

VISIBLE EVIDENCE, VOLUME 6

▶—————  
*Collecting Visible  
Evidence*  
■—————

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NEIL LERNER

[ 5 ] *Damming Virgil Thomson's Music for  
The River*

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Most analytic discussions surrounding film privilege the eye; questions concerning the role of the ear and its effects on shaping perceptions are traditionally ignored. Despite, and even because of, its marginalized status, music mediates and manipulates any cinematic discourses where it is present. Although it has become a topos in film music literature to lament the dearth of film music scholarship,<sup>1</sup> studies integrating a close reading of a film *and* its accompanying musical sound track remain quite rare. Textbooks, anthologies, and course syllabi all do little more than acknowledge music's presence, the more sophisticated ones perhaps systematizing it as either diegetic or nondiegetic, but almost never do they delve into the kinds of musical issues addressed by musicologists or music theorists, questions that, because of the nature of the filmic text, play absolutely crucial roles in the way a film is read. It is all the more striking, then, that in documentary film studies, a field committed to uncovering hidden or obscured agendas and ideologies, music is almost categorically muted, even when it plays a significant part in determining a film's rhetorical effectiveness (at least in the documentary's early history).

In writing about his first film, Pare Lorentz calls *The Plow That Broke the Plains* a "documentary musical picture," and the same designation seems equally appropriate for his next film, *The River*, released in 1937 and again with the support of the Roosevelt administration.<sup>2</sup> Both films featured landmark musical scores by the American modernist composer Virgil Thomson; both are exceptional and remarkable examples of how music can be closely coordinated within a film. Thomson found his second collaboration with Lorentz to be a more difficult assignment than writing the music for *The Plow*: "Floods, though murderous to land and houses, are not at all dramatic to observe. A film explaining how they come about and how they can be controlled by dams demands a far more complex

composition, if one wants to make it powerful, than the blowing away of our dry high-lying West."<sup>3</sup> Lorentz, whose first career ambition was to become a music critic, was well aware of the integral role music plays in shaping perceptions of a film. Understanding music's conventionally secondary status in relation to that of the image, he notes that, "properly handled, music should be knit into a film so that the audience is no more aware of it than it is of the dimmed house lights or the actors' grease-paint."<sup>4</sup> Lorentz articulates one of the central principles of the then-nascent classical Hollywood film score, a principle identified as "inaudibility" by Claudia Gorbman in her important study of narrative film music. By "inaudibility," Gorbman means that "music is not meant to be heard consciously. As such it should subordinate itself to dialogue, to visuals—i.e., to the primary vehicles of the narrative."<sup>5</sup> Yet just because this paradoxically "unheard" music may not be noticed at the forefront of consciousness, this does not mean we should ignore its presence when explicating a film, be it Hollywood narrative or government documentary. If we are to examine the ideological and rhetorical practices employed in *The River*, we need a close analysis of the sound, including tightly organized sounds such as Virgil Thomson's musical score.

The metaphor of a dam can serve as a way of describing the process of explicating the music in *The River*. In certain ways, film music behaves not unlike a river; its mere presence, threaded throughout the cinematic narrative, creates a sense of flow and directionality. It acts as an agent of manipulation and change within the discourse of the film. And its raw power to alter the perceived visual landscape drastically has caused it to be subjected to a number of artificial constraints and conventions. An attempt to interpret, and thus control, film music involves the harnessing of forces that normally travel freely, if not passively, across the audience's consciousness; if engineered properly, this harnessing generates interpretive energy.

The dam serves as an especially appropriate metaphor for discussing the music in *The River*, a film whose argument centers not only on literal rivers and dams but also on the channeling and controlling of broad public opinions. The film employs a familiar documentary paradigm: an initial situation is described (the natural beauty and economic value of the Mississippi region), a problem is revealed (the misuse of the land has led to soil erosion and flooding), and finally a solution is recommended (a variety of government agencies, specifically the Farm Security Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Tennessee Valley Authority, can repair this broken world).<sup>6</sup> The voice-over narration by Lorentz—which James Joyce called "the most beautiful prose I have heard in ten years"—

moves, as Brian Winston notes, from an impersonal distance to a collective “we” and “us” to a “you” that is involved with the solution.<sup>8</sup> Through this rhetorical strategy, *The River* seeks sympathy for the political administration then in power, and it uses both visual and audible signifiers to manipulate. Lorentz encourages further identification by mentioning river names across the country and by showing maps of the United States, suggesting a problem owned by the nation as a whole. Despite these efforts to address the entire American population, the music contains a significant subtext that excludes certain segments of the “us” in question.

