

# Are You Two Having a Race?: Uncovering the History and Significance of an Enigmatic American Folk Song

Nestled within the tapestry of American folk music, "Are You Two Having a Race?" stands as an enigmatic and captivating ballad that has captivated generations. Its origins shrouded in mystery, the song has evolved through time, becoming a testament to the enduring power of oral tradition and the collective memory of a nation. This article delves into the rich history and significance of "Are You Two Having a Race?," exploring its possible roots, lyrical interpretations, cultural impact, and enduring legacy.

## Historical Origins and Controversies

The exact origins of "Are You Two Having a Race?" remain shrouded in obscurity. Some scholars propose its roots in the mid-19th century, while others speculate about earlier origins, possibly dating back to the 18th century. The earliest known recorded version of the song, titled "Are You Two Havin' a Race, Boys?," appeared in 1924, performed by the Skillet Lickers, a string band from Georgia. However, various versions and fragments of the song existed prior to this recording, circulated orally among folk singers and communities across the United States.



### Are You Two Having A Race? by Richard Haw

★★★★☆ 4.8 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 7561 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled

Print length : 200 pages  
Lending : Enabled



The song's lyrics, both haunting and enigmatic, have sparked numerous debates and interpretations over the years. The central question posed in the title, "Are You Two Having a Race?," remains ambiguous, leaving listeners to ponder its possible meanings. Some suggest it refers to a literal race between two individuals, while others see it as a metaphor for life's journey or a race against death. The song's chorus, "Goin' down the road feelin' bad," adds a layer of melancholia and introspection, inviting listeners to contemplate the struggles and challenges of existence.

## **Lyrical Interpretations and Symbolism**

The lyrics of "Are You Two Having a Race?" are a tapestry of evocative imagery and potent symbolism. The repeated phrase "goin' down the road" symbolizes the journey of life, with its inevitable trials and tribulations. The "two" individuals in the song can represent the duality of human nature, the constant struggle between good and evil, or the companions we encounter along the path of life. The "race" itself can be interpreted as a relentless pursuit of something elusive, whether it be success, happiness, or the meaning of life.

The song's haunting refrain, "Where are you goin' with that load of lumber?," adds another layer of ambiguity. The "load of lumber" could represent the burdens we carry in life, the responsibilities and challenges that weigh us down. Alternatively, it could symbolize the raw materials from which we build our lives and forge our destinies. The question posed in the

refrain invites us to reflect on the purpose and direction of our own journeys.

## **Cultural Impact and Legacy**

"Are You Two Having a Race?" has become deeply ingrained in American culture, resonating with people from all walks of life. Its simple yet profound lyrics have touched the hearts of countless listeners, inspiring interpretations and serving as a soundtrack for countless experiences. The song has been covered by a wide range of artists, including Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Johnny Cash, further cementing its status as a folk classic.

The song's enduring appeal lies in its universal themes and timeless message. It speaks to the human condition, our struggles, our hopes, and our relentless pursuit of meaning in an often incomprehensible world. "Are You Two Having a Race?" has become an anthem for travelers, wanderers, and seekers, a reminder that we are all interconnected in our journey through life.

"Are You Two Having a Race?" stands as an enduring testament to the power and beauty of American folk music. Its enigmatic origins and ambiguous lyrics have fueled countless interpretations and debates, while its haunting melody and evocative imagery continue to resonate with listeners today. Through its journey through time, the song has become a cultural touchstone, a reminder of the human spirit's resilience and the enduring power of storytelling.

As we continue to navigate the complexities of life's journey, "Are You Two Having a Race?" serves as a timeless companion, inviting us to contemplate the meaning of our own pursuits and the connections we forge

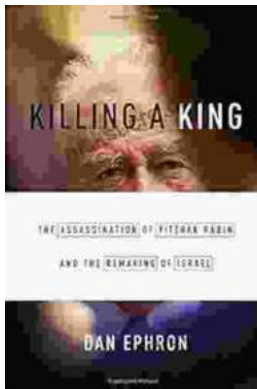
along the way. May its lyrics forever remind us that we are not alone in our struggles and that the race we run is ultimately one of self-discovery and the pursuit of our own unique destiny.



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