

ACADEMIC AND APPLIED FOLKLORE:
PARTNERS FOR THE FUTURE

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It is my privilege to address the question of the future of folklore studies in the United States. I am aware that this issue could be approached in a variety of ways. I could focus, for instance, on the direction that folkloristic theory seems to be taking, on the relationships between folklore studies and other academic disciplines, or on the research topics that seem to hold the most promise for folklorists. To take any of these tacks, however, would mean restricting myself to folklore studies as they exist solely within the academic realm. What I would like to do instead is to broaden my remarks to discuss the future of their discipline in other arenas as well. Thus, the general thrust of what I have to say is how folklorists can best use their talents and training in the years to come both within and outside the academic environment.

Before I begin, however, I would like to take a retrospective look at folklore studies at Indiana University and reminisce about my own days as an IU graduate student from 1960 to 1963.

Fellow students with me at Indiana University at one time or another during those years were a bunch of wet-behind-the-ears aspiring folklorists with such names as Edward Ives, Jan Brunvand, Richard Bauman; Ellen Stekert, Dan Ben-Amos, Alan Dundes, Robert Georges, Roderick Roberts, Bruce Buckley, Frank Hoffman, Judith McCulloch, George Carey, the two Robert Adamses, Elli Köngas-Maranda, Neil Rosenberg, Gladys-Marie Fry, Hasan El-Shamy, and Barbro Klein, among a host of others.

We were initiated into the mysteries of folklore by such resident notables as Richard Dorson, Warren Roberts, Edson Richmond, Felix Oinas, George Herzog, Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin, George List, and by visiting dignitaries such as MacEdward Leach, Robert Wildhaber, Carl O. Sauer, Archer Taylor, and Newbell Niles Puckett. Regrettably, we arrived at IU after Stith Thompson had retired and we left before Linda Dégh had

joined the faculty, so we did not have the benefit of their instruction.

I treasure the memories of my graduate school days at Indiana University. It truly was a privilege to study under such distinguished scholars and to study with individuals who, although they did not know it then, were to become the catalysts for the burgeoning of folklore studies in the following decade.

Those were truly good times, for when my class of folklore graduate students completed its studies, there were honest-to-goodness jobs waiting for us out there. I said "jobs" plural, for most of us could choose from among three or four offers. Almost without exception, the positions we gained as folklorists were in teaching, for folklore in the public sector was unheard of at that time.

The opportunities for the folklore graduate students of the 1980s to achieve the same measure of success and acclaim in academic folklore circles seem more limited than ours were. As I have already mentioned, however, I feel that the future of folklore studies in the United States lies not entirely within the academic arena, as it did until the recent past. Other important avenues of service in the public and private sectors also need to be explored and developed. Thus, the positions of leadership that today's graduate students will achieve in folklore circles are more likely to lie in the non-academic sector. More on this later.

Folklorists of my generation are fortunate in that we have been able to watch our discipline grow into a position of respect among its sister academic disciplines. For instance, I was present in the 1960s when the American Folklore Society met for the first time independently of the American Anthropological Association or the Modern Language Association. If memory serves me correctly, we had only one session running at any one time. Compare that with the most recent meeting in San Antonio at which there were six or seven concurrent sessions.

In addition, we have been privileged not only to see the ranks of professional folklorists swell, but to contribute to that growth through our involvement in the development of folklore

studies at the college level. When I finished my doctoral work and left Indiana University in 1963, only one other institution offered the Ph.D. in folklore--the University of Pennsylvania, which listed Kenneth Goldstein and Roger Abrahams among its recent graduates. The graduate programs at UCLA and Texas were in their embryo stages; Arthur Palmer Hudson was offering only a handful of courses at North Carolina; and Herbert Halpert, still teaching at Carlinville, Illinois, had probably never heard of Memorial University. Virtually all the students who were my colleagues at IU went on to become ground-breaking theoreticians and moving forces in the folklore graduate programs that developed at Penn, UCLA, Texas, North Carolina, Cooperstown, and Western Kentucky University.

