

TEAM FIELDWORK

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In sports and business and science the ethic of teamwork pervades American culture, but can the team spirit serve academic humanists, known as loners? And in particular can it serve those notorious loners the folklorists? We know that European fieldworkers venture forth in teams, with the folklorist one of a group of specialists, which might include a sociologist, a medical researcher, an ethnobotanist, a psychologist, a camera man, and related types. In the United States we can think of father and son or husband and wife teams such as the Lomaxes and the Fifes. Our foray into the Calumet Region of Northwest Indiana in 1975-76 was, however, the first time a band of folklorists--one professor, seven graduate students--had collaborated in a formal field expedition, so far as we can determine from the history of American folkloristics. Furthermore, we were penetrating an urban area, still another novelty for field explorers. How did this kind of collaboration work out? And does it suggest a model to be emulated on future occasions?

First, let it be said that this was indeed a cooperative venture, not a case of an "old hand" instructing the young how to do fieldwork. At the outset I announced that I would not play the role of a mother hen clucking over her chicks. Our "Gary Gang" was composed of advanced doctoral candidates with considerable experience behind them, in teaching, travel, fieldwork, picked for their expertise by Inta Carpenter, the project coordinator, and myself, the project director. Richard March had studied two years at the University of Zagreb in Yugoslavia, and seemed just the person to approach the Serbian and Croatian communities. Phil George came to the Folklore Institute after two years in the Peace Corps in San Salvador, and seemed equally right for the Latinos. Elena Bradunas, possessor of an M. A. in folklore at the University of California at Los Angeles before coming to

Bloomington, had done extended fieldwork among Lithuanians in Pennsylvania, and would direct her energies to the small Lithuanian and large Greek communities in the Region. Adrienne Seward had spent two years in Ghana working with the well-known theater company of Efue Sutherland, and had also served as chairperson of an Afro-American Studies department at Contra Costa College in San Pablo, and we invited her to inquire into the black community of Gary. Gil Cooley, although a newcomer with only a year in the Folklore Institute, had collected and published Negro hoodoo and ghost tales in his home state of North Carolina, and we suggested he follow a similar trail in the Region. Tom Adler, with a folklore M. A. from Cooperstown, wore several hats, as part-time folklore instructor, bluegrass musician and authority (quoted in a recent issue of Time*), and expert photographer, and we asked him to look into the southern white subculture of the Region. John Hasse, holder of a coveted Danforth fellowship, plays as a pianist in supper clubs while pursuing his ethnomusicological studies and his specialty is ragtime, and for us he concentrated on black gospel music.

Besides these charter members of the Gary Gang, there should be mentioned one additional part-time collaborator, the only aborigine from the Region among the Folklore Institute students, Richard Vidutis. Husky in build, modest in manner, Richard was born in Germany and raised in Gary and had worked in the mills. He could not understand why we, or anyone, would want to visit the Region, let alone undertake an extended exploration of its bowels. At first, he skeptically accompanied Elena on her Lithuanian interviews, but quickly enough got caught up in the contagion of the adventure and came to share our excitement at the "salad bowl" mixture of the Region's multiple cultures. His conversion reconfirmed our impulse: the folklorist-ethnographer could indeed find gold in the Region. The native was now joining us as a fellow-folklorist and training new eyes on his old haunts. Besides his familiarity with local landmarks, he

* "Bluegrass in Blossom," Time, July 4, 1977, p. 45.

served the team in an unexpected capacity of master videotaper. As I was the clumsiest and least adept team member with the dratted machine, so Richard proved to be its most expert master, with the steadiest hand and keenest eye, and the one who came to regard it with tender affection.

So these were our designated divisions of labor, but our common purpose was to identify, record, and interpret, individually and collectively, the variegated folk traditions of the Region. Sometimes we followed our own personal orbits to informants, sometimes we acted in pairs, or threesomes, necessarily so when we were videotaping; but only on a few special occasions, such as the day we shot the film at Jennie's restaurant, or for the ethnic festival in Marquette Park during the Bicentennial Week celebration, did the majority of us get together. The eight of us never cruised down Gary's Broadway in a Land Rover sweeping the sidewalks for informants. Our plans did not call for, and our budget did not permit us, all to be in the field continually at the same time. In the fall of 1975 and in the first summer session of 1976 I taught, on a volunteer basis, at Indiana University Northwest, and resided continually in the Region, and the Gang members contacted me during their shorter forays. In the spring of 1976, when I was back teaching in Bloomington, some made trips north on their own. For the extended week of July 2 to 12, 1976, when the city of Gary put on a special Founder's Day and Bicentennial series of events, the Gang descended en masse on the Region. Adrienne did make an extended stay in May-June 1976, at the home of new friends in Glen Park. So our arrangements tended to be loose, informal, and individualistic, but with an underlying intensity, for we were all caught up in the excitement of the quest and the challenge posed by the Region. Inta regulated the flow of communications between Gang members and myself, Bloomington and the Region, the Folklore Institute office and other campus offices, such as contract administration and accounting, which were involved in the operation of our grant. The problem of communication between all these focal points constitutes a kind of unbelievable folklore in itself.