In their well-known introductory film textbook, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson describe Thomson’s music for *The River* as “distinctly American” in style, a type of music that could, by implication, appeal to nationalistic sensibilities extending beyond the American South as a region.<sup>9</sup> The notion of a distinctly American musical style, however, raises a number of questions. First, it seems to be assumed that we are discussing only the highbrow, concert-hall end of the musical culture from the 1930s. Although Thomson’s score definitely has an American flavor and character insofar as it carries many of the stylistic features that we associate with some of the most commonly performed concert-hall music of that time (and George Gershwin’s and Aaron Copland’s music from this time has remained as some of the strongest models for a generic “American” sound),<sup>10</sup> it is still only one rather American music found in that decade. During the 1930s a number of composers sought to create a uniquely American voice, but by the end of the decade the entire musical landscape was awash in a flood of European immigrants who came to the United States representing many kinds of musical modernism, thus complicating even further the establishment and definition of an American nationalistic musical idiom. Thomson’s music certainly should strike many ears as broadly American in its sound, but it can be described in far more precise terms, specifically, as an orchestral music utilizing nineteenth-century Protestant hymn tunes and folk tunes potentially familiar to inhabitants of the Mississippi regions where those tunes were most known.

Only a small proportion of Thomson’s score for *The River* consists of originally composed music; most of Thomson’s melodies are taken from hymns, folk songs, and popular tunes with which he had become familiar through a study of the region’s music.<sup>11</sup> Thomson had earlier demonstrated facility with hymn and folk material in his *Symphony on a Hymn Tune* (1926–28), the last movement of which Thomson offered to Lorentz to accompany the last half reel of the film.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the fourth movement of the *Symphony*, which appears essentially unaltered, the beginning of the third movement also appears in the film score.<sup>13</sup> In its proportion of original

versus borrowed material, *The River* score differs somewhat from Thomson's earlier film score for *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, in which Thomson employs a hymn melody ("Old Hundred") and several cowboy songs (such as "I Ride an Old Paint" and "Git Along Little Dogies") at key moments in the film, but the bulk of the score consists of originally composed music.

Several of the hymn melodies selected by Thomson for *The River* came from *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion*, compiled by "Singin' Billy" Walker in 1835, and Benjamin Franklin White and E. J. King's *Sacred Harp* (first printed in 1844), two of the South's most important and influential early shape-note tune books.<sup>14</sup> These hymns were commonly referred to as "white spirituals."<sup>15</sup> The musical notation of these hymnals was designed to allow those with little or no formal training in reading music to do so; it replaced the standard European notation with various shapes (triangles, squares, circles) designating solfège syllables (see the illustration of the shape-note version of the hymn "Mississippi" from *The Southern Harmony*). It is significant that (the well-educated) Thomson attempted to establish an American (as opposed to European) sound by using these early American hymns, because these hymns had already been at the center of even earlier debates regarding the nature of what constitutes

144 MISSISSIPPI S, S, S, 7, S, S, 3, 3, 3, S. Hymn tune.

When Gabriel's awful trump shall sound, And rend the rocks, convulse the ground, Ye dead, arise to Judgment; the lightning  
And give to time let us not bound.

God and thunders roll, See earth wrapt up like parchment a roll; Dread amazement seize, Sinners raise, The guilty woe of Adam's race, Uncover'd from sin by Jesus.

The Christian fill'd with rapturous joy, Mide'st flaming worlds he mounts on high, To meet the Saviour on the sky; And see the One of Jesus; The soul and body reunited, And fill'd with glory infinite, Hallelujah, Christians say! Will you stay? That we may all partake in joy company, To praise the name of Jesus

"Mississippi," from *The Southern Harmony & Musical Companion* (1854). The middle staff of this music, notated in shape notes, contains the melody that Thomson borrowed for *The River*. Reprinted from Glenn C. Wilcox, *The Southern Harmony & Musical Companion*, copyright 1987 by the University Press of Kentucky, reprinted by permission of the publishers.

American music: Lowell Mason's sweeping reforms of religious music in the first half of the nineteenth century. Mason favored European musical models and worked to rid American churches and schools of fugal tunes and shape notes, something he achieved for the most part in New England and the mid-Atlantic regions, although the frontier areas of the time (basically anything from Appalachia to the West) continued to use shape notes (and still do in isolated pockets).<sup>16</sup> Thomson's choice of shape-note hymns, then, while linked geographically and historically with the region addressed within the film, is also politically charged as a potentially anti-European gesture.