The impact of these young scholars on the academic study of folklore in general was revolutionary. When I was a student, folklore studies were text oriented. There was no such thing as contextual studies; folklife as a concept was unheard of at Indiana; material culture studies were yet to come. In the late 1960s and early '70s, however, a radical shift, with far-reaching implications, took place. Largely as an outgrowth of the work of folklorists such as Dan Ben-Amos, Roger Abrahams, Bob Georges, Dick Bauman, and Alan Dundes, all of whom Richard Dorson called the "young Turks," the study of folklore moved toward a closer alignment with the social sciences, especially cultural anthropology and socio-linguistics. The resulting emphasis was on the study of expressive culture in behavioristic terms. Adherents of the contextual school of folkloristic thought believed it was the key to the revitalization of folklore studies. And any student of the history of the discipline knows what valuable contributions and keen, fresh insights their theories offered. It is still unclear why the anticipated impact of the contextual approach never fully materialized. Ronald Baker wrote in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1978 that "The emphasis on folklore as a behavioral or social science...made only moderate impact on the place of folklore in the college or university."¹ He noted that most folklore courses still are offered in humanistic departments. While many teachers in the graduate

folklore centers were turning out students with strong social science leanings, these same students were going into teaching situations in which the genre approach was deeply ingrained, perhaps to the point that there was little hope of substituting the behavioral for the genre approach.

One might speculate that behavioral, contextual studies have faltered because, as a discipline, folklore has been shifting gradually toward other emphases, one of which is folklife. The early distinction between folklore as verbal arts and folklife as material culture seems to be giving way to a concentration on the totality of human traditional expression--verbal, artifactual, and behavioral--as a patterned system within a group or region. Thus, both the scope and methodology of folklife studies can contribute substantially to research in a number of areas, such as ethnicity and regionalism (whose popularity is reflected in research centers such as the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska, the Appalachian Studies Center at East Tennessee State University, and the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi).

Folklorists have recognized the relationship between the development of ethnic and regional awareness and folklore studies. It has been observed that "as a society, we are discarding the 'melting pot' metaphor for America. Instead, we are beginning to project an image of America as a multi-cultural society, a society of many voices in which citizens retain their cultural identity and traditions."² This process will go on for years, in the words of Robert Byington, and will "involve folklorists as key figures. Their skills and knowledge are probably more important to this ethnic awareness movement than those of any other discipline, and the support they can provide through formal instruction and work in the field is bound to elicit more and more respect."³ Around the first of February 1982, Elena Bradunas of the American Folklife Center sent a letter and a project abstract to me, and I assume others, describing the Center's plans to document ethnic heritage and language schools in America, and to collect and analyze curricular materials used in 5,000 or more of these viable but unofficial community-based schools.

Thus, while I am in no way disposed to write off either genre studies or behavioral studies in folklore, I am personally inclined to feel that, at the academic level, both will have to make room for the increasingly significant movement toward regionally-oriented folklife studies.

In the folklore program at Western Kentucky University, we have, in fact, recently begun to incorporate the folklife approach into a curriculum that has historically been genre oriented. Folklore instruction began at Western in 1929 with Dr. Gordon Wilson and extended through the tenures of Drs. D.K. Wilgus and Kenneth and Mary Clarke, but no degree programs in folklore were offered until I arrived in 1969. The Clarkes and I instituted an undergraduate minor degree program in that year; three years later we established a Master of Arts degree in Folk Studies and a graduate minor in Folk Studies in combination with an M.A. degree in education.

In providing the rationale for the master's degree program in the curriculum proposal, we stated, "The approach to folk studies will be neither literary nor anthropological, but folkloristic; that is, folklore is viewed as a discipline in and of itself, with its own subject matter, methodology, and body of scholarship. But folklore covers a vast area, and just as the humanities and social sciences have contributed to the study of folklore, so it is that folklore, with its stress on comparative and cross-cultural study of traditional expressive forms of behavior, will continue to make its contributions to these fields." That statement quite accurately described the thrust of folk studies at Western until the mid-1970s.

In 1976, we employed Robert Teske explicitly to provide direction in incorporating the folklife approach into certain courses within the existing curriculum. This he did through directed independent study courses and by arranging an elaborate internship program for both undergraduate and graduate students. We received cooperation from public and private agencies such as the Tennessee Valley Authority, the National Park Service, the Tennessee Department of Parks and Recreation, the Smithsonian Institution, the American Folklife Center, the Center for Southern Folklore, the

Kentucky Folklife Foundation, Shakertown at both Pleasant Hill and South Union, the Ohio Office for Historic Preservation, the Kentucky Heritage Commission, and numerous others. Two years later, in 1978, we established a historic preservation track within the master's degree in Folk Studies, with Teskes's course in Museum Techniques and Preservation Procedures as the new track's initial curricular offering within the department. Other courses designed explicitly for the preservation track were developed and offered in the Departments of History and Geography.

When Teske left to go to NEA, we employed Jay Anderson of Living History Farms in Iowa to continue the museum course and the internship program, to develop new course offerings in folklife studies and material culture, and to take the lead in preservation matters.

