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**HUFF
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Pete Seeger Deserves the Nobel Peace Prize

Now that Pete Seeger has sung at Barack Obama's inaugural celebration Sunday at the Lincoln Memorial -- leading more than half a million people on the mall and millions of people watching on TV in a rendition of "This Land is Your Land" -- what is left for the 89-year old folksinger to accomplish?

How about the Nobel Peace Prize?

Indeed, his admirers have launched a campaign, a petition (signed so far by over 21,000 individuals), and a website to nominate Seeger for this honor.

It is much deserved. Since the late 1930s, Seeger has been a political activist and a troubadour for social justice in the U.S. and human rights around the world. He has used his remarkable talents as a performer, musician, songwriter, and folklorist to engage other people, from all walks of life, across generations and cultures, in causes to build a better and more civilized world. He almost singlehandedly popularized the notion that music can be a force for social change.

Seeger is without doubt the most influential folk artist of the past century. No one can get a crowd singing like Seeger. The songs he's written, like "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" "If I Had a Hammer," and "Turn, Turn, Turn" (drawn from Ecclesiastes), and those he's popularized, including "This Land is Your Land," "Guantanamera," "Wimoweh," and "We Shall Overcome," have been recorded by hundreds of artists in many languages and become global anthems for people fighting for freedom. His songs are sung by people in cities and villages around the world, promoting the basic idea that the hopes that unite us are greater than the fears that divide us.

"If the world is to survive," Seeger recently said, "the whole human race must realize how important it is that we learn how to communicate with each other, even if we disagree strongly."

In addition to being a much-acclaimed and innovative guitarist and banjoist, a globe-trotting minstrel and song collector, and the author of many songbooks and musical how-to manuals, Seeger has been on the front lines of every key progressive crusade during his lifetime -- labor unions and migrant workers in the 1930s and 1940s, banning nuclear weapons and opposing the Cold War in the 1950s, civil rights and the anti-Vietnam war movement in the 1960s, environmental responsibility and opposition to South African apartheid in the 1970s, and, always, human rights throughout the world.

During World War Two, while serving in the military, Seeger performed for soldiers and for First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. In the 1960s, he sang with civil rights workers at rallies and churches in the South and at the march from Selma to Montgomery. In a letter to Seeger, Rev. Martin Luther King thanked him for his "moral support and Christian generosity." In 1969, Seeger launched the sloop Clearwater (near his home in Beacon, New York) and an annual celebration dedicated to cleaning up the polluted Hudson River, an effort that helped inspire the environmental movement.

For a brief period in the 1950s, as a member of the Weavers folk quartet, Seeger achieved commercial success, with several chart-topping songs that reflected his eclectic repertoire - Huddie Ledbetter's "Good Night Irene," "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine," "On Top of Old Smokey," and the Israeli tune, "Tzena, Tzena."

But his career was soon torpedoed by McCarthyism because of his political activism and outspoken views. The Weavers broke up and Seeger was blacklisted for almost two decades. He was kept out of many colleges and concert halls. He was kept off network television in the 1950s and 1960s until the Smothers Brothers defiantly invited him on their CBS variety show in 1967. True to his principles, Seeger insisted on singing a controversial anti-war song, "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy." CBS censors refused to air the song, but public outrage forced the network to relent and allow him to perform the song on the show a few months later.

During the blacklist years, Seeger scratched together a living by giving guitar and banjo lessons and singing at the small number of summer camps, churches, high schools and colleges, and union halls that were courageous enough invite the controversial balladeer.

Eventually, however, Seeger's audience grew. He helped catalyze the folk music revival of the 1960s, encouraging young performers and helping start the Newport Folk Festival. Many prominent musicians, including Bob Dylan, Bono, Joan Baez, the Byrds, Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks, Bonnie Raitt, and Bruce Springsteen (who sang with Seeger at the Lincoln Memorial on Sunday) consider Seeger a role model and trace their musical roots to his influence. Seeger's albums -- he's recorded over 80 of them, including children's songs, labor and protest songs, traditional American folk songs, international songs, and Christmas songs -- began to sell to wider audiences. His travels around the world -- collecting songs and performing in many languages -- inspired today's world music movement. Among performers across the globe, Seeger became a symbol of a principled artist deeply engaged in the world.

Through persistence and unrelenting optimism, Seeger endured and overcame the controversies triggered by his activism. His critics faded away and the nation's cultural and political establishment eventually began to recognize Seeger's unique contributions. In 1994, at age 75, he received the National Medal of Arts (the highest award given to artists and arts patrons by the U.S. government) as well as the Kennedy Center Honor, where President Bill Clinton called him "an inconvenient artist, who dared to sing things as he saw them." In 1996, he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame because of his influence on so many rock performers. In 1997, Seeger won the Grammy Award for his 18-track compilation album, "Pete."

In the past decade, some of the nation's most prominent singers have recorded albums honoring Seeger, including Springsteen's "Seeger Sessions." Last year, PBS broadcast a 93-minute documentary on Seeger's life, "The Power of Song." Seeger is now, despite his ambivalence about commercial success, a part of American popular culture. In a segment of the popular TV show, *Law and Order*, a character says, "The Hudson River's clean now, thanks to Pete Seeger!"

A truly modest man, Seeger has become a reluctant icon. But Sunday in Washington, performing before a large audience for perhaps the last time, he remained defiant, singing two little-known verses of his friend Woody Guthrie's 1940 patriotic anthem, "This Land is Your Land" -- one about Depression-era poverty, the other about trespassing on private property.

Seeger deserves at least one more moment on the world stage -- at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Norway. The prize is only bestowed on people who are living. Although still vital, Seeger turns 90 on May 3. It would be a fitting and much-deserved final tribute for the world's preeminent troubadour for peace and justice.