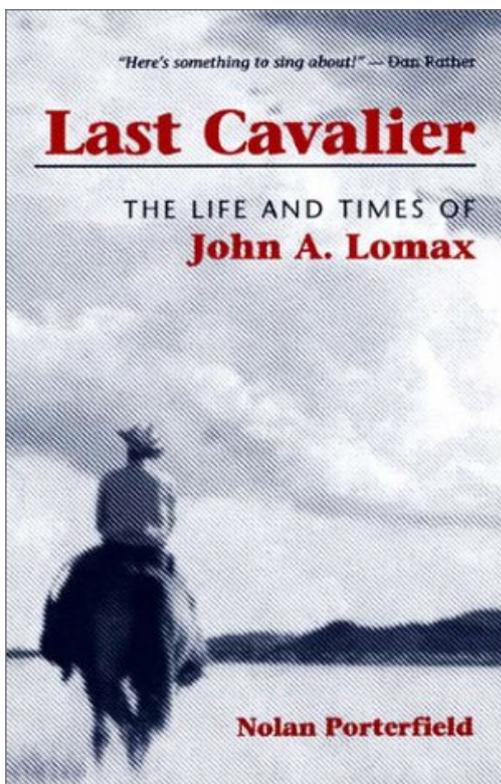


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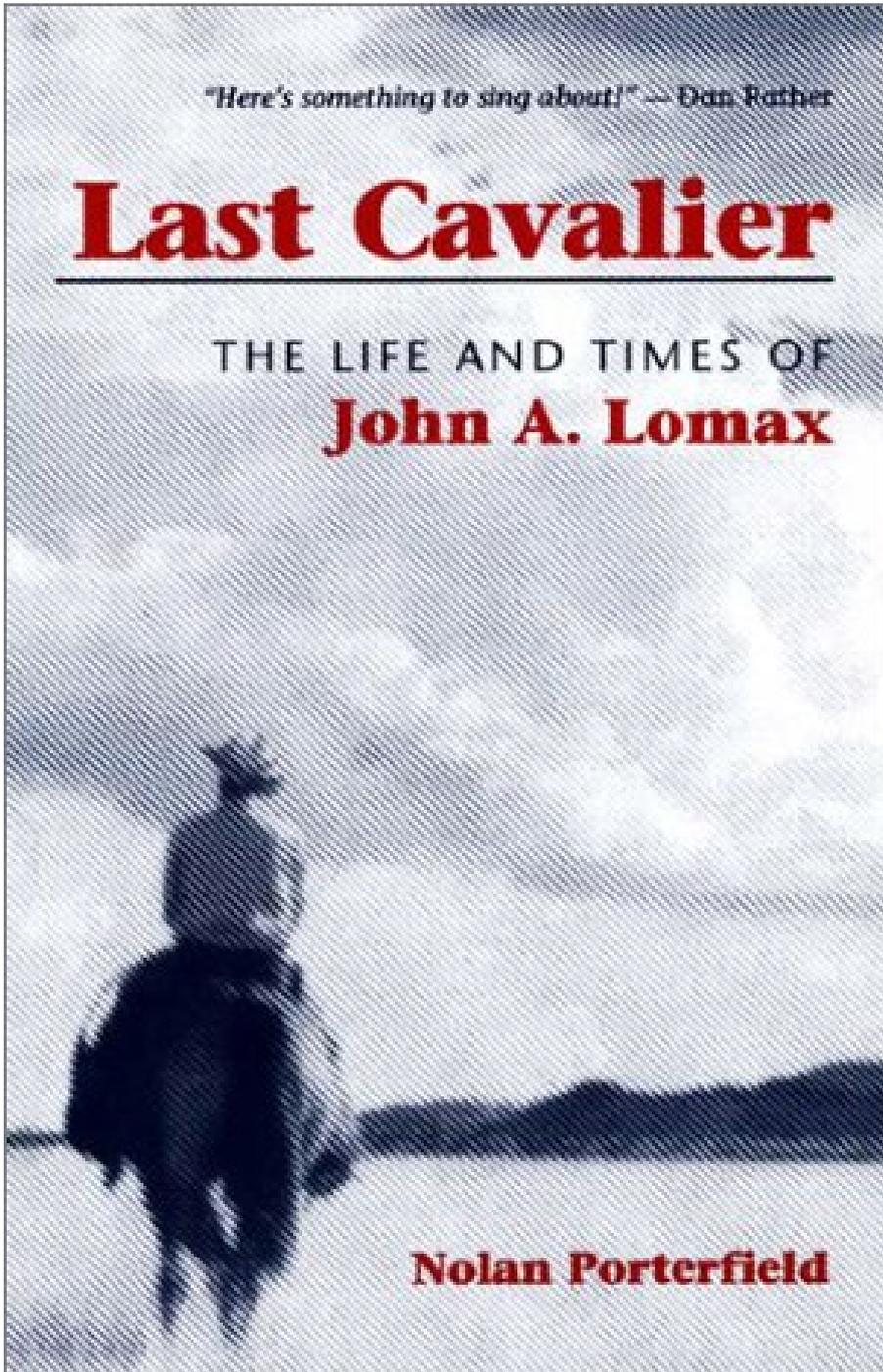
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"Here's something to sing about!" -- Dan Rather