The religious music Thomson uses as a launching point for his film score comes from a source identifiable in terms of race (white), class (generally lower), and religion (Protestant). Because both tune books were widely circulated throughout the South, these hymns were potentially familiar to certain listeners in the Mississippi region. The words sung to these melodies reflect a specific set of religious values, one that does not speak either for or to all American citizens. This music, and the entire "documentary musical picture" that relies so heavily upon it for its effectiveness as a form of persuasive, manipulative media, thus speaks most persuasively to a particular religious group, those white Protestants familiar with the hymn melodies and cognizant of the words normally sung with them. Although the score is completely instrumental—we never hear a vocalist or choral ensemble sing any of the words to the hymn tunes or folk melodies—the words would very possibly sound through to the appropriately educated audience member (i.e., Protestant), forming an important subtext to the musical and cinematic discourse.

Although the images on the screen may present a seemingly objective and authoritative discourse surrounding a natural disaster and its possible causes and solutions, the subtext of the music and its textual references suggest an unquestionably Christian narrative. The music accompanying the opening credits of *The River* uses melodic material from the hymn "Foundation" (also known as "Sincerity"), the text of which opens with "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, / Is laid for your faith in his excellent word." A later verse of the same hymn, just as possibly evoked by the melody as the first verse, employs a metaphor that is germane to this film and its images of flooding:

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,  
The rivers of water shall not overflow;  
For I will be with thee thy troubles to bless  
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

At first glance, it appears Thomson selected his melodies solely for their titular connections. To write music for a film discussing redemption after flooding, why not find melodies whose texts talk about redemption after flooding? Since the earliest days of accompanying films with music, it has been common to borrow musical melodies with textual references to the visuals.<sup>17</sup> A cowboy on a horse appears—for instance, to borrow an example from *The Plow*—and we hear “Git Along Little Dogies,” the audible sign paralleling the visual.<sup>18</sup>

Curiously, Thomson has repeatedly denied that the hymn and folk tunes he borrowed were taken for their textual connotations. In program notes for a performance of the concert suite arrangement of the music from *The River*, Thomson says that “the ironical appropriateness of these titles [of the tunes] need not be taken to mean that they have been chosen for their topical references. Quite the contrary. It is simply that tunes which have an expressive or characteristic quality usually end by getting themselves words of the same character.”<sup>19</sup> Perhaps Thomson wanted to avoid the charges of merely choosing tunes solely for textual purposes, of resorting to synchronous scoring. Notice, however, that he qualifies his explanation of the titles’ ironic appropriateness with the phrase “need not be taken,” suggesting (with a wink?) that they still might very well be taken as ironically appropriate.

In standard fictional films, the opening musical cues perform important narrative functions, such as the establishment of genre and mood.<sup>20</sup> For the listener acquainted with the melody and words of “Foundation” (“How firm a foundation . . .”), the melody dominating the opening cue of the film score, one initial message is clear: faith in Christ offers relief from misery. As the (unheard words of the) music alludes to the divine agency of Jesus, the opening credits mention the Farm Security Administration, a government agency also—like Jesus—charged with providing relief to the masses. Rather significantly, the same music, with the same implied words, returns for the closing scene, providing in the musical recapitulation a sense of formal closure; musical expressions of Christian faith frame the film in both formal and ideological ways.

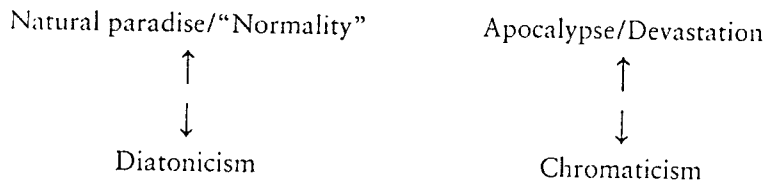
Thomson and Lorentz use other musical conventions familiar to fiction films in their documentary musical picture, such as the repeated association of a musical motive with a certain image (the leitmotiv derived from Wagnerian opera). An original monophonic theme appears at four different times in *The River* (at approximately :35, 7:50, 12:40, and 26:20 into the film); each occurrence accompanies visual images of natural scenes, usually long pans and tilts of mountains, trees, and clouds. This “mountain theme” in its first form consists of a five-note pitch collection



Example 1. Diatonic version of the mountain theme from *The River*. Copyright 1958 by Virgil Thomson. All rights for the world exclusively controlled by Southern Music Publishing Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission.

