The work done in Anguilla by the respected folklorist and anthropologist Alan Lomax serves as a reminder of the importance of documenting the island’s unique culture and folklore. Lomax, a native Texan, is known mainly for audio recordings done in Haiti and prisons of the Southern US. The valuable research that he completed in the Leeward Islands, especially the smaller more remote islands, has been largely overlooked. Yet as some local residents still remember, Anguilla is one of the places that he visited in 1962.

Lomax, a self-described “song-hunter”, was an experienced fieldwork with extensive knowledge of music and a background highly relevant for research in the Caribbean, having worked in places such as Haiti and the Bahamas. He visited Anguilla and other islands of the Eastern Caribbean in order to complete a project that was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. At that time many people throughout the British West Indies were optimistic about the possibility of various Caribbean islands joining together with Jamaica to form a new democracy, the Federation of the West Indies. The Rockefeller Foundation sent him to the Caribbean with a related goal in mind. As he recalls in *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings, 1934-1997* (2005), “The enlightened presidents of Jamaica and Trinidad were working hard to bring this idea to reality. My task as a folklorist was to look for the creative cultural commonalities among the many powers in support of their great dream of unity” (p. 337).

The University of the West Indies served as a base of Lomax’s operations. Philip Sherlock, a folklorist and one of the institutions founders, supported his project. Both men shared the vision that ethnographic fieldwork was necessary in order to identify the cultural forms of each island as well as those shared across the region. They believed the documentation of music could later play an important role in regional integration.

Lomax included Anguilla in a list of destinations that he called “a chain of magic places that poured out their jeweled music.” His time in Anguilla was brief; in fact, according to Szwed (2010: 344) he covered Anguilla as well as St. Kitts and St. Bartholomew in only six days. While on the island he visited East End, South Hill, the
Valley, and the secondary school. Lomax recorded approximately twenty-five songs, ring games, interviews, rhymes, and other examples of oral culture. In addition, he took sixty-seven photos, using black and white as well as color film. These images tend to feature the same people that he recorded. Most show groups of men and women dancing and working in the fields. Others document uniformed students playing children's games.

Traveling with the forty-seven year-old Lomax was his wife Toni and daughter Anna, as well as a “recording machine” and two huge loud speakers. The stereo speakers were three feet high and required high voltage. The equipment had two purposes: first and most obviously, it was used to record folk music, verbal art, and conversations with local people. Second, the equipment was used to play back singing, rhymes, conversation, and such to the villagers that were recorded. Lomax called it “cultural feedback.” Turning again to his *Selected Writings* (2005):

> “Whenever we recorded, we played the music back to its makers, filling the [...] hamlets and village streets with the thunder of speakers, while whole neighborhoods danced in delight. My Caribbean colleagues told me that in two or three places musical practices that were on the point of dying out were revived by that one act of sonorous support” (p. 337).

Szwed (2010: 340) explains that an agreement with the University of the West Indies established guidelines for fieldwork in Anguilla and the other islands that Lomax and his family visited during the summer of 1962. It stipulated that he was to pay each singer and musician the equivalent of a day’s wages for his or her participation. While Lomax frequently listened to various performers before deciding whom and what to record, everyone received payment, prospective artists as well as those who were chosen. All of the resulting recordings were to be kept at the university and, at least initially, it was to own and manage the rights. Unfortunately, in most cases copies of the recordings were not placed in local depositories (e.g., cultural institutions, libraries, schools) until decades later.

A few pages of handwritten notes about the Anguilla visit are held in the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage in Washington DC. These mention that many of the recordings were done in the “back yard of house in a little settlement.” According to the notes, “All the best of old-fashioned folks of the neighborhood gathered, mostly middle-aged women.” Some of the conversations suggest that the absence of men had to do with the longstanding pattern of migration to Santo Domingo for work. Lomax goes on to add that the ladies “wanted drink and guaranteed payment.” He describes them as “positive, forthright, and very British in their approach to us.”

The Anguillians Lomax met spoke at length of jollification and discussed its
importance in the community. Jollification is a cooperative gathering focused on a project involving physical labor (such as clearing land, planting, and other aspects of cultivation), one similar to the combite tradition of Haiti, the “maroon” practice of Montserrat, and the “lift system” of other Leeward Islands. As they explained, these events did not include the payment of wages. Music, the jollification song in particular, stands out as a key component of these communal work events. Some of the songs had also been used by men working on ships, but Lomax was told that shantying, the local practice of singing songs while working at sea, was already rare by the time of his visit. Among the call and response shanties (sometimes written chanteys) performed for his sessions were “Captain, Where Are We Bound?” and “Man O' War in the Harbor.” These and numerous jollification tunes feature call and response. Hearing the recordings today one is likely to be struck by the sharp and clean sounds of a line of hoes hitting the ground in unison with lyrics in a coordinated and steady rhythm.

