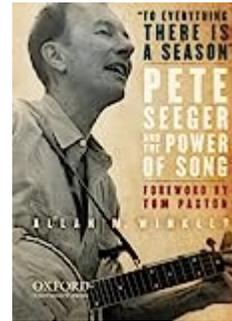




Allan M. Winkler. *To Everything There Is a Season: Pete Seeger and the Power of Song.* New Narratives in American History Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Illustrations, CD. 223 pp. \$23.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-532482-2.



Reviewed by Nicole Frisone (University of Minnesota)

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Commissioned by Jessica Kovler (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, The City University of New York)

Where Have All the Flowers Gone?

Upon hearing the twang of the banjo, the average American mind might conjure images of the bizarre hillbillies in the infamous film *Deliverance* (1972), but historian Allan M. Winkler forgoes this association in his recent work *To Everything There is a Season*. Pete Seeger, according to Winkler, was the Johnny Appleseed of mid-century American folk music as he traveled the country and later internationally, with guitar and banjo in tow, in his simple desire to make the world a better place through music, one hootenanny at a time. *To Everything There is a Season* is not a personal, intimate biography of Seeger by any stretch of the imagination. His early life remains relatively untouched, except for some details about his father and musical background as well as such information as the fact that his parents were divorced and the frequently repeated fact that Seeger attended Harvard. The book focuses more on Seeger's politics, musical career, songs, and legacy with chapters devoted to union and labor songs, civil rights songs, Vietnam, and his time as a member of the Weavers musical group.

When historians write monographs, should there be

an imperative to have some kind of overarching meaning and analysis, that proverbial "big issue"? Seeger's career presents a bounty of possible topics for further inquiry and interrogation that fall within the category of "big issues," many of which deal with race. Singing in front of unions in the 1930s and 1940s (one of his most famous songs, in fact, "If I Had a Hammer," was a song written in support of the progressive movement), did Seeger ever address segregation and the racial politics of the union? Winkler writes that Seeger, singing to unions, "wanted to encourage them to sing songs, new and old, that would make them feel part of an America that valued their contributions," and yet he does not address the racial division and exclusion that existed in some unions at the time (p. 26).

Seeger's career and use of songs by famed black musician Lead Belly begs additional questions about race and music of celebrities in mid-century America. In performing and using such songs as "Goodnight, Irene" when he played with the Weavers, Seeger was engaging in a practice of borrowing music from black musi-

cians; music that would then be popularized not by the black musician but by a white one. Even in describing the music of the civil rights movement, it is whites, such as Seeger, who interpret and provide the soundtrack for a black movement, taking gospel hymns and reworking them into the now famous "We Shall Overcome." The complex relationship between white and black musicians and how this translated into the world of folk music remains untouched by Winkler, which was particularly disappointing.

"Wearing overalls in an awkward effort to identify with the working class, Seeger at first had a hard time relating to the well dressed Lead Belley," writes Winkler (p. 15). This awkward scene raises additional questions about Seeger's pursuit of becoming one with the working class he so admired and the meaning and pursuit of "authenticity." Seeger told Winkler he was "eager to change" and become part of the working class, underdog, downtrodden people of America (p. 21). How Seeger formed these images of the oppressed worker in overalls and his pursuit of what seems to be some form of authenticity remains a fascinating but also unexamined aspect of his life.

Winkler does not develop these themes and does not divert from his tightly held course: telling the story of Seeger and his songs. In many ways, the lack of critical analysis of Seeger's career and outside voices almost makes this monograph read like extended liner notes since the hardcover edition includes a CD with songs and photographs. Published by Oxford University Press, it seems distinctly unacademic in this sense. The sources contain in no small part Winkler's own personal interviews of Seeger and material provided by his family.

The benefit of this relationship, though, shows in this

work. *To Everything a Season* provides ample illustrations and reproductions of posters, should the prospective reader ever wonder what a young Seeger looked like in a loincloth. An additional benefit is the inclusion of many of the songs that Winkler discusses, such as "If I Had a Hammer" and "Where Have All the Flowers Gone." One of the greatest benefits of the work is that Winkler seems completely uninhibited by the usual copyright issues: he includes songs, photographs, posters, and other documents in his work that other authors may only dream about. But that is what folk music is at its core: bringing people together through song. Seeger frequently "traded" songs with the likes of Peter, Paul, and Mary; John Denver; and other groups, such as the Kingston Trio. Seeger and his wife appear to have donated much of the material, and according to the endnotes, Winkler completed extensive interviews with Seeger. The material for this book comes largely from this source.

For those interested more generally in mid-century American folk music, this work would perhaps not be the best alternative; Seeger is featured front and center as the lone star. Other artists are mentioned only in their relation to him, with even Bob Dylan taking a very brief supporting role. Other luminaries of 1950s and 1960s folk music, such as Joan Baez, Odetta, Phil Ochs, or even the Mamas and the Papas, are also mentioned only in passing, if at all.

The work is clear, concise, and well written, appropriate for undergraduates or even high school students. The lack of context, though, makes the work primarily an ode to Seeger, much in the same manner as Bob Spitz's work *The Beatles: The Biography* (2005). For Seeger fans, it will be appreciated and most likely enjoyed, while leaving younger readers thinking, "Oh wow, that song we sang by the campfire was a Seeger song?"

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