



RADIO STATION WNEW'S STORY OF SELMA

WITH LEN CHANDLER, PETE SEEGER
AND THE FREEDOM VOICES

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PETE: It was the clearest example to me of how Folk Music is made up. . . That I could probably ask for. I've heard arguments between Professors on how do you suppose the old ballads were composed or cowboy songs or sailor songs. But I feel I've seen it happen now. What it is-- one person gets an idea for a song-- usually borrowing an old tune-- changing around the words and then if it's a good idea, it'll be picked up by others and new verses added to it. . . until after a while you naturally can't say who composed the song. Right square in front of me I could see people making up verses. . . I'd go around afterward and say, "What are the verses to this song, "Oh, Wallace," you're singing?" And they look at me kind of perplexed and say, "The verses? There are no verses. . . you just make them up." What they meant is that I should have asked for some verses. Soon as I did that I got dozens of verses from them. "Hold On," is a typical example. It used to be:

Mmmm, I got my hand on the gospel plow
I wouldn't take nothin' for my journey now
Keep your hand on the plow. .
Hold On, Hold On.

Well, I don't know exactly who it was-- I think-- I was told it was a woman in Georgia who first thought of changing:

Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold On, Hold On

But since a few years ago, when this version got going around, why there've been dozens-- maybe hundreds of verses. . .

The only thing that-ah we did wrong,
Was staying in the wilderness too long
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on
Hold on, hold on
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

The only thing that we did right
Was the day we begun to fight
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on -- hold on---

And so on. . . you see it's an easy form. You only need to think of two short lines that rhyme with each other and you got. . . the whole crowd can join in on this chorus. . .

CHORUS: Hold on, Hold on
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

NARR: There were other songs too, that found themselves with new words-- like "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho."
In Selma the police had blocked the road in front of Brown's Chapel. . . strung a rope across it. . .

We've got a rope that's a Berlin Wall
A Berlin Wall, A Berlin Wall,
Well, we've got a rope that's a Berlin Wall
In Selma Alabama

Well, we've got a rope that's a Berlin Wall
A Berlin Wall, Oh Lord, a Berlin Wall,
We've got a rope that's a Berlin Wall
In Selma, Alabama

Well, hate is the thing that'll build that Wall
Build that Wall, Build that Wall,
Hate is the thing that built that Wall
In Selma, Alabama.

Well, Ol' George Wallace helped build that
Wall
Build that Wall, build that Wall
Old George Wallace built that Wall
In Selma, Alabama

Well, we're gonna stay here til it falls
Til it falls, til it falls
We're gonna stay here til it falls
In Selma, Alabama

Well, love is the thing that'll make it fall
Make it fall, make it fall,
Love is the thing that'll make it fall
In Selma, Alabama.

Well, we've got a rope that's a Berlin Wall
A Berlin Wall, a Berlin Wall
Well, we've got a rope that's a Berlin Wall
In Selma, Alabama. In Selma, Alabama.
In Selma, Alabama.

PETE: There are batches of young women-- some of them teenage girls-- right in back of where my wife and I were walking. . They came out with a couple of verses that gave me pause to think and I realized that this March had something unique in the whole world. Anybody in America that thought that this March was full of a bunch of angry people-- you know-- shouting out malignant thoughts and . . . on the contrary it was one of the most happy. . . purely joyful thing you could imagine. This is what these girls were singing. . .

I love everybody in my heart
I love everybody in my heart
I love everybody, I love everybody
Well, I love everybody in my heart.

NARR: And on Route 80;

CROWD: (Noises up and under for:)

. in my heart
There's no two ways about him
There's no two ways about him
In my heart.

You can't make me doubt him
You can't make me doubt him
You can't make me doubt him in my heart
You can't make me doubt him,
You can't make me doubt him
You can't make me doubt him in my heart

Feel that fire burning,
Feel that fire burning,
Feel that fire burning in my heart
I feel that fire burning
I feel that fire burning
I feel that fire burning in my heart.

Well, I love everybody
I love everybody,
I love everybody in my heart
I love everybody,
I love everybody
I love everybody in my heart

GROUP: Well, you can't make me doubt it in my heart. .
You can't make me doubt it in my heart
You can't make me doubt it
You can't make me doubt it
In my heart.