In terms of teamwork, our interactions took two main forms: conversational discussions in which we

ruminated about our field methods and folklore concepts, and joint interviewing and observing in which we engaged as occasions arose. The discussions developed evenings at the Gateway Motel after our day's pursuits, over breakfast at Lum's down the highway from the motel, in between times at Jennie's Restaurant, our favorite hangout, opposite the Indiana University Northwest campus, or in the office loaned me on the campus. We lacked any central meeting place or message center, and had to rely on these impromptu sessions, mini-seminars as it were, in which we exchanged our ideas and impressions at fever pitch.

Tips on field strategy generated by one Gang member speedily made the rounds of the others. A particular source of unease with some of my new acquaintances was the matter of identification--who was I? Even when rapport had been established, I sensed a need to leave some tangible, or legible, evidence of myself with these field friends, and often scribbled my name and address down on a leaf torn out of my notebook. The situation reached its most critical point when I entered the Supermercado, the resplendent Mexican Supermarket in East Chicago, to request permission for Phil George and helpers to bring our videorecorder into the store and take scenes of the goods and displays. "Where are your credentials?" the two young Mexican storeowners asked me, with severe countenances. "Well," I fumbled, "I am professor of history at Indiana University in Bloomington." My hand moved to my wallet, but my driver's license said nothing about my professional qualifications, and I did not have any reprints handy. "Ask me a question about American history," I volunteered. They froze for a moment, then relaxed into broad grins. "My cousin reads a lot," said one. "He has an encyclopedia." The crisis passed, we were given carte blanche into the store, and the owners cooperated most graciously with Phil, even letting themselves be interviewed on camera. But a lesson was there which John Hasse pointed out to me, the need for name cards--a practice I had become thoroughly familiar with in Japan, where the exchange of cards is a social necessity on first introduction. John even knew of

a printer in Bloomington, from whom Adrienne and I ordered a whole box load. Thenceforth I distributed them like confetti, reassured by their presence as much as by my little Sony tape recorder.

Another valuable field tip passed on to me by a Gang member helped with the problem of how to record a situation when the tape recorder cannot be used. Speak your recollections into the tape immediately afterwards, advised Richard March. The counsel proved useful, and for an instance, while driving back to Bloomington the morning following a monologue drama I had heard Jean Shepherd give in Hammond, I set the little Sony on my lap and for half the trip repeated the substance of his performance, loaded with Region local color, while it was fresh in my thoughts. The mind itself can function something like a tape recorder, and once you set in motion the sequence of impressions, it is astonishing how they reform in the mind's eye. A related tip, this time from Elena, recommended turning on the tape recorder while driving with a longtime resident around town, to capture the comments and observations on neighborhood landmarks and legendary associations he or she would vouchsafe. Subsequently I did exactly that, on a tour around Whiting given me by Ed Zivich, a native Slovak son who taught history there at Calumet College and was writing a doctoral dissertation on the history of its Slovak community. Sure enough, Ed poured forth a stream of local anecdotes which I could never have noted while driving, but the recorder absorbed them all.

From Tom Adler came another cogent observation: the presence of our equipment (video recorders, tape recorders, tripods, still cameras) gave us an immediate entrée. Instead of these machines embarrassing us and our informants by their awkward visibility, they opened doors for us, into churches, beauty pagents, stores, private homes. The American public knew all about television and the media, and Region people accepted naturally the notion that our camera crew had been dispatched by a national network to film some local happening. One time Richard March and Tom Adler set up their video camera in downtown

Gary and conducted random interviews with delighted passersby, eager to say their piece on the tube about the state of Gary and the plight of the nation. From nonentities we grew into investigative reporters, camera crews, links with the media culture in all its glamour.

From points of urban field methods our mini-seminars moved on to points of urban folklore theories. One matter troubling all of us concerned the difficulty we experienced in collecting conventional genres of folklore, although we all agreed that our interviews were yielding rich human rewards. Finally, Phil George articulated the thought toward which we were moving: our speakers talked on traditional themes rather than in traditional form. Crystallizing this key idea gave us all considerable comfort. A statement by Herbert Gutman, who is doing novel research among factory workers, echoed in my mind, to the effect that American historians should pay heed to what the blue-collar workingman had to say. As folklorists we should be listening to what the folk wanted to tell us, not telling them what we wanted to hear. In the Upper Peninsula I collected traditional tales, in the Region we collected life experiences.