The work of linguist Peter Roberts (1997) assists in situating Anguilla's work songs in terms of a labor market that historically denied persons of African ancestry access to formal education. Roberts identifies this type of song as the only major feature of Afro-Caribbean people that may have retained some influence from African literary sources (p. 68). He contextualizes the evolution of the work song and its use of call and response diachronically, suggesting that it emerged in an oppressive situation that "bonded the slaves into a working unit and a social group" (p. 40). According to his analysis, the early emergence of songs and music in the slave societies of the British Caribbean promoted a spirit of comradeship and empathy within a communal tradition. This assertion complicates – and exists in tension with – the idea that the creation of Creole languages and distinctive Afro-Caribbean cultures necessarily signals a break with African heritages.

Contemporary listeners are likely to be impressed and moved by the gentle humor and kindness evident in the laughter, explanations, and conversations of those who performed for Lomax. The beauty and artfulness of the recordings are by no means limited to the performance of song, as voices mix with stories, improvisation, fun, and sharing. Clearly Lomax did more than simply record talking about traditional ways of life, he contemplated and documented events in which people came together in the spirit of community. Perhaps this helps explain why he describes jollification as "warm in the hearts of the people" even when Anguilla's residents were conscious of the fact that it was taking place less frequently than it had in previous years.

The locals Lomax met gave three reasons for the decline of jollification. First, they pointed out that the young people were lazy and did not “want to work too hard.” Another factor, a reminder that widespread wage labor was a relatively new phenomenon on the island, was that people wanted payment for work. They had become less willing to labor without compensation, but describe widespread payment
of wages as a relatively new phenomenon. Finally, women reported that substantial numbers of men were going off the island to work, leaving them to carry on by themselves. It should be noted, however, that some of these same women pointed out that they were independent and highly capable of taking care of themselves. When Lomax asked how they “manage[d] to get by”, they indicated that they were capable of taking care of their families and performing hard physical work even when their husbands were away.

Lomax’s notes also mention a group that he describes as a “raffish, merry crowd of ladies”, that he recorded one morning in “the green meadow beside the school where the children play during recess.” He indicates about thirty girls, mostly teenagers, were present that day and notes a lot of teacher supervision. Another reminder that musical culture is fluid rather than static, Lomax observes that the teachers knew slightly different versions of the games that the children played. The liveliest of the songs that were recorded that day are those done for skipping rope. Later in life Lomax revisited the memory of this Anguilla morning when he referred to children's voices as “among the richest veins” of the region's music. He wrote, “in spite of the rapid pour of short notes and many syllables that characterized their peppery songs, every syllable was as clear as a drop of water on a palm leaf” (2002: 126).

The activities of youth were documented by Lomax on all of the islands he visited. One of the most popular games he recorded in Anguilla was “There's A Brown Girl in the Ring.” He noted that the version children sang was distinct from that of Trinidad. This classic ring game positions one dancer in the center of a circle. The dancer “shows the motion” and then chooses another participant who briefly dances and then replaces the player in the center. Lomax saw children’s games as significant for their role in nurturing community and introducing children to social life. Games, he believed, transmitted messages about morality and fairness as well as ideas about Standard English, gender, and local identity. Years after the visit, Lomax described “Brown Girl in the Ring” and other games as experiences that prepared youth for courtship, referring to them as “theater in which children can rehearse adult behavior in a socially approved situation” (Lomax et al., 1997: 8).

Lomax and locals discuss two additional topics that are important to Anguilla's music and folklore: the local string band and the beloved Judge Gumbs, an important community figure often remembered as a prophet and drummer. The string band members remarked that they had never tuned as much as they did the day that they recorded. Lomax refers to the music of the string band that performed for him as “a good version” and observes that people frequently danced to string band music in the 1960s. Locals said that Anguillian styles had been influenced by music from Cuba and Santo Domingo. It is clear, however, that the men fused Spanish Caribbean styles with local aesthetics and circumstances. In one of the interviews Florie Brooks explains that string band music was used for a variety of events, including maypole dances.
As mentioned above, Lomax's Smithsonian notes include details about the life of Mr. Judge Gumbs. People spoke of Gumbs' ability to accurately foresee hurricanes, murders, and other catastrophes (e.g., gales, cyclones, plane crashes, illnesses). Lomax appears to have been initially skeptical about Mr. Gumbs and the stories he heard about clairvoyance and predictions. However, once he met with Mr. Gumbs he was impressed, found him to be sincere, and believed all that had been reported.

In an eleven-minute conversation with Lomax, Gumbs speaks of "things being revealed to him" through a voice and a responsibility to "tell them." He mentions the ability to heal through the laying on of hands, citing the Gospel of Matthew to substantiate his claims that prophecy and curing the sick were Christian actions. Lomax explains that Mr. Judge Gumbs and his wife are said to have become involved with an evangelical group in Cuba. According to Mr. Gumbs, it was there that God came to him and gave him prophetic and musical gifts that he called "privileges." He claimed that the gift of prophecy came to him on April 3, 1926. He returned to Anguilla from Cuba the following year.