I feel the spirit burning
I feel the spirit burning
I feel the spirit burning in my heart
I feel the spirit burning,
I feel the spirit burning
I feel the spirit burning in my heart

Oh, I love everybody,
I love everybody
I love everybody in my heart.
Oh, I love everybody
I love everybody,
I love everybody in my heart

NARR: Len Chandler recalls the scene in Alabama. . .
LEN: When we were marching along and some old Army guys were calling cadence-- Hup-hip to your left

To your left, right left,
Left, left. . .

And so I started thinking that left isn't a thing that we want to get. I mean we want to keep up. . . we want to go along. . . we want to go to Montgomery which is not getting left. And as ah, right is an affirmative statement also, and so I said why don't we accent on the right foot. And so a-right, right, and then you can put together verses and the answers from the group would be right-right. . . right. . . And so I just started singing:

Pick 'em up and lay 'em down
Right. Right.
Pick 'em up and lay 'em down
Right. Right.
Pick 'em up and lay 'em down
Right. Right.
And all the way from Selma town
Right. Right.
Oh, the mud sure was deep
Right. Right.
Oh, the hills sure was steep
Right. Right.
Lord I didn't get much sleep
Right. Right.
That's why we're moving in a creep
Right. Right.
We made some level ground
Right. Right.
Now we're movin' on down
Right. Right.
Did the rain come down?
Right. Right.
Lord I thought I woulda drowned
Right. Right.
But I thought of Sheriff Jim
Right. Right.
I thought of Sheriff Jim
Right. Right.
I thought of Sheriff Jim
Right. Right.
Somethin' said Boy you better swim
Right. Right.
I've been walkin' so long
Right. Right.
I put blisters on the street.
Right. Right.
I caught the Freedom fever
Right. Right.
He done settled in my feet
Right. Right.
I got blisters on my feet
Right. Right.
Make me want to skip a beat.
Right. Right.
I got blisters on my feet
Right. Right.
Make me want to skip a beat.
Right. Right.
Pick 'em up and lay 'em down
Right. Right.
And let Wallace hear the sound
Right. Right.
Pick 'em up and lay 'em down
Right. Right.
Don't you know we're Freedom-bound
Right. Right.

There was a guy named Jim Leather who had one leg. He said, "Make up a verse about me." And so I said;

Jim Leather's leg got left
Right. Right.
But he's still in the fight.
Right. Right.
He's been walkin' day and night
Right. Right.
Jim's left leg is alright.
Right. Right.

JIM: I lost my leg when I was 10 but I get along pretty good. I'm marching for Freedom now in Selma, Alabama. And I'm hoping that by going all the way, that those people in the North and the West and the East are saying the time isn't right now, They'll realize that maybe it is time to go all the way. . . And with God's grace I'll make it.
Right. Right.

PETE: Course, sometimes you just walk along, talking to your neighbor or lookin' at the scenery. And the songs weren't organized in any way. . . There just might be some person that felt like singing and they'd heist a tune. That's the old country way of starting off a hymn. Like a sailor heisting a sail or heisting a flag up into the breeze. . . they'd heist a tune. Some of them were almost like . . . cheerleading songs. . . like:

If you want to get your Freedom, clap
your hands
If you want to get your Freedom, clap
your hands
If you want to get your Freedom
If you want to get your Freedom
If you want to get your Freedom, clap
your hands.
If you want to get your Freedom, stamp
your feet
If you want to get your Freedom, stamp
your feet.
If you want to get your Freedom
If you want to get your Freedom
If you want to get your Freedom, stamp
your feet.

LEN: I heard a Fife coming from somewhere and there was about a 15 year-old girl blowing this Fife... from a music book. And so I borrowed the Fife, and we would march with it. And so people were singing "Yankee Doodle" and so we started singing a verse that said:

Wallace said we couldn't march
We knew he was a phony
Now we're marching all the way
To make him eat baloney
Freedom fighters keep it up
Even though you're weary
Freedom fighters keep it up
We love our Freedom dearly.