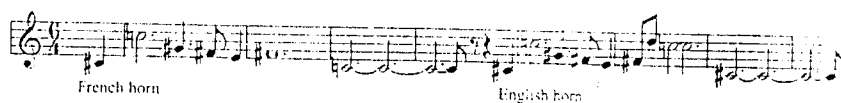
(D-E-G-A-B) that gives it a folklike sound (folk melodies are often pentatonic; see example 1). Thomson's choice of a single-lined texture here reinforces the primacy and solitude of "nature" in its pure and altered states, from lush and majestic (underscored with consonance) to barren and abused (accompanied by dissonant rewritings of the consonant original).

The initial statement of the melody is diatonic, but Thomson alters it to achieve different effects, as when he chromaticizes the motive in its third appearance (see example 2). In chromaticism, the octave is divided into more, smaller intervals than in diatonic divisions, allowing for more color, melodically and harmonically. Contrasting consonant diatonicism with dissonant chromaticism creates a stark opposition, the first sounding stable and at rest, the second unstable and in need of resolution. The direction of the intervallic leaps stays the same, but the sizes of the leaps change (e.g., a leap up of an octave becomes a leap up of a major seventh, the second sounding far more unstable and jarring than the familiar, comfortable octave). Thomson and Lorentz establish the following parallel visual and musical dichotomies:



The third iteration of the mountain theme serves as a transition into the flood montage; the chromatic melody that remains after Thomson changes his octaves and perfect fourths into major sevenths and tritones supplies tension and signals impending doom, doom that follows in the form of the extended flood montage sequence. Thomson achieves a similar effect earlier in the film by gradually chromaticizing the trumpet fanfare accompanying Robert E. Lee's vertically scrolling letter of surrender. (In fact, when Lee's name appeared on the screen at *The River's* world premiere in New Orleans, the audience stood up and cheered, although probably not out of excitement at the recognition of heightened chromatic instability.)<sup>21</sup>

Thomson moves away from religious melodies in his music written for the scenes illustrating industrial growth and the subsequent misuse of the river. For the sequences showing commerce along the Mississippi—



(transposed to C)

Example 2. Chromatic version of the mountain theme from *The River*. Copyright 1958 by Virgil Thomson. All rights for the world exclusively controlled by Southern Music Publishing Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission.

commerce represented metonymically as cotton fields and steamboats — Thomson uses the melody from “Rose of Alabama,” a popular minstrel song from the nineteenth century. Just as significant as the use of this tune is Thomson’s instrumentation at this point in the score. Until “Rose of Alabama” occurs, the instrumentation consists of typical (European) symphonic brass, woodwinds, strings, and percussion. With “Rose of Alabama,” however, Thomson introduces the sound of a banjo into his timbral palette, a slightly transgressive act in the context of the symphonic tradition (the introduction of a lowbrow instrument into the citadel of musical highbrow culture, the symphony orchestra). Thomson made use of an orchestrator for his score to *The River*, Henry Brant, a young Canadian composer who had served in the same capacity in *The Plow That Broke the Plains*. Using an orchestrator was, and is, a common practice in Hollywood scoring, the orchestrator’s presence reflecting Hollywood’s assembly-line approach to creating a product and the extreme deadlines under which most film composers work. When orchestrators are used, it is sometimes hard to know who chose what instrument in specific passages. Brant, however, takes no “credit for any special features of the orchestral sound” in his orchestration for Thomson:

Some 60, 50 and 40 years back, when I worked as an orchestrator to Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Marc Blitzstein, William Schuman, George Antheil, Douglas Moore and Alex North, my sole aim was to carry out the orchestral ideas of the composer and to prepare the score in battle-ready order, for performance or recording. All these composers consulted me, on occasion, on matters of timbre and balance.<sup>22</sup>

Besides drawing attention because of its piquant, plucked twang, the banjo’s presence raises important questions about the relationship of instruments and politics. Roland Barthes has written that “every musical instrument, from the lute to the saxophone, implies an ideology.”<sup>23</sup> The links between instruments and specific cultural traditions are strong; instruments participate in the signification of any number of identities. Lorentz was intuitively aware of these relationships. In his instructions to Thomson for the composition of the score for *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, he wrote,

