



Songs of the American Labor Movement

Materials related to “Songs of the American Labor Movement” in the collections of the Center for Popular Music, Middle Tennessee State University.

Compiled by: Grace Holland, Jan-March 2025

What is the American Labor Movement?

The American Labor Movement is a collection of various labor rights campaigns throughout the nation’s history. Though trade unions began to emerge in the late 1700s, they were largely decentralized and spread apart. The creation of the Mechanics’ Union of Trade Associations in Philadelphia in 1827 is when centralized unions began uniting all the smaller craft unions within a single city. Later, in 1852, the creation of the International Typographical Union led to national unions bringing together local unions of the same trade from across the United States. The labor movement, and Unions, in the United States became a huge political force and have remained relevant through subsequent decades.

Why does Labor Movement Research Matter?

Research on the Labor Movement in the United States is important because it is a movement that not only helped to implement many of the labor laws and workplace regulations that we have today, but also a movement that remains culturally relevant even today. The Labor Movement is also responsible for a large discography of music both about the movement itself and about the various protest efforts that have occurred within the larger movement over time.

What can this Labor Movement research guide do for me?

This guide will provide a few ways and resources to help you understand the ways that the Labor Movement can frame your historical research. The types of primary and secondary sources included in this guide are sheet music, song broadsides, songbooks, sound recordings, and secondary source books.

Additional research materials are included at the end of this research guide. These materials include outside databases, online repositories, and online exhibits with information about the Labor Movement in the United States to help broaden your understanding and research.

“How do I search for these primary source materials?”

Most of these primary source materials are searchable through the Center’s website. Sound recordings can be searched in the Center’s Reading Room through the in-house database.

To search for these materials online, visit the CPM’s website. The catalog will search for materials in the following collection categories: Manuscript Collections, Rare Books, and Scores; Song Broad sides (which are inexpensive printed sheets of paper that normally only contain the lyrics to one or more songs); Posters, Playbills, and Programs; trade Catalogs, Photographs; and Periodicals: Secondary Collection.

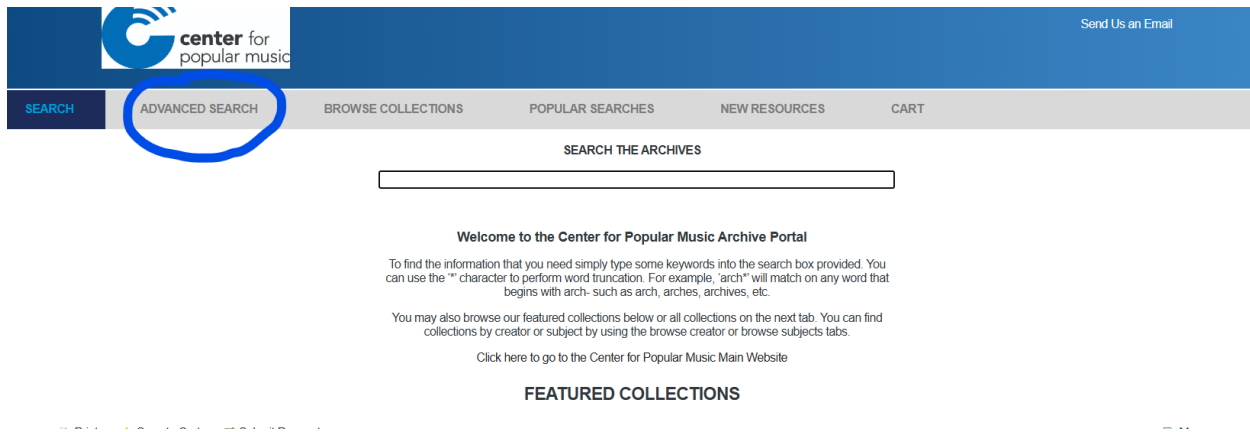
To search the materials in the Center’s archive, click on “Archive Collection Search.”

Center for Popular Music



You can search for specific titles, songs, or artists in Basic Search or Advanced Search. You can examine secondary source materials before searching for primary sources if you do not have any specific names in mind. Terms such as **fill in later with appropriate terms for this search.**

To limit your search to a particular field or type of material, click on the Advanced Search link. You can limit your search by title, dates, song lyrics, song titles, collections, creators, authors, performers, and many other different specifications.