NARR: There are some songs you might hear only once on the march, but others like this one were in the background almost constantly:

CHORUS: Oh, Wallace segregation's bound to fall

PETE: Well, somebody told me that the tune for this used to be a rock-and-roll song... The idea is that you can get anybody joining in on this song... All they have to sing is dah-ah-dah-daht-daht (laughs)

I read in the papers
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
The other day
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
The Freedom Fighters
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
Are on their way
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
Well, they're coming by bus
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
And by airplane, too
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
They'll even walk
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
If you ask them to
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
Oh-h-h, Wallace
You never can jail us all
Oh, Wallace
Segregation is bound to fall
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
(three times)
I don't want no mess
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
I don't want no jive
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
I want my Freedom
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
In '65
Oh-h-h, Wallace
You never can jail us all
Oh, Wallace,
Segregation's bound to fall
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
Now don't you worry
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
About goin' to jail
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
Cause Martin King
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
Will go your bail
Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
Yes, he'll get you out
Yes, right on time

Dah-ah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah
He'll put you back
Dah-ah, etc,
On the picket line
Dah-ah, etc.
Oh-h-h, Wallace
You never can jail us all
Oh, Wallace
Segregation's bound to fall
Dah-ah, etc.

PETE: Who knows more verses?

Well I went downtown
Dah-ah, etc.
And they did me wrong
Dah-ah
Take my few pennies
Dah-ah, etc.
And keep my tail at home
Dah-ah-etc.
Oh, Wallace
You never can jail us all
Oh, Wallace
Segregation's bound to fall.
Zah da, etc.



PETE: And of course you know on the march this could go on 10 - 15 minutes as long-- I even heard a verse there:

Come all you people
Worried about fat.
A day on Route 80
Will take care of that.

LEN: You know, that's a funny modification of a verse that I think I wrote.

PETE: Did you start that verse off?

LEN: Yeah, Some verses which I wrote for "Which Side Are You On." And Cordell and I used to sing this song all over Mississippi and I asked the kid that I heard do that... one of the kids on the march, where'd he get that verse... and he said, I don't know-- I heard it somewhere I don't know where it came from...

Come all you bourgeois black men
With all your excess fat
A few days in the county jail
Will sure get rid of that.

GROUP: Won't you tell me now--
Which side are you on boy
Which side are you on
Come on and know now--
Which side are you on, boy
Which side are you on
Come all you Freedom Fighters
The story I will tell
'bout down in prison
In a lonesome jail cell
You better tell me now--
Which side are you on, boy
Which side are you on (I want to hear you now)--

You really better tell me
 Which side are you on,
 Come all you Uncle Tom's
 Take that hankie from your head
 Forget your fears and shed a tear
 For the life of shame you've led
 (Then tell me)
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on (I want to know now)
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on

Don't Tom for Mr. Charlie
 Don't listen to his lies
 Us colored folk we ain't got a chance
 Unless we organize (everybody now--)
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on
 Which side are you on boy,
 Which side are you on
 You need not join the picket line
 If you can't stand a blows
 But join your dimes with dollars
 Or be counted with our foes
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on
 Come on all you high toned college grads
 Pronounce your final G's
 But don't forget your old Grandmaw
 She's still a scrubbin' on her knees
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on (You really better
 tell me)
 Which side are you on
 Have you heard about the Paddy Wagon?
 The big red light outside
 If you stand up for your rights
 He'll take you for a ride. (Everybody now)
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on
 I heard that the Klu Klux Klan
 Just up and dyed their sheets
 And now they sing of Freedom
 Everytime they meet
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on,
 Which side are you on, boy
 Which side are you on...

PETE: A lot of these tunes will sound similar if
 you're not used to them...

Ain't gonna let segregation turn me 'round
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let segregation turn me 'round
 Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
 Marchin' down to Freedom land

Now the verses to this are very easy to make
 up new ones too. You just throw in the names
 of anybody who's around:

Ain't gonna let Governor Wallace turn
 me 'round
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let Governor Wallace turn
 me 'round
 Keep on a walkin', marchin' down to
 Freedom land

And if the Sheriff's name is Jim Clark...

Ain't gonna let Sheriff Clark turn me
 'round
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let Jim Clark turn me 'round
 Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
 Marchin' down to Freedom land.

And if you run out of names... there's al-
 ways this verse.