"If the instrument of the herder was the guitar, the banjo certainly was the music brought from the South and the highlands by the homesteader, along with the accordion brought by the Norwegians into the Northwest, the fiddle, of course, being the instrument of the devil wherever it appeared."<sup>24</sup> The associations Lorentz mentioned delineate many of the stereotypical uses of these instruments in Hollywood film scores, revealing his keen sensitivity to music's functional capabilities. The modern banjo is a nineteenth-century commercial adaptation of an instrument brought to North America by African slaves. When the instrument sought respectability in polite middle-class parlors after the Civil War, an effort was made to rewrite the banjo's history and deny its association with African culture.<sup>25</sup> The banjo's appropriation by middle-class white parlors has not diluted any of its potency as a symbol of southern culture, a culture still haunted by divisions of race, class, and religion.<sup>26</sup> The banjo's presence, characteristically non-diegetic and thus not linked to any visual images of the performer's race or body, can, if nothing else, serve as a reminder of the South's history of racial division and of white culture's attempts to master and control African culture.

Reminders of racial discord in *The River* do not end with the use of the banjo. In planning the energetic log sequence, Lorentz advised Thomson that the music should evoke "minstrel show numbers":

This entire sequence should be a trumpet and trombone extravaganza. That is, it should sound like those nigger bands that used to play outside the theatres before the minstrel show started: almost a circus band, but with the river-negro-Spanish-water-heat-drunken-careless-carefree-Mississippi motif which we should establish as the feeling of the river.<sup>27</sup>

Some of Thomson's music followed Lorentz's instructions, but some of it did not. His music for the log sequence includes quick-paced arrangements of popular songs like "Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" as we watch log after log shoot through the water. The implied sexual tension present in the text of this song causes these images to be (at least potentially) bizarrely erotic, the ejaculatory stream of the logs coursing into the water establishing a connection between the uncontrolled consumption of natural resources and masculine sexual fulfillment.

The music accompanying the steel mill scenes, however, runs contrary to Lorentz's dictates for the sound of a minstrel band. This music is neither "careless" nor "carefree," but full of dissonant tone clusters (in the eight measures in example 3, Thomson employs nine of the twelve available pitches), cacophonous parallel tritones, and the harsh grinding sound of a ratchet, suggesting that the images accompanying it are somehow ominous



Example 3. Steel Mill Music from *The River*. Copyright 1958 by Virgil Thomson. All rights for the world exclusively controlled by Southern Music Publishing Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission.

and evil. The image of the steel mill is here meant to represent one of the villains of the film, and the music acts accordingly, providing a synchronous musical track that criticizes the growth of industry linked with the river. If the steel mill were meant to be viewed in a positive light, which is not the case in this film's argument, then this music would be in a contrapuntal relationship to the visual track (this use of the term *contrapuntal* coming from Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov in their famous "Statement").

Among other titles, the interval of the tritone has been called *diabolus in musica*, its characteristic dissonance carefully monitored and controlled throughout much of the history of Western music. The presence of the devil—signified by the use of melodic and harmonic tritones—juxtaposed alongside several secular tunes reinforces the sense that, at least in terms of musical symbolism, we are in the midst of a fallen, postlapsarian world of sin. To extend this narrative further would bring us to a climactic, apocalyptic event. The music accompanying the flood sequence is based on the hymn "Mississippi" from *The Southern Harmony*, and its lyrics describe the expected apocalyptic nightmare:

When Gabriel's awful trump shall sound,  
 And rend the rocks, convulse the ground,  
 And give to time her utmost bound,  
 Ye dead, arise to judgment;  
 See lightnings flash and thunder roll,  
 See earth wrapt up like parchment scroll;  
 Comets blaze, sinners raise,  
 Dread amaze, horrors seize  
 The guilty sons of Adam's race,  
 Unsaved from sin by Jesus.

Thomson's treatment of this musical material blends synergistically with the imagery; as the flood on the image track builds up from dripping icicles to an overpowering deluge, the music grows from a single line stating the hymn melody (the English horn over a timpani ostinato) into a thick polyphonic texture, finally culminating in the original harmonization of the

hymn as found in the shape-note books. Visuals—long aerial shots of the bloated river—and music climax at this moment.