At the Center (in-house searching only):

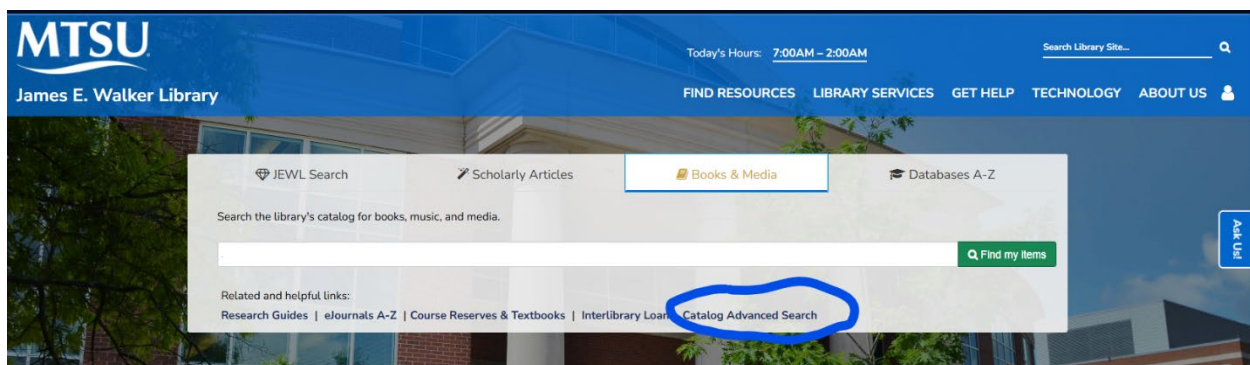
To search for Sound Recordings, please visit the Center and use out in-house database or email the Center at popular.music@mtsu.edu

Some photographic and manuscript materials also require staff assistance to locate. Please contact **Archivist** with any questions.

“What secondary source materials do you have?”

To search for secondary Source Materials available in the Center’s Reading Room—go to MTSU’s Walker Library catalog and use search terms like **fill in with appropriate search terms**.

If you are only interested in materials held at the CPM, click on “Catalog Advanced Search” at the bottom of the search box.



Then select “Center for Popular Music” under the “Collection” menu.

Advanced Search

Search for:	Match:
<input type="text"/>	ALL Terms
<input type="text"/>	All Fields
<input type="text"/>	All Fields
<input type="text"/>	All Fields

[Add Search Field](#)

[Add Search Group](#)

Find

Clear

Limit To

Call Number:	Language:	Format:	Collection:
A - General Works	Afrikaans	Article	Center for Popular Music
B - Philosophy, Psychology	Akkadian	Audio	Concordium Collection
C - Historical Sciences	Albanian	Audio Disc	Gore Research Center
D - World History	Algonquian	Blu-ray Disc	LP Collection
E - United States History	Amharic	Book	Main Collection
F - General American History	Ancient Egyptian	Book Chapter	Media Collection
G - Geography, Anthropology	Ancient Greek	Cassette	Music Collection
H - Social Science	Arabic	Conference Proceeding	On Exhibit
J - Political Science	Aramaic	Database	Periodicals
K - Law	Armenian	Data Set	Reference

Search Tips

[Help with Advanced Search](#)

[Help with Search Operators](#)

US Labor Movement through Popular Music Bibliography

Primary Sources

Broadsides

Chaplin, Ralph. *Solidarity Forever*. Chicago, IL: Socialist Party of America, 1933. | Call Number: 005632-BROAD

Don't Put the Poor Workingman Down. New York, NY: H.J. Wehman and F.W. Helmick, 1877 | Call Number: 001753-BROAD

McGlennon, Felix. *I've Worked Eight Hours This Day*. Philadelphia, PA: A.W. Auner, 1850-1900. | Call Number: 000315-BROAD

We'll Not Be Fools Any More. Chicago, IL: Socialist Party of America, 1933. | Call Number: 005634-BROAD

Rare Books

Winds of the People. Philadelphia, PA: privately published, 1979. | Call Number: SP-080612

62 Folk Song Hit Paraders: The Hootenanny Book. New York, NY: Hansen Publications, 1965. | Call Number: SP-042676

The People's Songbook (foreword by Alan Lomax, preface by B.A. Botkin). New York, NY: People's Artists, 1956, c.1948. | Call Number: SP-041846

Vincent, Leopold. *Alliance Songster: A Collection of Labor and Comic Songs for the use of Grange, Alliance, and Debating Clubs*. Winfield, KS: H. & L. Vincent, 1891. | Call Number: SP-085345

Kerr, Charles H. *Socialist Songs with Music—compiled by Charles H. Kerr*. Chicago, IL: no publisher listed, 1902. | Call Number: SP-041533