Following the interview and other interactions with Gumbs, Lomax wrote:

"We were told that Anguilla had a drummer and a prophet. They turned out to be the same man, a Mr. Gumbs [...]. Sometimes God speaks to him, bent over in his field. Gumbs straightens up, listens, goes to his house, takes his big bass drums, and goes from crossroad to crossroad, calling the people together. When they have assembled he warns of something that God has in store for them."

The music and cultural feedback that apparently accompanied it raised some eyebrows that summer. In his notes from the field, Lomax explains that one session went on late into the night and "horrified the team of missionaries that had flown in from a Puerto Rico religious radio station." He offers a few more details about the commotion that resulted from having Anguilla's traditions front and center, stating that the missionaries, financed by "American money" wanted "to bring the Bible message to the already devout Anguillians." Lomax writes that the missionaries believed the recordings, singing, and dancing were "somehow sabotaging their image."

When the recordings described above are considered alongside other scholarly work on Anguilla's folklore, it is clear that they constitute one of the most substantial contributions to the documentation of Anguilla's culture to date. His work has led to more awareness about the uniqueness and value of local culture throughout the Leewards, primarily internationally but also locally. While Lomax's scholarship has gained more attention in recent years, its potential as an innovative educational resource appropriate for classrooms and cultural programming remains largely untapped. Bacchus (2006: 248) suggests that the transmission of knowledge about
cultural heritage and folklore is important given that it can help provide local populations a sense of rootedness in their society and encourage social consensus and cohesion across different groups. In a study of links between education and social change in the Caribbean's ex-British colonies (a group in which he includes Anguilla), he argues that it should form part of the official and "hidden" curricula of a given school or educational system. Bacchus points out that the latter includes indirect lessons that students learn from teacher attitudes toward given topics (including history, race, and culture), interactions between native-born groups and immigrants, and the various organizations with which student bodies and administrators formally associate.

The relationships between ideas about social change and local culture that Bacchus identifies resonate with some of Lomax's interests in the social functions of folklore and music, as well as the larger Rockefeller project. Music, Lomax believed, was a window onto larger social psychological phenomena that patterned across human societies. While both scholars comment on socioeconomic stratification, behavioral norms, and historical influences, Bacchus, writing more recently, takes a stronger position concerning the insights offered by a view of social formations as the result of consecutive sequences of human intervention. His perspective is useful because it underscores that the development of any educational materials as well as the decision not to educate certain social groups are both best understood as the product of numerous choices. Bacchus effectively challenges the assertion that it is natural or moral to avoid debate about the contemporary significance of traditional cultural forms and their treatment by state institutions. This prompts questions about the contemporary tendency to separate music and folklore from historical realities such as colonialism, African enslavement, and socioeconomic hierarchy. Considering how each of these relates to the Lomax project — and the cultural forms it documents — suggests that greater awareness about the historical past (and indirectly, questions about certain contemporary preferences for ignorance) should inform discussions of what is beneficial, just, and worthy of being inherited by future generations of Caribbean youth.

In March 2010 the Anguilla Library Services sponsored and organized "Snapshots of Anguilla's Past", an evening highlighting the music and other materials in the Lomax collection. A formal presentation focused on the cultural feedback of a generation that has been forgotten by many youth. In the question and answer session that followed, members of the audience drew attention to the importance of passing on knowledge about Anguilla's folklore to the new generations. Keenly aware of the significance of this legacy, a few individuals in attendance insisted that the Department of Education should make use of the materials at the same time that it involved students in documenting the cultural practices of the early twenty-first century. An educator who was presented pointed out that Lomax's work could be used in teacher training, calling
it “a set of living treasures” that should be taken advantage of by local teachers as well as those from abroad. Some who attended the evening’s event were so inspired that they even demonstrated songs and games featured in the recordings. The event was followed in July with a Children’s Library Annual Summer Program (CLASP) organized around the theme Jollification Time (see http://clasp2010.weebly.com). For two weeks children ages five to twelve learned about the traditions and stories at the center of Lomax’s research. Teachers memorized songs from his recordings in order to teach them to CLASP participants. The children who participated in the program were divided into three groups: Johnny Cakes, Shantees, and Jollies. Each group’s activities cultivated a personal relationship with the past among CLASP students, allowing them to learn songs and games documented in the 1962 collection. Participants completed arts and crafts projects (including the making of guitars), learned songs, and heard traditional stories. In the evenings some conducted informal interviews about jollification with grandparents and other community members, reporting their findings to the larger group the following day. A mural featuring a Lomax photo of men singing while using hoes to chop ground was painted on an outside wall in the front of the library. Finally, on the afternoon of the last day, the library sponsored a jollification. Hundreds of people attended, joining in a maypole dance, Brown Girl in the Ring, and other festivities. Events such as CLASP 2010 underscore ways in which people can continue to benefit from the cooperation that took place between local culture-bearers and Lomax almost five decades ago.

REFERENCES