When conveying the sense of the aftermath of the flood, Thomson's music connotes the depths of despair by utilizing the familiar folk tune "Go Tell Aunt Rhody," a melody whose words already contain a sad tale: the old gray goose is dead.<sup>28</sup> Lorentz shows several shots of washed-out land and barren trees, complete with buzzards circling above. Thomson creates an even darker mood by applying an increasing number of distortions to the "Aunt Rhody" melody: first, it is placed in a minor mode while the oboe and English horn play it (it is normally major); then, the tune switches between minor and major while in the French horns; and finally the bassoon and bass clarinet play a rhythmically augmented version of the tune in parallel tritones. This last gasp of satanic dissonance yields to a music of redemption, a progression made even more obvious in the concert suite version of this music (in the suite, the music progresses immediately from the dissonated "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" material to the redemptive hymn music; in the film, there are moments of silence and then voice-over narration without musical underscoring between these two sections). As the film moves on to show the rebuilding efforts of the FSA, CCC, and TVA, the music continues with consonant harmonizations of the hymns "Yes, Jesus Loves Me," "There's Not a Friend Like the Lowly Jesus," and "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need." Once again, divine and governmental agencies occupy different levels of the same narrative, both of which find subtle support through the ever-flowing musical score.

Thomson's music for *The River* supplies a specifically southern dimension to the film and its argument. Reanalyzing this famous documentary with our ears as well as our eyes exposes a religious subtext that alters our understanding of the film, the ways it works, and how certain audiences may have understood it (at the exclusion of others). Although it was first screened only to southern audiences, *The River* was intended for national distribution, which it eventually got through the assistance of Paramount Pictures.<sup>29</sup> Discovering traces of racial friction and southern fundamentalism in a southern documentary is not especially surprising, but does discovering these traces in the music of a southern documentary not cause us to reconsider the damming metaphor as a pun as well?

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#### NOTES

1. Roy M. Prendergast indulges in the trope by titling his book *Film Music: A Neglected Art: A Critical Study of Music in Films* (New York:

New York University Press, 1977; 2d ed., New York: W. W. Norton, 1992). Caryll Flinn questions the "neglected" status of film music in

- her introduction to *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992). Royal Brown ends the first paragraph of his introduction to *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994) by writing that "music by and large remains one of the two most 'invisible' contributing arts to the cinema. The other is montage" (1). James Buhler and David Neumeyer address this question in their review of Flinn's book and Kathryn Kalinak's *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film*, in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47, no. 2 (summer 1994): 381-85, posing an alternative question: "What has enabled both musicology and film studies to feel secure in treating the existence of film music as irrelevant?" (382).
2. Pare Lorentz, *Movies 1927 to 1941: Lorentz on Film* (New York: Hopkinson & Blake, 1975), 135. See Robert L. Snyder, *Pare Lorentz and the Documentary Film* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1994), 50-78; this volume was originally published under the same title by the University of Oklahoma Press in 1968. In 1937, the Resettlement Administration, which had been responsible for the production of *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, became a part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and was renamed the Farm Security Administration. The story of the Tennessee Valley Authority was told to the American public in book form by its chairman, David Lilienthal, in *TVA: Democracy on the March* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), a section of which was reprinted in the Office of War Information's *U.S.A. 2*, no. 4 (February 1945): 1-7. *U.S.A.* was intended solely for distribution abroad, and it was not to be viewed by Americans overseas; rather, it was part of the Office of War Information's efforts to disseminate information about American policies around the world.
  3. Virgil Thomson, *Virgil Thomson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 270.
  4. Lorentz, *Movies 1927 to 1941*, 87.
  5. Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 73.
  6. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 18. The issues involved in the creation of federally funded dams included the myriad concerns arising from the creation of electrical power, which would position the federal government in competition with private utilities; the use of that power to create nitrates for fertilizer or for the manufacture of explosives; flood control; reforestation and afforestation; the attraction of industry through the lure of cheap power; and the relocation of farmers from flooded lands to less productive areas in the hills. In short, it was a project that would have massive political, economic, and ecological repercussions for the entire region. For a brief overview of the concerns facing Roosevelt in the creation and implementation of the Tennessee Valley Authority, see Raymond Moley, *The First New Deal* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 323-34.
  7. Quoted in W. L. White, "Pare Lorentz," *Scribner's* 105, no. 1 (January 1939): 10.
  8. Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 71-72.
  9. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 115.
  10. For example, short snippets of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) and Copland's ballet music (e.g., *Appalachian Spring*, 1943-44), or close imitations thereof, are frequently used by television advertisers to sell products meant to resonate as explicitly American (such as airline travel and luxury sedans).
  11. Claudia Widgery's dissertation, "The Kinetic and Temporal Interaction of Music and Film: Three Documentaries of 1930s America" (University of Maryland, 1990), contains an exhaustive study of the primary sources for Thomson's score for *The River* (see chap. two, "Temporal Perspective in *The River*," 174-255). She identifies in her Appendix B.2 (404-7) the following hymn tunes in the film score: "How Firm a Foundation," "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need" (also known as "Resignation"), "What Solemn Sound the Ear Invades (also known as "Mount Vernon"), "When Gabriel's Awful Trump Shall Sound" (also known as "Mississippi"), "Savior, Visit Thy Plantation," "Yes, Jesus Loves Me," and "There's Not a Friend Like the Lowly Jesus." The popular songs Widgery identifies are "Rose of Alabama," an obscure version of "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny," "Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight," and "Captain Kidd."
  12. Thomson, *Virgil Thomson*, 273. Thomson said Lorentz gave him no cue sheets for the last reel, and only asked for a five-minute finale. It is apparently a coincidence that some of the same hymn tunes quoted in the *Symphony* (such as "How Firm a Foundation") had also been quoted in the score for *The River*. The connections between the *Symphony* and *The River* have been mentioned by Thomson and later writers, and I identify a melodic similarity between one of the *Symphony*'s motifs and a repeated melody in the score for *The Plow That Broke the Plains* in chapter 3 of my dissertation, "The Classical Documentary Score in American Films of Persuasion: Contexts and Case Studies, 1936-1945" (Duke University, 1997).

