

Long Way to Travel

As you read...

“Long Way to Travel” is part of the John and Ruby Lomax 1939 Southern States Recording Trip collection at the Library of Congress.

John Lomax was a folklorist and musicologist (person who studies music) who traveled throughout the U.S. making field recordings of American folk music. In 1939, he and his wife, Ruby Lomax, made such a trip through the southern states and recorded more than 300 performers, representing a diverse array of traditional musical styles, including ballads, blues, children’s songs, cowboy songs, fiddle tunes, field hollers, lullabies, play-party songs, religious dramas, spirituals, and work songs.

“Long Way to Travel” is a folk spiritual, part of an African American song tradition that arose during slavery. Spirituals were created by slaves using elements of African music such as clapping, drumming, repetition of lyrics, and call-and-response to express their religion and their experiences as slaves.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. We know that many of these songs were sung by people as they worked. Think about the tempo and the tone of this song. How might this song have encouraged people to continue working even though they were tired or discouraged?
2. These spirituals contained references to Christianity, but also to slavery. In what ways could the lyrics have referred to experiences of slavery?

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Lyrics

We got a long way to travel
Children we got a long way to travel, Lord
Children we got a long way to travel

Well I just want to make it in the kingdom
Well I just want to make it in the kingdom, Lord
Well I just want to make it in the kingdom
Children I got a long way to travel
Children I got a long way to travel, Lord
Children I got a long way to travel
Well I just want to make it over yonder
Well I just want to make it over yonder, Lord
Well I just want to make it over yonder
Well I got on my travelin' shoes
Well I got on my travelin' shoes, Lord
Well I got on my travelin' shoes

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