Ain't gonna let no body turn me 'round
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round
 Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
 Marchin' down to Freedom land

GROUP:

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round,
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round
 I keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
 Marching up to Freedom land
 Ain't gonna let Sheriff Clark turn me
 'round
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let Sheriff Clark turn me
 'round
 Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
 Marchin' up to Freedom land
 Ain't gonna let no dog turn me
 'round
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let no dog turn me
 'round
 I keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
 Marchin' up to Freedom land
 Ain't gonna let George Wallace, turn
 me 'round
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let George Wallace-- Lordy,
 Turn me 'round
 Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
 Marchin' up to Freedom land
 Ain't gonna let those killings, Lord,
 turn me 'round
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let those killings, Lord,
 turn me 'round
 Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
 Marching up to Freedom land
 Ain't gonna let no burnings Lord,
 turn me 'round
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let those burnings, Lord,
 turn me 'round
 Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
 Marching up to Freedom land.
 Ain't gonna let nobody, Lord, turn
 me 'round
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let nobody, Lord, turn
 me 'round,
 Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
 Marching up to Freedom land.
 Ain't gonna let no guns turn me
 'round,
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Aint gonna let no guns turn me
 'round,
 Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
 Marching up to Freedom land.
 Ain't gonna let no clubs, Lord,
 turn me 'round
 Turn me 'round, turn me 'round
 Ain't gonna let no clubs turn me
 'round



Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
Marching up to Freedom land.

Ain't gonna let nobody, Lord, turn me
'round,
Turn me 'round, turn me round,
Ain't gonna let no body, Lord, turn me
'round
Keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
Marching up to Freedom land.

PETE: A picture I'll always keep in my mind of this song, was after a day of marching when most of the people... you'd think their feet would be sore and tired, but there was a gang of 50 young ones.. well I say young-- 15 or 20 years old,... they just wouldn't stop. They were standing around in this muddy field waiting for supper. And singing at the top of their lungs... were 3 or 4 teenage girls with real good voices. Some had their hair done up in curlers. You know this is a very interesting parade. People said they were a bunch of sloppy, no goods... Sure there was mud around, but... these girls wanted to look as well as they could. They had their hair up in curlers. The next day they looked bright and fresh. But there they were standing in the field singing and just making up verse after verse. If the spirit was real good why a song could go on for five or ten minutes. Just as long as somebody could think of some verses for it.

LEN: There's a song called, "I'm Gonna Do What the Spirits Say Do" There are lots of people who are saying now... What are you gonna do man? They say, spirits say eat. Yeah know.

GROUP: Do what the Spirits Say Do
I'm gonna do what the Spirits say do
And what the Spirits say do
I'm gonna do oh, Lord,
I'm gonna do what the Spirits say do
I'll go to jail, if the Spirits say go
I'll go to jail if the Spirits say go
And if the Spirits say go,
I'm gonna go oh, Lord,
I'm gonna jail if the spirits say go.
I'm gonna picket if the spirits say picket
I'm gonna picket if the spirits say picket
If the spirits say picket, I'm gonna picket
oh, Lord,
I'm gonna picket if the spirits say picket
I'm gonna march if the spirits say march
I'm gonna march if the spirits say march
And if the spirits say march, I'm gonna
march oh, Lord,
I'm gonna march if the spirits say march
I'm gonna love, if the spirits say love
I'm gonna love if the spirits say love
And if the spirits say love, I'm gonna love
oh Lord,
I'm gonna love if the spirits say love
I'm gonna sing if the spirits say sing,
I'm gonna sing if the spirits say sing
And if the spirits say sing, I'm gonna sing,
Oh, Lord
I'm gonna sing if the spirits say sing

NARR: And once in Montgomery, at the capitol steps 30,000 people massed in front.. Len Chandler did that same song..