At present, Western's folklore faculty consists of Jay Anderson and Burt Feintuch, both from the University of Pennsylvania; Camilla Collins and me from Indiana University; and Marilyn White, who is finishing her Ph.D. at the University of Texas. Together, the five of us are planning a major revision of both the individual course offerings and the degree programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels of instruction. Regional folklife or holistic studies will undergird the undergraduate folk studies program. Students will be able to select from a gamut of offerings ranging from broadly-based courses such as European Folklife, Latin American Folklife, the Roots of Southern Culture, and Women's Folklife, to more traditionally conceived courses such as Folk Medicine and American Traditional Song. The term folklife will be substituted for the word folklore in most courses, and most present course descriptions will be rewritten to reflect the new thrust.

The regional folklife courses will be designed to give students fresh insights into their own lives and new perceptions of the world around them as they investigate human social organization and traditional behavior. We are hoping that these courses will be approved as general education courses across the University.

Western's undergraduate degree program in folklore and the graduate program in Folk Studies

will likely be renamed Folklife Studies. Not only are we shifting to folklife in hopes of attracting and interesting more students, we are dropping the term folklore because of the continuing proclivity of the term to conjure up non-serious images in the mind of the general public. The word folklife does not appear to convey the same connotations; it was, after all, the choice of those who successfully lobbied in Congress for the creation of the American Folklife Center in the 1970s.

The establishment of the American Folklife Center brought into focus the second major shift in folklore studies in recent years--a stronger emphasis on folklore in the public and private sectors. Thus far, I have spoken of the future of folklore studies only on the academic level and have suggested the trend toward folklife. Yet there is rich potential for folklorists to apply their training outside the classroom in areas such as arts programming, museums and living history, cultural interpretation, and historic preservation.

Some folklorists lament what they perceive as an essentially weak position of folklore in the public sector. They point to statistics indicating that public folklorists by and large have been employed for short periods of time, mainly to organize and promote folk festivals. These critics also note that a number of folklorists have begun to challenge the validity of the folk festivals as a means of helping individuals and communities develop self-esteem and find "creative alternatives to mass culture."⁴

Such charges may be true, at least in part. But there is more to public sector folklore than just putting on festivals. Charles Camp, Maryland State Folklorist, writes:

To any folklorist who has glanced at an American Folklore Society meeting program or looked for work recently it is no surprise to learn that the number of folklorists employed as full-time professionals in the so-called "public sector" has increased dramatically in the past few years, and that the places where such folklorists are employed and the work they do have become more varied.⁵

Folk arts programming at the state level,

for instance, is very much in favor around the country, and the number of state folklorist positions is increasing each year. Ten states now totally fund these positions through legislative appropriations with no help from NEA or state arts councils. Just this past year, Alaska, New York, and North Dakota joined this elite category.⁶ Such states generally see their folklorist not as a festival organizer and promoter, but as a cultural interpreter--as a folk culture expert accountable to state government and to the people of the state. The job of the state folklorist is primarily that of public education, which must be pursued through a diversified and carefully coordinated series of program activities.⁷

Regarding the areas of museums and living history, anyone who questions the viable relationships between folklife studies and museums has only to read J. Geraint Jenkins' classic description of "The Use of Artifacts and Folk Art in the Folk Museum," or an article by anthropologist James Deetz entitled "The Link from Object to Person to Concept."⁸ In the United States we may never have the tremendously large number of folk museums as that found across Scandinavia and described by Jenkins, but the number is ever-increasing in America. In discussing the rise of outdoor folklife museums (so-called living history museums) in the United States, Howard W. Marshall notes that some of these museums, which portray village and farm life, are staffed by folklorists who interpret the total past in a living history setting complete with artifacts, sensitive communication, and a reconstructed cultural landscape.⁹ What is equally important, however, is that American folklorists with some museum training are finding jobs in history museums around the country, and, according to Jay Anderson,¹⁰ there are close to 30,000 such positions. The challenge for folklorists is to be uniquely qualified when all types of opportunities for museum employment knock--ready with their knowledge of expressive culture to step in and help in setting up interpretive programs that truly depict history and culture as they were.

