

NOTES AND QUERIES

The issue of Folklore Forum devoted to "Conceptual Problems in Contemporary Folklore Study"¹ contains much meat, but I wish to comment here simply on two references to my work which seem to me seriously in error. In "Re-evaluating the Concept of Group: ICEN as an Alternative," Beth Blumenreich and Bari Lynn Polonsky use my history of James Douglas Suggs to invalidate the concept of group by saying "It should be obvious to anyone that Suggs cannot be representative of a 'Southern Negro group' unless all individuals labelled 'Southern Negro' are known to have had experiences comparable to those of Suggs."² Well, I say it should be obvious to any folklorist worth his salt that Suggs does perfectly exemplify Southern Negro tradition. The evidence is all there in the comparative notes to Suggs' tales, which are reported in variant form by other collectors of southern black folk narratives such as Brewer, Hurston, and Parsons. The Old Harster cycle, in which Suggs is adept, is exclusively and entirely a southern Negro corpus. Of course Suggs' life is unique; the life of every one of us is unique; if Blumenreich and Lynn carry their logic to its extreme there would be no shared folklore because everybody is an individual. But all of us lead group as well as individual lives, Suggs is completely typical of the deep south Afro-American engaging in a variety of occupations and gradually working his way north. He is part of the great black migration northwards during the past half century.³ Simply look at the brief biographical sketches I have appended to Negro Folktales in Michigan to see the repetitive pattern.

In "Conceptual Problems in Writing a History of the Development of Folkloristic Thought," Neil Grobman opines that my history of the British folklorists pays too much attention to the giants of the Victorian era to the relative neglect of antiquaries and peripheral figures.⁴ Well, when I began writing this history, there were no giants, let alone marginal pygmies. There was just a great arid blank in this major chapter in the history of our discipline. The Great Team might as well never have lived, for all the attention they received. In Four Symposia on Folklore not a single mention is made of an English folklorist. It is a strange irony, in a way rather pleasing, that now the Great Team are regarded as giants by a new generation of folklorists, who feel that the history was somehow always there and visible.

Refining the concept of the group, and defining the strategy of the history of folkloristics, are highly praiseworthy aims. I salute the authors of these articles for their endeavors, which I wholeheartedly support.

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1. Bibliographic and Special Series no. 12, ed., Gerald Cashion (1974).
2. Ibid., p. 161
3. See e.g. Karl E. Taeuber and Alma F. Taeuber, "The Negro Population in the United States" in The American Negro Reference Book, ed., John P. Davis (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: 1966), esp. "Migration from South to North, 1910 to 1960," pp. 109 ff.
4. Folklore Forum, pp. 56-63.