13. Widgery, "The Kinetic and Temporal Interaction," 200.
14. William Walker, comp., *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion*, ed. Glenn C. Wilcox (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987 [1835]); Benjamin Franklin White and E. J. King, *Sacred Harp* (Bremen, Ga: Sacred Harp, 1991 [1844]).
15. See George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933).
16. See Gilbert Chase, *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), 149-63; and H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*, 3d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1988), 64-68.
17. *Textual here* refers to the actual words normally sung with the melody. Two important sources on the history of the early musical accompaniment of films are Gillian Anderson's "A Warming Flame: The Musical Presentation of Silent Films," in *Music for Silent Films, 1894-1929: A Guide* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1988); and Martin Miller Marks's *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1895-1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
18. One of the chief complaints music critics have had about film composers has been their overreliance on synchronous, instead of contrapuntal, scoring. Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov call for "only a contrapuntal use of sound in relation to the visual montage piece" to "afford a new potentiality of montage development and perfection." Sergei Eisenstein, V. I. Pudovkin, and Grigory Alexandrov, "A Statement," in Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), 258. For a further definition of the term *counterpoint* as discussed in film—as opposed to its use in music as a designation of note-against-note writing—see Kristin Thompson, "Early Sound Counterpoint," *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 115-40.
19. Quoted in Kathleen Hoover and John Cage, *Virgil Thomson: His Life and Music* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 180-81. Thomson made similar claims in a December 8, 1986, interview with Claudia Widgery; see "The Kinetic and Temporal Interaction," 204-5.
20. For more on the narrative functions of beginning and ending music, see Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 82.
21. See Snyder, *Pare Lorentz*, 64.
22. Henry Brant, letter to the author, August 16, 1995.
23. Roland Barthes, "Loving Schumann," in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 293.
24. From a twelve-page typed document that contains Lorentz's preliminary timings and scene explanations, part of the Virgil Thomson papers held at the Yale Music Library (ms. 29, box 51, folder 542), 4.
25. See Karen Linn, "The 'Elevation' of the Banjo in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 5-39.
26. Consider the significant diegetic placement of banjos and banjo music in John Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972), another film about an encounter with a southern river. In this case, the timbre and characteristic folk repertoire of the banjo becomes a symbol for presumably incestuous cross-breeding and poverty (the mute banjo boy appears to be a product of both).
27. From an eight-page document at the Yale Music Library titled "Musical Notes: The River" (ms. 29, box 17, folder 3), 7. Quoted in Widgery, "The Kinetic and Temporal Interaction," 208.
28. Hitchcock points out that the melody of this song was a resecularization of the folk hymn "Hallelujah" from John Wyeth's *Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second*, 2d ed. (1820); see *Music in the United States*, 103-4.
29. See Snyder, *Pare Lorentz*, 64-78.