Last Cavalier

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF
John A. Lomax



Nolan Porterfield

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From Booklist

John A. Lomax may be most famous for getting the legendary songster Leadbelly out of prison in Louisiana. Trouble is, he didn't do it, though he did what he could to keep the myth that he did current, as Porterfield shows in his exhaustive examination of a unique and energetic man. Lomax said he began collecting cowboy songs as a child, and collecting, transcribing, and recording folk music was indeed his life's labor. He was most famously associated with Leadbelly, employing him as driver and assistant while he combed the South and Southwest, searching out previously unknown music and musicians. Lauded now for recording folk musicians for the Library of Congress, he also interacted crucially with the popular media of his day. Giving great attention to details and documentation, Porterfield tracks down the discrepancies between the myth of Lomax the noble researcher and the facts. The resulting biography engagingly portrays a man who, despite or maybe because of the mythmaking, contributed almost incredibly to American cultural history and lived a life enviable in its zeal for discovery. Mike Tribby

From Kirkus Reviews

Scholarly biography of a colorful folklorist who was equal parts academic, businessman, and hustler. Best known for spending much of the last 16 years of his life roaming the rural landscape for singers--from cowboys to convicts--who would record their folk songs, John Lomax (1867-1948) patched together a long career by working hard and exploiting his good-old-boy Texas persona and his old-boy university network with equal skill. First encouraged in his interest in folk music by his mentors at Harvard, Lomax solicited and collected songs from newspaper editors, educators, friends, and local officials while holding various positions at Texas A&M and the University of Texas. At both institutions he plunged into major squabbles, which are reported here with a completeness endearing only to academics. Twice, when the ivy tower became too hot, Lomax's friends got him into business, where he sold bonds with shrewdness and success. The Great Depression and ill health turned Lomax's interests back to music; he hit the road to deliver lectures and to record the tunes that so substantially increased the holdings of the Library of Congress's Archive of American Folk Song. Even this venture wasn't free of contention, particularly when ex-convict Huddie Ledbetter, an effective singer known as Leadbelly who found fame with Lomax's help, suspected the "Big Boss" was getting the better part of their business deal. Porterfield, an award-winning biographer and novelist, is clearly amused by his subject, but the resulting work is as heavy on detail as it is light on insight. It would have been better, for instance, to know why Porterfield claims, despite evidence to the contrary, that

young Lomax was not "rigidly conservative" than what he ate at a particular diner. An unblinking portrait of Lomax's eccentricities, his outspokenness, and his prejudices--including racism--keep this from dissolving into standard academic fare. (25 illustrations, not seen) -- Copyright ©1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

"A stunningly fair and objective portrait. Analytical, without being judgmental, Porterfield allows the 'facts' of Lomax's story to unfold themselves with narrative eloquence and perceptive grace." -- Ron Pen, College Music Symposium "One of the most brilliant yet overlooked American culture volumes of recent vintage." -- San Francisco Examiner "Here's something to sing about! ... Nolan Porterfield has written an admirable study of one of America's earliest and greatest cultural heroes. Last Cavalier reveals the real man to whom we owe a lasting debt." -- Dan Rather "More than anyone else, John Lomax was responsible for introducing on a national scale America's folk voices. He collected songs from school children and saloon keepers, buffalo hunters and ranch hands. He introduced 'Home on the Range' in a Louisiana prison to the legendary songster Leadbelly. Historian Nolan Porterfield masterfully explores Lomax's long life: his complexity, industriousness, and temperament. Last Cavalier, a work of great understanding, chronicles America's folksong pioneer." -- Stephen Wade, creator of Banjo Dancing and On the Way Home "As long as we remember songs like 'Home on the Range' and 'Whoopie Ti Yi Yo,' the spirit of the West will live on in our hearts. Porterfield's illuminating and entertaining biography is a three-dimensional, warts-and-all look at the man we have to thank for it." -- Jesse Sublett, Southwestern Historical Quarterly "Portrays a man ... who contributed almost incredibly to American cultural history and lived a life enviable in its zeal for discovery." -- Booklist

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