc recording machines caused irreparable technical problems with a number of recordings, but thankfully his recordings of **LAURA SMALLEY** and **AUNT HARRIET SMITH** survived, giving us a rare and excellent opportunity to hear first hand accounts of ex-slaves whose experiences included instances of horrifying victimization (as in Smalley's account of a whipping and the subsequent snuffing out of a pipe on the beaten slave's back), deception (as when a slave holder neglects to tell his slaves that they have been emancipated), but also courage and defiance (as when a slave mother

refuses to allow her child to be beaten – “She was gonna fight him,” Smalley laughs delightedly and proudly in the narrative). These remarkable and valuable recordings are tributes to the strength and resilience of these two ladies, as well as to the humanity and foresight of the southerner Faulk, who, though occasionally awkward or clumsy in his questionings and promptings (“Did she scream?” he asks Smalley when she describes the pipe snuffing incident, “I reckon she did,” responds Smalley), generally elicits interesting responses in unfamiliar and uncomfortable circumstances.

The recording by WASHINGTON (“LIGHTNIN’”) and a convict group was done for the Library of Congress in Sandy Point, Texas in December, 1933. “**The Grey Goose**,” the same song as the one recorded seven years later by Leadbelly and the Golden Gate Quartet in New York City, is an attractive bit of antiphonal singing. LESTER POWELL’s snippet of a lullaby, “**Go to Sleep**,” was recorded in Weirgate, Texas on Sept. 30, 1940. This sounds very much like a female voice on the recording, suggesting that either the name was mis-transcribed or the female performer had been given a traditionally male name. JOHN L. HANDCOX is described in the notes to *Songs for Political Action* as a labor poet and union organizer inspired to poetry by the work of Paul Laurence Dunbar and active in the Southern Tenant Farmer’s Union. Born on Feb. 5, 1904 in Monroe County, Arkansas, Handcox was the first recipient of the Joe Hill Award for a half a century’s support of labor causes. There is a significant amount of irony in the name as it echoes the name of a signer of the Declaration of Independence, especially since his labor protest songs were recorded by Charles Seeger and Sidney Robertson for the Archive of Folk Song in Washington, D.C., the nation’s capitol. Handcox is a cackling singer with an interesting edge to his voice, singing his songs boisterously and meaningfully – especially “**There is Mean Things**” and “**Raggedy, Raggedy**,” where he repeats in most stanzas “We don’t get nothing for our labor” – and driving home his complaints with a determination and straightforward artistry that sits quite well beside the touching and dignified ex-slave narratives with which they share their space.

*Prof. Steve Tracy*

**Sources:** *Actual Voices of Ex-Slaves*, Mark 56 Records 875, notes by John Henry Faulk; plus B. A. Botkin, *Lay My Burden Down*; Ronald D. Cohen and Dave Samuelson, Notes to *Songs for Political Action*; Godrich, Dixon and Rye, *Blues and Gospel Records*; Joanne V. Gabbin, *Sterling Brown: Building the New Black Aesthetic*; Julius Lester, *To Be a Slave*; Randall M. Miller and David Smith, *Dictionary of Afro-American Slavery*.

Copyright 1998: Document Records, Austria



**DISC 1****WASHINGTON ("LIGHTNIN")**

- |  |                                       |     |       |
|--|---------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| 1. The Gray Goose  | 182-A-LC-NW 291 (LP)                  | (A) | 3:19  |
| <b>LESTER POWELL</b>   |                                       |     |       |
| 2. Go To Sleep, Little Baby  | 3973-A-6-LC-NW 291 (LP)               | (B) | 0:36  |
| <b>ACTUAL VOICES OF EX-SLAVES</b>  |                                       |     |       |
| 3. Introduction by John Henry Faulk  | Mark 56 Records 785 (LP)              | (C) | 33:16 |
| 4. Laura Smalley - Interview,<br>Speaking About Her Slave Days<br>(Including Songs: Thunderbolt Rattling<br>[I Ain't Got Long To Stay Here], The Old<br>Ship Of Zion, I've Been Saved All Day) | 5496/5497-LC-Mark 56 Records 785 (LP) | (D) | 27:44 |

**DISC 2****ACTUAL VOICES OF EX-SLAVES - CONTINUED**

- |  |                                  |     |       |
|--|----------------------------------|-----|-------|
| 1. Laura Smalley - Interview continued   | 5498-LC-Mark 56 Records 785 (LP) | (D) | 28:40 |
| 2. Intro by J. H. Faulk/Aunt Harriet Smith -<br>Interview: Slavery Songs and Talking | 5499-LC-Mark 56 Records 785 (LP) | (E) | 29:50 |
| <b>JOHN HANDCOCK</b>   |                                  |     |       |
| 3. Raggedy, Raggedy  | 3237-A-1-LC-BFCD 15720           | (F) | 1:28  |
| 4. Going To Roll The Union On  | 3237-A-2-LC-BFCD 15720           | (F) | 0:57  |
| 5. Join The Union Tonight  | 3237-B-1-LC-BFCD 15720           | (F) | 0:41  |
| 6. No More Mourning (Oh Freedom)   | 3238-A-2-LC-BFCD 15720           | (F) | 1:03  |
| 7. There Is Mean Things Happening<br>In This Land                                    | 3238-B-LC-BFCD 15720             | (F) | 0:45  |

*NOTE: two further titles by Washington are on DOCD-5580.*

**PERSONNEL:**

- A: Washington ("Lightnin"), vcl; acc. convict group. \_\_\_\_\_ Darrington State Farm, Sandy Point, Tex., December 1933  
 B: Lester Powell, vcl; unacc. \_\_\_\_\_ Weirgate, Tex., 30 September 1940  
 C: John Henry Faulk (who made the following original field recordings), speech. \_\_\_\_\_ Unknown location and date  
 D: Laura Smalley, speech and singing;  
 John Henry Faulk and another, speech. \_\_\_\_\_ Austin, Tex., or between Hempstead and Navasota, Tex.,  
 16 November 1941  
 E: Aunt Harriet Smith, speech; John Henry Faulk, speech. \_\_\_\_\_ Austin, Tex., or between Hempstead and Navasota, Tex.,  
 16 November 1941  
 F: John Handcock (Handcox), vcl; unacc. \_\_\_\_\_ Washington, D. C., 9 March 1937

**Original recordings** from the collections of Prof. David Evans, Chris Smith, Prof. Steve Tracy.