In addition to living history museums, the broader area of cultural interpretation affords numerous additional opportunities for folklorists

to serve in governmental agencies and private organizations as well. To list only three examples at the governmental level, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Tennessee Valley Authority are engaged in a variety of cultural preservation activities and interpretation programs, ranging from folklife surveys to oral folk history to festivals. Since official relationships between folklorists and most federal agencies have not yet been worked out, all too often folklife surveys, to use this one example, are performed not by folklorists but by people in archaeology, history, and other disciplines better known in federal circles. As a specific case in point, I was the only folklorist to submit a bid to do a folklife survey for the Big South Fork project, yet the contract was awarded to an anthropologist with leanings toward prehistoric archaeology. Know why? The NPS had earlier contracted with the Southeastern Archaeological Center in Tallahassee, Florida, to award contracts and oversee folklife surveys in the region.

As this illustration suggests, the American Folklore Society needs a lobbyist or representative in Washington to carry our discipline's name and expertise to the public agencies. This void should be addressed immediately, or folklorists will continue to lose survey contracts and be passed over when vacant positions in governmental offices are announced.

Folklorists already perform critically needed cultural interpretation services in the private sector. Three specific examples should suffice.

Sondra Thiederman, a doctoral candidate in folklore at UCLA, has for the past two years conducted workshops for health care professionals under a program she calls "Cross-Cultural Health Education." She teaches doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals how to bridge the gap between themselves and their ethnic patients by dealing with culturally specific issues, beliefs, and practices observed by the patient population. She instructs the health professionals in matters pertaining to cross-cultural etiquette and the world views of ethnic individuals who come to them for help. For example, Hispanics cannot perceive of medicine in the future tense, i.e., they are

not culturally attuned to the idea of preventative medicine. Thus, knowledge of patients' cultural backgrounds helps the health professionals understand their patients more fully and to deal with potential cross-cultural misunderstandings. Sondra recently told me that medical centers and hospitals have money for workshops of this sort, and that if a folklorist would really hustle the health care scene, a very financially productive and rewarding future is possible. (I should point out that David Hufford, a trained folklorist, is also engaged in this type of cross-cultural health education in an academic setting at the Hershey Medical Center in Pennsylvania).¹¹

The American Association for State and Local History, a private membership organization, employed Patricia Hall as Assistant Director of the Education Division. Patty is a folklorist by training, but her job is not a folklore position. She has, however, worked diligently to make her peers aware of folklore as a discipline and what it has to offer to AASLH's program areas. She was one of the moving forces behind the 1980 New Orleans Conference on Folklore and Local History, and has seen to it that folklore students may compete for the William T. Alderson History Internship to be awarded for the first time this summer.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science provides my third example of folkloristic involvement in the private sector. Folklorist Rayna Green was employed by AAAS to help stimulate interest in culturally-based science, a term which, according to Rayna, is a non-academic way of saying ethnoscience. Her article on "Culturally-Based Science: The Potential for Traditional People, Science, and Folklore" contains a rather strong indictment of folklorists for excluding themselves from the mainstream of the applied social sciences. She does, however, conclude on the positive note of singling out certain areas in which folklorists are uniquely trained to examine cultural materials and "to break them down into discrete and significant parts." Rayna continues:

They (folklorists) are trained to take texts, pots, pictures and designs apart, to develop taxonomies and make lists, without getting lost in cultural descriptions of the whole...And they are trained to look at and

where scientists never look--at those artistic, expressive materials that are the antithesis of science and the essence of culturally-based science.¹²

To Dr. Green, a gap exists between traditional peoples and the scientists who study them. Folklorists could help bridge that gap.

My last example designed to illustrate how folklorists may apply their training and expertise outside the classroom is in the area of historic preservation.

The first historic preservation efforts in the United States were marked by limited support, colored by romantic notions of earlier periods of American history, and confined to urban areas. Throughout the nineteenth century, the focus of preservation activities was on rescuing single buildings associated with nationally prominent persons or events. After many years, decades even, preservation activities shifted to an appreciation of great architectural achievements in American history. Preservation today, broadly expanded from these narrowly-conceived beginnings, generally revolves around the concept of the architectural and cultural integrity of entire urban neighborhoods. This concept came about thanks to the creation of the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1933, the creation of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1949, and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, not to mention subsequent laws, proclamations, and executive orders related to preservation activities.

