American Public Folklore—History, Issues, Challenges

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Abstract: This overview of American public and applied folklore explores the development of ideas about public and applied folklore, along with government support for folk arts and folklife, over the past century and a half in the United States. The development of American public and applied folklore through several key periods in United States history and the shaping of an American national identity are narrated. The periods of mass interest in folk music, the formation of academic departments in the discipline and the impact of debates on Intellectual Property Rights on folklore are among the issues discussed.

In this overview of American public and applied folklore I will explore how ideas about public and applied folklore, along with government support for folk arts and folklife, have developed over the past century and a half in the United States. I will relate the development of American public and applied folklore to several key periods in United States history and the shaping of an American national identity.

Americans have long struggled with conflicting ideas about whether to assimilate or maintain diverse cultures and cultural identities. Since the nineteenth century, American national identity has come to be seen as built out of the diverse ethnic, regional, and native cultures that make up the United States. American folklorists have often been in the vanguard of efforts to document, safeguard, perpetuate, and publicly present the diverse cultural traditions of the United States.

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As public and applied folklore became a major focus of folklore as both academic discipline and public practice in the late twentieth century, we have vigorously debated such issues as whether academically trained folklorists should be engaged in applied folklore, how to "recontextualize" folklore so that we present it publicly in a manner grounded in the customary contexts of presentation; the relative merits of and distinctions between, "applied folklore" and "public folklore"; how public folklore programming represents traditions and their practitioners; public folklore as cultural intervention, whether folklorists should be advocates for the cultures we study and present, and the question of "who owns folklore" as a matter of intellectual property. I will discuss these issues as I trace the history of ideas about applied and public folklore in the U.S.

American applied and public folklore has usually depended upon extensive support from the federal government, to a greater degree than other areas of arts and culture. This federal leadership role was especially evident prior to the 1980s, when a national infrastructure of public folklore programs based in state governments and in private, not-for-profit organizations was created, complementing the federal programs.

The first systematic American initiatives which could be viewed from a contemporary standpoint as "applied" or "public" folklore were undertaken in the mid-nineteenth century by the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), a federal agency responsible for documenting the cultures of Native Americans. Led by Civil War veteran John Wesley Powell, the BAE researched narrative, material culture, customary behavior and belief systems. Powell and the BAE felt that it was imperative to document these traditions before they would inevitably disappear through assimilation within a few generations. According to Erika Brady, "collection of information concerning American Indian culture served both a scientific and a practical purpose: a record would remain of the nature of these cultures for an Indianless future which could also be used meanwhile to facilitate a humane and efficient transition to that future" (Brady 1988: 39). Through this documentation, the administrators of America's conquered, and resettled, Native peoples would be able to better able to understand the cultures of American Indians in order to more effectively administer them. Of course, an "Indianless future" never occurred, and American Indians still proudly retain their distinctive identities.

Assimilation was also viewed as a policy goal for the adaptation to American life of the millions of immigrants who arrived in the great wave of immigration which began in the late nineteenth century. This great wave ended with severe restrictions upon immigration imposed in 1924, with large-scale immigration resuming due to a new federal law in 1965

which eliminated racist restrictions upon immigration based on national origin. Until the late 20th century, the goal of assimilation was seen as creating an American "melting pot." The melting pot is a metaphor for the combination of ingredients in a pot which form a compound made up of all the different components melted together, and this metaphor has been applied to the development of America as a homogenous society. There were major contradictions in the melting pot ideal, such as the segregation of African Americans in the Southern U.S., and the exclusion of Asians through immigration laws.

Since folklore began as an academic discipline in the U.S., American folklorists have contested the ideal of assimilation, viewing the culture of the United States in terms of cultural pluralism, even if their idea of diversity was initially limited. The first issue of the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1888 stated the mission of the new American Folklore Society (AFS) as collecting the "fast vanishing remains" of "Old English Folk-lore," and the "lore of Negroes in the Southern States ... Indian tribes" and "French Canada, Mexico, etc (Newell 1888:3)." In describing the AFS's founding mission, Roger Abrahams states that while the founders saw folklore as "holdovers from the premodern past", they were trying "to discover what was unique about America from the traditions that had been maintained or developed because of the specific cultural confluences that had occurred here, and the socially open quality of the American experiment." He saw their interest in folklore as having a public purpose, as a "concern with the ways in which traditional communities and their lifeways might be dignified through receiving ardent notice by folklorists, and out of this... a useful notion of what it means to be an American might be forged." Abrahams sees the foundations of American public folklore as having been established at the same time as the academic discipline was created (Abrahams [1992] 2007: 259, 258-59).

