

La Claire arrived at the blacksmith shop and was met by my grandfather, dressed in a suit and tie in anticipation of a "formal" portrait session. This, was hardly what my uncle wanted; he sought to photograph craftspeople "in situ," practicing their art. Although my grandfather had a strong sense of self-worth, his years as a welder in the salt mines of Manistee, Michigan made him believe that his craft and artistic vision had little significance to most members of mainstream society.

But my grandfather was surprised in a positive way. He was happy to get into his work clothes, put on his long apron, stoke the forge with coal, and pound red-hot iron for my uncle's camera. Because he did so, my uncle was able to create a permanent vision of the village blacksmith that is both personal to me and archetypal for all who see it.

Folklorists typically strive to do (in a more "professional," systematic, and organized way) what my uncle did as an avocation: interpret and present traditional people in a manner that builds mutual respect and understanding. My hope for the future of public sector/applied folklore is to consciously develop methods, strategies, and visions that facilitate artists and craftspeople understanding their own significance, learning how to successfully interact with the larger, mainstream society on their own terms, and mitigating the disruption and alienation so often caused by massive social change.

Nuff Respect for Jamaican Women: On the Experience of Organizing a Celebration of Female Dub Poets

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Dub poetry, or reggae poetry, emerged in the late 1970s as an art form that combines traditional Jamaican verbal and musical components. Unfortunately, the existing scholarship on the genre focuses primarily on male practitioners. In recent years interest in the work of established female poets such as Lillian Allen, Jean "Binta" Breeze, and Cherry Natural has grown significantly. Despite the increased interest, joint female performances remain rare. More commonly, a single female performs along with a line-up of male artists.

While conducting fieldwork with Jamaican poets in 1996, I shared my vision of organizing an all-women dub poetry program at Indiana University. I first approached the poets Cherry Natural and Queen Majeeda during an interview in Kingston. I invited them to participate in the project, and they accepted. Soon we discussed adding another poet, as well as a female drummer. After many conversations, phone calls, and faxes, we successfully recruited a third poet, Jean "Binta" Breeze, and a drummer, Joy Erskine.

Detailed planning began in Bloomington in August, 1996. Generating the funds necessary to pay stipends and airfare was no easy task—especially since I was committed to bringing all four women to Bloomington for an entire week of events. The Ethnomusicology Students' Association provided tremendous help in organizing the project, but this group had never before attempted such a large-scale project. In addition to public performances, the plans included classroom lectures on Jamaican verbal and musical traditions as well as poetry and drumming workshops. The project's strength was that it would provide students, faculty, and members of the Bloomington community with the opportunity not only to experience live dub poetry but also to interact with the women in a number of settings. I submitted the proposal to a variety of funding organizations in the fall of 1996, and I began coordinating the event after funds were secured.

During their visit in February, 1997, the women literally interacted with hundreds of people. While they were at Indiana University, I did not fully grasp how deeply these experiences personally affected Cherry, Majeeda, Jean, and Joy. Sharing an apartment and working together gave each of the women the chance to tell stories about her own experiences as a woman and as a performer in a male-dominated genre. They drew inspiration from one another and from audience members, relishing the knowledge that the event celebrated the work and creativity of Caribbean women.

Working with these women remains one of the highlights of my efforts as a public folklorist. The fruits of this project serve as a reminder of the diverse benefits offered by public folklore initiatives, whether they are large or small in scale. The logistics of funding and organizing a program while taking graduate classes was daunting, but the educational and personal rewards for all involved were great. The dub poetry events in Bloomington made a significant impact on the public, the women, and myself. I encourage others to dream big and then act on the public folklore projects that they envision.

Who's Gonna Fight, Who's Giving In

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I write about an event that promoted community solidarity, yet ultimately damaged relations between that community and a cultural organization in Texarkana, Arkansas/Texas. It had to do with the sale of beer at a festival initially designed as an organizational fund raiser for a local museum. The museum wanted to sell beer at its festival; the community, predominantly Christian in belief, did not want alcohol served. The result was a community-wide movement to rescind the museum's decision. It worked.