As a result of all these official motivating factors, the historic preservation movement is again gradually expanding, this time from a preoccupation with tangible artifacts within the urban realm to attention to the whole range of cultural expression, tangible and intangible, urban and rural. There is a new move afoot by the Department of the Interior to revitalize, protect, and conserve rural areas, including their human, natural, and cultural resources. Who decides which resources in rural areas are valuable enough to save is a vital issue. As rural preservation broadens to include farmscapes and cultural landscapes, folklore and folklife specialists will need to become involved, and, according to certain essays in a recent book entitled, **New Directions**

in Rural Preservation, folklife experts are expected to provide input into these decision-making matters. The American Folklife Center, itself created under legislation entitled The American Folklife Preservation Act, should be and is leading in efforts to involve folklorists in rural preservation. They are uniquely qualified to understand and interpret the familiar landscapes, structures, and traditions associated with the countryside. But folklorists who have no knowledge of regional planning do not yet know how to interpret the revolution that is already underway and reshaping the face of rural America, namely, the significant decline of farms and farmland acreage and the concurrent move toward mechanization and agri-business. A case in point is folk structures, specifically older farm buildings which are being replaced by modern, ubiquitous, metal and concrete structures.¹³ These new forms of architectural design, materials, and function substantially alter the historic cultural landscapes. We do not need to be regional planners to understand this shift in architectural and settlement patterns, but we do need to be regional planners as well as folklorists so that we can obtain employment with regional planning agencies and thus be in positions to formulate policies--policies that would, for example, stress the importance of preserving selected examples of folk architecture, farmsteads, and entire rural landscapes.

The title of my presentation is "Academic and Applied Folklore: Partners for the Future." In addressing this topic, I have placed more emphasis on the applied part of these twin thrusts. The rationale is simple: most of the jobs for folklorists are now and will continue to be in the public sector. There will be many avenues of applied service open to folklorists. I have singled out and talked about folklorists in arts programming, museums and living history, cultural interpretation, and historic preservation. The list could go on to include folklorists in industry, folklorists in rumor centers, folklorists in public administration, and folklorists in programs for the ageing, to name only four additional potential areas open to members of our discipline.

Inherent in all this is a tremendous responsibility, for it is folklore graduate training

programs that must tool themselves now to train students for as many of these avenues of service as possible. Folklore programs must strive for a delicate balance between theory and content courses on the one hand, and skills and job-related courses which provide internships managerial training, and the like, on the other. It is alright to speak of folklore as one of the cornerstones of a liberal arts education at the undergraduate level, for folklore is indeed the most human of disciplines . Graduate students, however, need curriculum vitae replete with how-to-do-it courses to take with them into the market place. As Camilla Collins recently commented to me, "Folklorists should not be just people who can put on festivals, but individuals who can be readily integrated into public and private agencies as 'whole' workers."

The graduate education that I received at Indiana University in the early 1960s was right for the time. Folklore graduate schools today should take every measure to see to it that their programs of instruction are equipping students for the new directions in folklore that I have been talking about. Then, in twenty years, when one of you is addressing the future of folklore studies in America, you can assure graduate students then that folklore is alive and well, and that folklorists have a significant role to play in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. Ronald Baker, "The Study of Folklore in American Colleges and Universities," *Journal of American Folklore* 91 (1978): 793.
2. Burt Feintuch, written statement in proposal for new course entitled, "Cultural Pluralism in America," Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Spring, 1982.
3. Robert Byington, "Prepared Comments on the Academic Future of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore Supplement* (May 1972): 114.
4. Richard Blaustein, "Furthering the Folk Arts in Tennessee: Some Observations," *Kentucky Folklore Record* 28 (1981): 4.
5. Charles Camp, unpublished review of **The Traditional Arts and Crafts of Warren County, Kentucky** by Annie Archbold (Bowling Green, Kentucky, 1980) and **Webfoots and Bunch-grassers: Folk Art of the Oregon Country** (Eugene, Oregon, 1980), p. 1.
6. Robert Teske, telephone conversation with the author, February 21, 1982.
7. Henry Willett, "Re-Thinking the State Folk Arts Program (Or Alternatives to the Festival)," *Kentucky Folklore Record* 28 (1981): 13.
8. J. Geraint Jenkins, "The Use of Artifacts and Folk Art in the Folk Museum," in **Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction**, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago, 1972), pp. 497-516; James Deetz, "The Link from Object to Person to Concept," in **Museums, Adults and the Humanities** (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 24-34.
9. Howard W. Marshall, "Folklife and the Rise of American Folk Museums," *Journal of American Folklore* 90 (1977): 391.
10. Jay Anderson, oral communication with the author, February 9, 1982.
11. Sondra Thiederman, telephone conversation with the author, February 9, 1982.

12. Rayna Green, "Culturally-Based Science: The Potential for Traditional People, Science, and Folklore," in **Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century**, ed. Venetia J. Newall (London, 1980), p. 212.
13. William H. Tishler, "The Role of Historic Preservation in Tomorrow's Rural Landscape," in **New Directions in Rural Preservation**, ed. Robert E. Stipe (Washington, D.C., 1981), p. 27.