American folklorists strongly advocated for cultural pluralism during the twentieth century, joining scholars and writers who stressed the distinctiveness of an American culture built out of its diverse ethnic, regional and occupational communities. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, folklorists had a central role in large scale government efforts to provide work for unemployed writers through the Federal Writers Project (FWP) of the Works Project Administration (WPA). Through supporting the creation of works of art and literature and documentation of regional and ethnic cultures, the WPA contributed to an awakening of Americans to the value and beauty of their distinctive cultural heritage at a time of economic hardship and demoralization. American literature, art and folklore were viewed as beautiful and valuable on their own terms, and they no longer needed to be measured according to the standards

of European culture. As Jerrold Hirsch has indicated, the FWP embodied an expanded vision of who and what it means to be an American. For the leaders of the National FWP, "rediscovering, acknowledging and celebrating the nation's cultural pluralism ... could provide Americans with the cultural understanding that would provide the basis for a new form of national integration that was inclusive, not exclusive, and democratic, not coercive" (Hirsch 1988:49) enabling all individuals and cultural groups to more fully participate in the life of the nation as Americans. This view can be contrasted with the ideal of a cultural heritage derived from Great Britain as the normative standard.

The FWP supported the collection of folklore throughout the United States, with leadership positions for the great folklorists John Lomax, Herbert Halpert, and Benjamin A. Botkin. Botkin, who served as the first national editor of the entire FWP, eventually became the first folklorist to develop the concept of applied folklore. While very few of the field researchers were formally trained in folklore, they included exceptionally gifted writers like Ralph Ellison and Arthur Miller, who would go on to be among the greatest twentieth century American writers. The field researchers received expert guidance from Botkin, who served as the national editor of the entire Federal Writers Project. He saw the aim of the folklore work of the FWP as "giving back to the people what we have taken from them and what rightfully belongs to them, in a form which they can understand" (Botkin 1939:10). The form in which this folklore was returned to the people consisted of books about the folklore of American states, regions, and the entire nation; and a significant place for folklore in "The American Guide Series," guidebooks to each of the states and regions in the United States.

Botkin's instructions to field researchers stressed the collection of the social and cultural context of folklore and how it is performed, as "living lore", at a time when most folklorists were concerned with recording texts which could be traced to Old World antecedents. It anticipated the late twentieth century folklore paradigm which studies folklore as performance, as tradition possessed by any kind of cultural group, and involves the collection of folklore through the use of ethnographic methods. Botkin told field researchers to collect traditions which "come from oral sources" and stressed that they should be recorded "exactly as heard," with complete field notes provided by the researchers. The traditions to be collected should "have a purpose and reason for existence" and "should be tied up with the life of the community or group and of the individual informant as part of the community or group." He said that "every group bound together by common interests and purposes, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban" has folklore, and within these "traditions

may enter many elements, individual, popular, and even 'literary,' but all are absorbed and assimilated through repetition and variation into a pattern which has value and continuity for the group as a whole" (Botkin 1938, cited in Hirsch 1988:58).

The post-World War II period was a time of increasing economic prosperity, extensive development of suburbs, greater education and mobility for most Americans, and a triumph of modernity which brought with it growing popular consciousness of folk heritage at the same time as folk traditions were endangered. Folklore became popularized in many different ways. Botkin published anthologies of American folklore which sold many hundreds of thousands of copies. Widespread interest in American folk music developed throughout the U.S. The African American blues singer Leadbelly, Oklahoma folk singer Woody Guthrie and the Weavers, who adapted traditional folk songs for mass audiences, all gained great national fame and large audiences. At this time, programs were created in schools and other community institutions to achieve intercultural understanding through bringing together different cultures to learn about each other's folklore, radio series with folklore themes produced by Alan Lomax were broadcast on prime time on national networks, folk materials were extensively used in films, museums were created which featured regional agricultural traditions, many schoolteachers used folklore in their classes, and folk festivals featured the music of different regional (and, to a lesser extent, ethnic) cultures(see Baron [1992] 2007).