LEN: You gotta move when the spirits say move
You gotta move when the spirits say move,
Say, when the spirits say move, you gotta
move, oh Lord,
You gotta move when the spirits say move
You gotta work when the spirits say work
You gotta work when the spirits say work
And when the spirits say work, you gotta
work, oh, Lord
You gotta work when the spirits say work
You gotta preach when the spirits say
preach

You gotta preach when the spirits say
preach
Now when the spirits say preach, you gotta
preach oh, Lord,
You gotta preach when the spirits say
preach.
You gotta march when the spirits say march
ditto
Now when the spirits say march, you gotta
march, oh Lord,
You gotta march when the spirits say march
You gotta sing when the spirits say sing
ditto
Now when the spirits say sing, you gotta
sing, oh, Lord,
You gotta sing when the spirits say sing.
You gotta rock when the spirits say rock
ditto
Now when the spirits say rock, you gotta
rock, oh Lord,
You gotta rock when the spirits say rock
You gotta moan when the spirits say moan
ditto
Now when the spirits say moan, you gotta
moan, oh, Lord,
You gotta moan when the spirits say moan.
You gotta jump when the spirits say jump
ditto
Now when the spirits say jump you gotta
jump, oh Lord,
You gotta jump when the spirits say jump
You gotta move when the spirits say move
ditto
Now when the spirits say move, you gotta
move, oh, Lord
You gotta move when the spirits say move.
You gotta vote when the spirits say vote
ditto
Now when the spirits say vote, you gotta
vote, oh Lord,
You gotta vote when the spirits say vote.
(repeat vote stanza)
You gotta love when the spirits say love,
ditto
Now when the spirits say love, you gotta
love, oh Lord,
You gotta love when the spirits say love.
You gotta picket if the spirits say picket
ditto
Now when the spirits say picket, you gotta
picket, oh Lord,
You gotta picket when the spirits say picket.
You gotta move when the spirits say move
ditto
Now when the spirits say move, you gotta
move, oh Lord,
You gotta move when the spirits say move.
You gotta cool it when the spirits say
cool it
repeat
Now when the spirits say coll it, you gotta
cool it, Oh Lord
You gotta cool it when the spirits say cool it.
You gotta jump when the spirits say jump
repeat
Now when the spirits say jump you gotta
jump, Oh, Lord,
You gotta jump when the spirits say jump
You gotta clap when the spirits say clap
repeat
Now when the spirits say clap, you gotta
clap oh, Lord
You gotta clap when the spirits say clap.
(repeat clap stanza)

NARR: An old Chain Gang Chant song became a
"Chant for Freedom"

Been many a black man, Charlie
..... working on this road
Been many a black man, Charlie
A workin' on this road
Now a well - ah
Now we're walkin' on it Charlie,
To get the debt we're owed - ah
It's hard, ain't it hard Lordy rollin'
repeat
Come on boys awella
It takes rocks and gravel, baby

To make a solid road, Wella
 It takes rocks and gravel, baby,
 To make a solid road wella
 It takes rocks and gravel baby
 To make a solid road, a wella
 But it never gets done, Lawdy Baby
 Unless the Captain's gotta gun
 I'm up and early in the morning
 When I'll rise

LEN: I was on Highway 80 on my way to Selma,
 when we passed about 30 or 40 police cars
 and lots of lights and lots of activity and we
 thought that the car we saw poked half way
 through a fence off the right side of the road
 has just been involved in an accident. We uh
 found out that a lady had been shot to death on
 Highway 80.

Oh it's murder on the roads of Alabama
 Oh it's murder on the roads of Alabama
 If you're fightin' for what's right
 If you're black or if you're white
 You're a target in the night in Alabama

Oh we'd marched right by that spot in Alabama
 Oh we'd marched right by that spot in Alabama
 Oh we'd marched right by that spot
 Where the Klansman fired the shots
 Where the coward fired the shots in
 Alabama

Oh we know who is to blame in Alabama
 Oh we know who is to blame in Alabama
 She caught two bullets in the brain
 Before we learned to say her name
 And George Wallace is the shame of
 Alabama

There's a man behind the guns of Alabama
 There's a man behind the guns of Alabama
 There's a man behind the guns
 He kills for hate, for fear, for fun
 And George Wallace is top gun-- in
 Alabama

It was Jackson on the roads-- of Alabama
 It was Reeb on the roads of Alabama
 William Moore's dead and gone
 And this killin' still goes on
 Now Liuzzo's on the road of Alabama

There's a movement on the road in
 Alabama
 There's a movement on the road of
 Alabama
 Black man, White man, Christian, Jew
 We got to keep on marchin' through
 Oh, the tyrant's days are few in Alabama

It was murder on the road of Alabama
 It was murder on the roads of Alabama
 If you're fightin' for what's right
 If you're Black or you are white
 You're a target in the night in Alabama.