Lawrence, B.M. *The National Greenback Labor Songster—containing original, practical, patriotic, progressive, and stirring songs, adapted to the most popular airs*. New York, NY: D.M. Bennett Liberal and Scientific Publishing House, 1878. | Call Number: SP-085754

The Universal Songster: containing a choice collection of the most fashionable songs. Newark, NJ: Benjamin Olds, 1834. | Call Number: SP-085294

Orr, James L. *Grange melodies published by the National Grange of patrons of husbandry for use in the granges of the United States*. Philadelphia, PA: Geo S. Ferguson Co, 1914. | Call Number: SP-060235

*also available, 1911 publication | Call Number: SP-060303

Songs for the Grange: Set to Music and Dedicated to the Order of Patrons of Husbandry in the United States. Philadelphia, PA: J.A. Wagenseller, 1873. | Call Number: SP-040493

*also available, 1874 publication | Call Number: SP-040494

Johnson, J.C. *The Palace of Industry: A Juvenile oratorio, illustrative of the poetry of labor, with additional songs*. Boston, MA: S. Brainard, 1851. | Call Number: SP-060244

*also available, 1859 publication | Call Number: SP-060224

Steelworker's Song Book. Pittsburg, PA: United Steelworkers of America/The Department of Education | Call Number: SP-086050

Sheet Music

Bliss, P.P. *Hold the Fort*. S. Brainard's Songs, 1870. | Call Number: 001961-BYULG

Axt, William and Edward Turkisher, arr. *The Toilers: to depict the action of heavy workers, toiling laborers, miners, etc.* New York, NY: Robbins-Engel In., 1926. | Call Number: 001106-ORCHS

Commercial Sound Recordings

Seeger, Pete. *Songs of Struggle and Protest (1930-1950)*. New York City: Folkways Records, 1964. | Call Number: FH 5233 Folkways Records

Seeger, Pete. *Carry it On*. Chicago, IL: Flying Fish, 1986. | Call Number: FF 104 Flying Fish

Seeger, Pete. *Dangerous Songs!*? New York: Columbia, 1960s. | Call Number: CL 2503 Columbia

Seeger, Pete. *Rainbow Quest*. New York City: Folkways Records, 1960. | Call Number: FA 2454 Folkways Records

Entertainment Workers IU630 I.W.W. *Rebel Voices: Songs of the Industrial Workers of the World*. Chicago, IL: Flying Fish Records, 1987. | Call Number: 484 Flying Fish

Collins, Judy. *Bread and Roses*. Los Angeles: Elektra, 1976. | Call Number: 7E-1076 Elektra

Phillips, Utah. *We Have Fed You All a Thousand Years*. North Ferrisburg, VT: Philo Records, 1984. | Call Number: PH 1076 Philo

Romaine, Anne. *Take a Stand*. Chicago, IL: Flying Fish, 1985. | Call Number: FF 323 Flying Fish

The Silver Years. Hollywood, CA: Capitol (undated). | Call Number: SNP 91017 Capitol

The Freedom Singers (SNCC). *We Shall Overcome*. Chicago: Mercury, 1964. | Call Number: MG-20879 Mercury

Berkeley, Roy. *Songs of the FDR Years*. Shaftsbury, VT: Longview, 1979. | Call Number: L241 Longview

Seeger, Mike. *Tipple, Loom & Rail*. New York City: Folkways Records, 1966. | Call Number: FH 5273 Folkways Records

Secondary Sources

Books

Cohen, Ronald D. *Work and Sing: A History of Occupational and Labor Union Songs in the United States*. Crockett, CA: Carquinez Press, 2010. | Call Number: ML3780.C53 2010

Glazer, Joe. *Labor's Troubadour*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002. | Call Number: ML420. G53 2002

Lomax, Alan. *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People: American Folk Songs of the Depression and the Labor Movement of the 1930s*. New York: Oak Publications, 1967. | Call Number: M 1977. L3 H3 1967

Reuss, Richard A. *Songs of American Labor, Industrialization, and the Urban Work Experience: A Discography*. Ann Arbor, MI: Program on Workers Culture, Labor Studies Center, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of Michigan, 1983. | Call Number: ML156.4. L2 R49 1983

Sullivan, James. *Which Side Are You On? 20th Century American History in 100 Protest Songs*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019. | Call Number: ML3917.U6 S85 2019

More Archival Resources

Other Databases and Online Repositories:

[Labor Music Database](#)

[Oberlin College Library Union Music Collection](#)

[Library of Congress: Songs of Unionization, Labor Strikes, Child Labor](#)

[Library of Congress: Organized Labor Since the 19th Century](#)