The term "applied folklore" was first used in 1950, by Ralph Beals, who saw it as "the wide diffusion of folk materials" which has increased the appreciation of "minority group values" and "broadened the appreciation of folk heritage" (Beals 1950:360). In 1953, Botkin conceptualized applied folklore as "the use of folklore for some end beyond itself." Contrasting the "pure" and the "applied" folklorist, he said that the applied folklorist is engaged in an interdisciplinary endeavor, devoted to intercultural understanding, and involved with "social or literary history, education, recreation or the arts" in addition to folklore(Botkin 1953:199).

While many academic folklorists were involved with, or at least supportive of, applied folklore during the early 1950s, as folklore studies began to achieve status as an independent academic discipline later in the decade, many academic folklorists became highly critical of applied folklore and the popularization of folk materials. Applied folklorists and popularizers began to feel unwelcome in the folklore profession. Popularizers were marginalized within the AFS and applied folklorists like Botkin and Alan Lomax withdrew from involvement with the academic folklore discipline. The leading opponent of applied folklore was Richard

Dorson, academic folklore's most prominent champion and the man responsible for building the folklore program at Indiana University as the first major American graduate program (see Baron [1992] 2007).

The mass interest in folklore of the early post-war years diminished by the mid-1950s, for, among other reasons, the association of folk singers with the radical left, part of the extreme anti-communist hysteria which poisoned many aspects of American arts and culture.

Mass interest in folk music rose again in the 1960s. Singer songwriters and folk revivalists who called themselves "folk singers" performed in a folk idiom, wrote songs in favor of the movement for African American civil rights and in protest against the Vietnam War, and revived traditional songs. Some - for example, Bob Dylan—became major national stars. Traditional performers of blues and Appalachian Anglo-American folk music also became widely known, performing for the first time to audiences outside of their own communities. Many professional folklorists of today, including me, first became interested in folklore by listening to such traditional folk music in our youth, and some professional folklorists performed publicly as interpreters of traditional folk music.

While academic folklorists largely resisted applied folklore in the 1960s, prominent folklorists were involved in the development of the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife (now known as the Smithsonian Folklife Festival), the first major federal folklife initiative since the FWP. The Smithsonian Folklife Festival was founded in 1967 and developed by Ralph Rinzler. Rinzler, who directed the Festival through most of its first two decades, had previously been the director of field programs for the Newport Folk Festival, noted for the important traditional folk musicians it presented to new audiences in addition to singer songwriters and folk music revivalists.

Situated outdoors along the National Mall in Washington, flanked on both sides by the major national museums, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival uses interpretive and educational practices associated with museums, like photo-text panels, signs with information like those used for museum exhibitions of material culture, a "learning center", a shop for the sale of traditional crafts, books, CDs and other items comparable to a museum store, and a program book which functions like an exhibition catalog. A wide range of folklore genres are presented, including material culture, foodways, narrative, music and dance. Each year, tradition bearers from a particular country or region of the world (like the Mekong River region in 2007) are presented along with American immigrants from the featured country or region(see Kurin 1997). Regional, occupational

and Native American traditions are also presented at the Festival. The Festival, like other American public folklore programs, emphasizes the recontextualizing of folklore so that it is presented as customarily practiced in homes, community gathering places, schoolyards and other "natural contexts," rather than staged productions of folk music and dance extensively altered and stylized through choreography and theatricalization.

S. Dillon Ripley, the Secretary (director) of the Smithsonian Institution, which functions as the national museum of the United States, established the festival as a way of making the Smithsonian more accessible to visitors who do not usually go to museums. Richard Kurin has written that the "the festival was seen as a corrective of sorts, a way of telling the story of the diverse people that populated the nation but whose cultural achievements were not represented in the museums or their collections(Kurin 1997: 121)."

Folklorists, ethnomusicologists and anthropologists are contracted by the Festival to identify tradition bearers suitable for presentation, and act as "presenters," introducing the participants and interpreting their traditions. The experiences of folklorists at the Festival shaped a new generation of public folklorists, who would spend their careers working with government cultural agencies and private, not for profit cultural organizations rather than at colleges and universities.