Still another perceptions that profoundly stirred me came from Gil Cooley, who commented that psychics in the urban north had replaced the hoodoo doctors of the black rural south. While Gil (or Cooley as he likes to be called) did uncover in the Region items of hoodoo and rootwork, similar to what he had collected in the south, these were survivals from an older imported belief system, and the new urban supernaturalism, manifested in psychic and spiritualistic shops, lectures, and counselors, had taken a different turn. We kept hearing the term psychic constantly: one newspaper story asserted there were over two hundred psychics in the Region, and psychics appeared on radio programs and in advertisements. They appealed to blacks and whites alike, and fulfilled some of the same functions as the covert "two-heads" or hoodoo doctors in the south. But psychics had risen in public stature and come out in the open; not

undercover magicians but learned professionals, they shared the occult arts of preachers, psychiatrists, educators. Once Gil had made the connection, it seemed transparently clear, and we resolved to look further and deeper into the modus operandi of psychics.

In respect to the whole black scene, Adrienne confirmed a revolutionary conception that had been growing in my mind, but which required considerable further documentation, namely that Gary offered to the black community a proud, satisfying, and successful lifestyle. To the outsider, this idea was so ludicrous as to border on madness, but the more Adrienne and I considered it, compared notes, and engaged in further interviews and interaction, the more realistic it became. Burned out, closed down, polluted Gary was beautiful, to the black beholder.

And not only Garyites, but even some Regionites-- a small but fervent percentage--looked lovingly on their terrain, and from this attitude emerged, via Richard March, a central concept, the Region as salad bowl. He heard the metaphor from a new Serbian friend, Nick Tarailo, a youthful bon vivant and jokester who enjoyed the smorgasbord of ethnic dances, music, foods, costumes, and celebrations available in the Gary-East Chicago-Hammond complex. The Gang quickly latched on to the phrase as a positive substitute for the melting pot cliché. "Salad bowl" offered a symbolic as well as metaphoric value, by suggesting a positive image for the Region that Jean Shepherd had characterized with the phrase "The aesthetics of ugliness." We had discovered beauties of folk activities--performances, parades, pageants, festivals-- in that dusty arena of railroad yards, oil refineries, and steel mills. As we rushed from the Serbian to the Macedonian to the Mexican to the Greek to the Afro-American festive event, we felt ourselves at times swept up in a euphoria of sensory stimulation that clouded our rational judgment. "Beware of becoming the participant rather than the observer," I once cautioned Richard, when he and Elena flung themselves into a Serbian kolo dance, an admonition he repeated gleefully. In a calmer mood we could see the salad bowl metaphor-symbol as making a valid statement about life in the Region. A Gary schoolteacher of Irish

descent lauds her birthplace as "a little Europe." A melting pot the Region certainly was not, for the ethnics and blacks maintained and proudly asserted their identities and heritages. But these cultural groups mixed at ethnic festivals and community parades, they emulated and copied each other, with rival booths, bands, shops, floats. The more they asserted their individual identities, the more they seemed to resemble each other in outward form. They were all in it together, like a tossed salad.

One possible source of friction in a collaborative, yet individualized effort such as ours could have been possessiveness toward informants. Since ethnologists customarily think in terms of "my people," a field-worker might be expected to want to keep tradition carriers he or she had interviewed off limits to other team members. The problem simply never developed. Rather, the Gang introduced informants to each other, passed on leads, on occasion interviewed jointly, worked video cameras together, and did indeed function as a team, although not in any planned or systematic manner. We dealt with situations as they arose, which is pretty much how the folklorist must operate in the field, but we took advantage of our network. For one example: during the Bicentennial Week, Adrienne, Gil, and I agreed to cover a black teenage dance, fully expecting to capture exciting videotape scenes of black dancers to complement our videos of ethnic dances. But the youngsters wouldn't dance. As we stood disconsolately Gil, who had arrived early, introduced us to a new acquaintance he had been chatting with about our equipment. The stranger had struck up the conversation, saying that he owned a super 8 millimeter camera and had made a movie with it based on Gary life. Home-made movies as a form of expressive folk culture had certainly never entered our minds at the outset of our quest. Frank Jenkins, the moviemaker, who worked in the mills in his noncreative hours, invited the three of us back to his small apartment and showed the film for a spellbinding two hours. An evening that had seemed promising, then turned to gloom, suddenly shifted into an entirely unexpected direction and proved one of the memorable highlights of the whole Region adventure, thanks to Gil's presence and introduction.

