


# Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes

# ARTEFFECT



## Impact Statement

**Emily Hammill, Grade 12**

***Voice of the People, 2023***

**Olympia High School | Olympia, WA**

**Unsung Hero: John Avery Lomax**

When going through the list of pre-approved heroes, John Lomax was one of the ones that really stood out to me. I eventually decided to choose Lomax because I have a love for folklore, history, and culture. It's always devastating to hear about a fascinating aspect of a culture only to learn a major part of it has been forgotten because it was never recorded, like how the Poetic and Prose Edda or some of the only sources of Norse mythology, and they were recorded after the area was fully Christian. Lomax's efforts to preserve culture that would have been forgotten, the voices of freed slaves, Native Americans in their native languages, and "cowboy songs". I find this incredibly admirable, and am incredibly grateful that he allowed these voices to live on.

In my piece I wanted to show John Lomax's origins, the stories he told, and the story of his career and life. From his childhood on a farm listening to Nat Turner's folk song as his inspiration, the colleges he went to and taught at, the many voices he uplifted, the stories he shared, how he worked for the Library of Congress, and that he passed his mission onto his sons. To do all of this I made sure every part of the art piece meant something.

It all starts with the base. I recreated a wax cylinder phonograph, the same thing Lomax used to record the songs. The small side without a handle features a silhouette with broken chains about his head meant to represent Nat Turner, and the scythe and pitchfork the farm Lomax grew up on. Nat Turner was a freed slave, and he was also Lomax's introduction to folk songs as a young child. The side with his name on it represents the rural country, where Lomax searched for most of his songs, and his name in cursive on a banner is meant to resemble the logo on some Edison phonographs. The side with the guitar still represents folk music, but more importantly are the Harvard, Texas A & M, and University of Texas at Austin stickers on it. The background of boxes are the shelves of the Library of Congress. Working for the Library of Congress was a very

important part of his career, and let the songs he had recorded live even longer. The side with the crank represents Him and his two sons John Jr and Alan, who traveled and recorded songs with him, the lines stretching out like the branches on his family tree. The horn of the phonograph has a choir of silhouettes, the many varied people whose voices came out of the horn on John Lomax's phonograph.

Creating this project made me research someone I've never heard of, and it gave me new found respect for how much we know about American culture of that time. I'm very excited to be able to display my project in the hallway and share this knowledge and, hopefully, my appreciation with the rest of my school. I hope to preserve and share John Lomax's story, the way he did so with so many other peoples stories.