Presentations at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival embody the performance-centered approach to folklore studies developed during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This performance paradigm opposed the textual approach which had dominated American folklore studies. The performance approach views folklore as artistic communication in small groups and focuses upon how folklore emerges in face to face interaction, and the social and cultural contexts within which traditions are practiced(see Bauman and Paredes 1972, Bauman 1975, Limon and Young 1986). At the festival, like other folklife festivals produced by folklorists, tradition bearers are often presented in contexts which attempt to replicate the traditional "natural" contexts in which folklife is customarily practiced. For example, houses have been constructed to demonstrate traditional building techniques, dance concerts simulate a café or dance hall, and Caribbean carnival performers have processed through the festival grounds.

Presentational formats used at folklife festivals produced by folklorists (with the exception of large concerts), are designed to encourage interaction between participants and audience members, and educate visitors about the artist's culture, his or her background practicing the

tradition, styles and techniques. The traditions are explained by the folklorist presenter and the tradition bearers, ideally with the participant's voice most prominent.

Several principal formats of presentation are used at folklife festivals like the Smithsonian Folklife Festival:

Demonstrations and lecture/demonstrations of traditional crafts, occupational practices and foodways, presented on tables, a replicated traditional structure like a shop or house, or a defined open space on the festival grounds, enabling audience members to approach and engage the tradition bearers face to face. They can be presented continuously, or as scheduled activities which may involve a more active role for presenters explaining the contexts for the traditions being presented. Demonstrations may involve "hands-on" participation, with the craftspersons showing visitors and audience members how to make an object, and the audience members then trying to make it themselves.

Workshops, where artists talk about and present a tradition, sing a song, trade tunes with other musicians, or show their craft work as they talk about how they learned and continue to practice their tradition.

"Narrative stages", also known as "talkers tents" or "talk stages", used for the presentation of oral narrative or the discussion of various points of view about a tradition or cultural issues. When this format is used for narratives, they are elicited by folklorists from tradition bearers. Ideally, participants will exchange stories with one another with no intervention from the folklorist presenter.

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival increased in size and scope during the early and mid-1970s, peaking in a summer-long event in 1976 which brought much national attention as one of the main activities of the bicentennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence from Great Britain. After 1976, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival diminished in size, returning to presentations over two five-day periods each summer. During the late 1970s and 1980s, many other folklife programs of national, regional, statewide and local scope were developed throughout the U.S.

Meanwhile, academic folklorists were taking notice of increased applied folklore activities and exploring ways to integrate it with the academic discipline. In 1971, a number of prominent American folklorists participated in a conference about applied folklore held at Point Park College in Pennsylvania. They discussed initiatives applying folklore scholarship and expertise to a number of fields, including health care, secondary school education, historic preservation and the arts (Sweterlitsch 1971). The participants called for a Center of Applied Folklore within the American Folklore Society (AFS), reflecting a change in direction from

the marginal status imposed on applied folklore in the 1950s. Following the conference, which involved heated discussion about whether applied folklore should involve social reform, applied folklore began to take on new meanings, apart from its long association with bettering society and furthering understanding among different cultures. Michael Owen Jones indicates that "The American Folklore Society's Committee on Applied Folklore ... dropped the advocacy rhetoric in order to gain general support from their colleagues for establishing a Center for Applied Folklore." Robert Byington, who served as the Chair of the Committee, saw this new position evident in a new definition of applied folklore presented by the Committee, as "an expansion of the folklorists' customary activities (research, fieldwork, publication and teaching), particularly teaching, into areas beyond the walls of the academy." According to Byington, "the Committee, righteously denying the charge that we were `dissidents or revolutionaries', stated flatly that `we have no social or political platform' "(Byington 1989: 78-9).

In influential remarks in his 1974 presidential address to the American Folklore Society, "Folklore's Nature and the Sun's Myth," Dell Hymes viewed applied folklore as intrinsic to the mission of folklore studies and the nature of continuity and change itself. He contended that,

> Much "applied folklore" is genuinely part of the tradition with which it deals, a part of their adaptation to new conditions of performance, so, also, close study of old texts may not be merely antiquarian, but the means by which old meanings can take on new life, perhaps partly in print instead of the voice ... (Hymes 1975:355).

But presentation, according to Hymes, does not just mean publication:

> Short of preservation in the form of boxed storage in locked vaults, our efforts to preserve tradition through record, description, interpretation, find their natural end in presentation, that is, in communication (Hymes 1975: 356).