Another example: locating a guslar in Gary, with its large Serbian population, had piqued me since I first ventured into the Region, but all the leads had fizzled out, and I finally resigned myself to the likelihood that none of Albert Lord's singers of tales continued the old epic tradition in our part of the New World. Then one day unexpectedly a Serbian lady who had given me a good deal of information about the Serbian community and Saint Sava Church, mentioned an active guslar, Vojislav Rajkovich, a member of her church, who lived in downtown Gary. Indeed he was a master of the gusle, an elderly retired steelworker, living in what had once been a flourishing ethnic neighborhood but was now almost wholly black and rundown. He could not sell his home and move south with his countrymen because the property value had fallen too low for him to sell and repurchase. The mournful sound of his epic songs conveyed to me a personal overtone. He spoke a limited English, and his wife and the two friends in the room none at all, so my tape recording of our interview and his singing yielded scant information. On Richard March's next visit to the Region I apprised him of Mr. Rajkovich, and subsequently had the pleasure of seeing Richard conversing in Serbian with the guslar and videotaping and audiotaping him in his home with the assistance of John Hasse. From that session Richard obtained material which he wove into two excellent and meaningful videotapes for public presentation, "Singer of Tales in Gary, Indiana" and "Gusle vs. Tamburitsa." The gusle represented a dying, forlorn Old Country tradition, the tamburitsan a vigorous, joyous American transplant.

Besides the passing along of leads and suggestions and ideas from one to another, the team effort also produced joint interviews and forays, a development I would never have expected or recommended. At various times during the year I accompanied each member of the group on some outing. Richard took me to the home in Schererville of the tamburitzza maker and performer in the Drina band, cheery Milan Opacich, where we interviewed not only Milan but his wife and mother. With Elena I spent a long day beginning at the Lithuanian Saturday school in a desolate downtown area in Gary

deserted by most of the ethnic churches, where we began conversing with one of the teachers, Jonas Peckaitis, and eventually held a long interview in both Lithuanian and English, with him and his wife, first in the School basement and later at their apartment filled with Lithuanian objects. They told a gripping life history, representative yet unique, as are all the sagas of World War II escapes from the Soviets and the Nazis. In another scene, Gil took me to interview a black psychic, Kirby Jeffries, who had received considerable publicity in a feature article in the Gary Post Tribune. Cooley had met with him before and set up the appointment. After some waiting in the anteroom that served as a sales counter for occult objects, the stand of a husky blonde fortune-teller, and a convertible church area for Sunday services, we were ushered into his office for a lengthy tape interview, full of mystical matters. Of quite a different order, but equally dramatic, was the conversation Adrienne arranged for me with a Gary-born black steelworker who was "making it," and who held very positive convictions about race, politics, business, and society that he expressed with animation, explosive force, and pithy philosophy sprinkled with street obscenities. Adrienne had become friends with him and his family, who invited her to live with them during her field stay, and she enabled me to meet and record him in his home. Bob Johnson might be considered the secular equivalent of the charismatic preacher-hustler figure now well delineated by scholars of contemporary Afro-American culture. He himself was no church-goer but a vigorous blue-collar worker, who held two full-time jobs, in the mills and in an auto parts manufacturing plant, and sold consumers wholesale goods on the side. His unceasing labors had enabled him to purchase a \$40,000 home in the once ethnic stronghold of Glen Park. Bob could speak nonstop on the folk philosophy of the upwardly mobile urban black worker.

Besides these joint interviews (sometimes with two tape recorders going) the team spirit also generated other kinds of cooperative ventures. For

an example: Richard March, Inta (who was visiting the Gary Gang for an on-site inspection), and I called at the fire station where Milan Opacich worked every second day. The idea was to see Milan on the job as well as at home for a videotape Richard wished to prepare of the skilled tamburitza maker. Although Milan had agreed to the idea with his customary joviality, we entered the firehouse with some trepidation. The crew at once put us at ease, showed us all through the fire station, from the bedrooms above to workspace below, where Milan had actually set up a small tamburitza shop, a replica of the large one in his garage at home. To give full flavor to the videocamera, the impressive black fire captain donned his uniform; he and his crew slid down the pole; and as a crowning gesture they wheeled out the great fire engine and drove it around the block. For our part we perceived a Gary microcosm in the fire station scene, with its mixed crew of blacks and ethnics, who told agonizing tales of slum dwelling fire traps and city politics. Richard obtained splendid footage for his videotape on Milan* (who also played a prominent part in the film "Jenny's" as one of the four members of the Drina band), and I picked up a bonus in a new contact, Captain Nelson Bliss, who not only gave me an interview in the fire station, but also invited me to see him in his other career, as deputy sheriff on alternate days in the Gary welfare office, a block-long building downtown.

An instance of how teamwork can save a touchy situation occurred in East Chicago in a botanica, a shop dispensing magico-religious articles, usually run by Latinos but in this case by a black, Reverend Solomon Turner. He had given us permission to videotape the interior of his small place of business, but just as we had set up the equipment, a seedy-looking insurance salesman stepped up to the counter and made a sales pitch. With some indignation Reverend Turner bade him be gone, and the chap departed. I now moved in with the microphone to begin the interview, and found him too agitated and angry to talk with me.

* "Hey, Mr. Tamburitza Man: An Urban Folk Craftsman", available through the Indiana University Folklore Institute, Bloomington.

At this awkward moment, while I floundered, Richard suddenly stepped in and asked a neutral question about one of the articles in the store. Reverend Turner, who had been on the verge of cancelling the videotaping, quickly regained his composure, and we completed a detailed viewing of the botanica and its proprietor.

On a number of occasions two or three Gang members cooperated to record, visually and aurally, a festive event. A complex multi-faceted event taxes the powers and skills of the ethnographer, we rapidly discovered, and since folklorists previously had paid little attention to American pageants, fairs, and festivals, we had to develop our own strategies. Here the value of teamwork speedily manifested itself, for one pair of eyes and hands could not begin to absorb the spectacle. The tactical and theoretical problem concerned the nature of the event: what were its dimensions, its cast of characters, its structural core, its aesthetic values? To know what we wished to capture we needed eventually to refine our conception of festival, but meanwhile we acted in tandem to obtain data, with videocamera, still camera, tape recorder, notebook, and observations for diary logging. Some festival ethnographers had spent months or a year in interviewing participants and tracking down the behind-the-scenes preparation. Bob Smith had done so for his doctoral dissertation on a religious festival in Peru; Alan Dundes had done likewise for the Palio horse race festival of medieval origins in Siena; and my own son Ron in writing his book on The Indy 500, An American Institution Under Fire, had interrogated many of the people involved a all year long in staging the celebrated automobile race at the Indianapolis Speedway, which bore some parallels to the Palio. Our situation was vastly different, for we were learning about the existence of various festive events on a day-to-day basis, and becoming ever more aware of their proliferation and diversity in ethnic metropolises.

During my first fortnight in the Region in early September 1975, I witnessed a self-styled Ethnic Festival in Hammond lasting two days, and marveled

at the lively scene. None of the other Gang members had yet come north, and I felt keenly a dependence on them to capture as much as possible of the great feast of music and dance performances presented on the raised platform, the ethnic and local history booths, the arts and crafts displays, the nationality dishes, the teeming throng of blue-collar Regionites. Later I reported to Elena seeing a Lithuanian stand, to her surprise, for, though coming from and knowing well the large Lithuanian community in Chicago, she had thought no Lithuanian groups resided in Gary and East Chicago. Subsequently, she made successful contact with them. Learning in good time of the smaller Ethnic Festival in Gary, the team did collaborate to videotape and record aspects of that event.

Teamwork is not the whole story of our experience, and needs to be balanced with individual initiatives displayed by every Gang member. A good part of the time each followed hunches and pursued leads apart from the others. One night at Jennie's Richard suddenly conceived the idea of traveling round trip with the Gary Croatian Junior Tamburitzans by chartered bus from Gary to Detroit for their concert with a local group there, observing and recording that ethnic event from start to finish. Phil in high excitement uncovered a Puerto Rican Märchen teller, Cecilia Melendez, to whom he thenceforth devoted major attention. On a complete tangent from her ethnic concerns, Elena grew absorbed in a hermit of East Chicago, Martin Piniak, who slept under a bridge, and generated legends that she avidly collected (to add to the many already on record in our Folklore Institute Archives). Adrienne staked out a field base in the short-order restaurant and pooltable hangout for Gary blacks run by Louis Tate on Broadway in midtown, and spent long stretches there making friends and recording Mr. Tate's adventuresome life history. Tom talked with a local band at a Fourth of July program in an East Chicago football stadium, became entranced with their musical history and later toured their neighborhood with them, while recording their story and photographing familiar childhood landmarks. Gil began collecting psychic shops, proliferating through the Region, and showed us a handful of name cards he had amassed of such locations