Byington's and Hymes's remarks reflected a broadening view by folklorists of the public dimension of their work, whether practiced in the academy or in the "applied" sectors. Many folklorists were now beginning to accept the view that the presentation of scholarship and representation of traditions could, and should, occur through media besides publications and in venues outside colleges and universities.

However, applied folklore was by no means universally accepted by academic folklorists. While other folklorists were lobbying members of the United States Congress to establish the American Folklife Center of the

Library of Congress (AFC), Dorson contended, as he had for many years, that applied folklore is associated with ideological manipulation, as in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. According to Archie Green, Dorson testified at a hearing in the United States Congress that folklorists working in public agencies would "debase the coin of scholarship," reflecting his view that a folklorist could not be an advocate and a disinterested scholar at the same time (Green [1992] 2007: 55). Dorson claimed that it is not the proper role of the folklorist to intervene in social and cultural processes:

> I contend that it is no business of the folklorist to engage in social reform, that he is unequipped to reshape institutions, and that he will become the poorer scholar and folklorist if he turns activist (Dorson 1971: 40)

Despite Dorson's opposition, the AFC was established in 1976. During its first two decades, it engaged in regional field surveys and organized exhibitions. Since it was established, it has acquired collections for its Archive of Folk Culture, which had been established in 1928 as the Archive of American Folk Song. The AFC also provides technical assistance to the field of folklore through field schools and professional advice, conducts a massive oral history project of war veterans, provides extensive information about folklife on the web (http://www.loc.gov/folklife/), produces concerts, and organizes conferences involving both public and academic folklorists.

The third major federal folklore program is the Folk and Traditional Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, which is the major public funder of arts activities in the United States. From the time of its establishment in the mid-1970s, the Folk and Traditional Arts Program has emphasized establishment and support of a national infrastructure for folk arts programming, centered upon positions for folklorists in state government agencies, usually state arts councils but also including universities, historical societies, a parks and recreation department, and a bureau of historic preservation. This national infrastructure also includes private, not-for-profit organizations devoted to folklife, including regional organizations such as the Western Folklife Center in Nevada, urban folk arts organizations like the Philadelphia Folklore Project, and statewide programs such as the Vermont Folklife Center.

State folk arts programs led by public folklorists, sometimes called "state folklorists," are active in over forty states. They have carried out field research surveys, produced exhibitions, festivals, concerts, recordings and media productions; provided "services" to advise local organizations and individuals about how to present and document folklore, created archives from their field research, and developed "apprenticeships,"

where master folk artists with considerable skills in a traditional art teach a tradition to a member of their own community with ability in a folk art and the potential to eventually become a master. In recent years, many of the state folk arts programs have become increasingly involved with making grants to local private, not-for-profit organizations to carry out projects.

I serve as the Folk Arts Program Director of the New York State Council on the Arts (known as "NYSCA"). Because of the size and complexity of New York State, and the large funding budget of my organization, from the time I began at NYSCA in the early 1980s, our program has been mainly devoted to funding other organizations to carry out folk arts projects. With our budget of over $1.67 million, we are able to support over 90 different organizations each year. We support staff folklorists who work in local arts councils, museums and libraries in a number of regions of New York State to carry out field research, produce folk arts programs and assist individuals and organizations within their region to develop their own folk arts programs. Our program also funds organizations led by folklorists that are primarily or exclusively devoted to folk arts, such as City Lore, an urban folk culture organization, and Traditional Arts in Upstate New York, which serves a rural area of upstate New York. We support the New York Folklore Society, a statewide organization which provides technical assistance and professional development in such areas as field research techniques, marketing and archiving, organizes an annual meeting with a different theme each year (in 2007 it was religious folk arts traditions), provides workshops for artists to learn how to present and market their traditions, and publishes *Voices*, which features articles for a general audience written by professional folklorists and other writers interested in the folklore of New York State. Most of the organizations we fund, however, are community-based ethnic and regional organizations not led by folklorists which carry out folk arts projects, including concerts, exhibitions, festivals, folk artist residencies and apprenticeships.

In order to foster the professional development of the public folklore field in New York State and sustain our community of public folklorists, our program organizes the annual New York State Folk Arts Roundtable in association with the Cultural Resources Council, of Syracuse, New York. At the Roundtable, folklorists and community members involved in folk arts programming gather together in small groups to discuss current projects and attend workshops and plenary sessions featuring a different topic each year. These have included workshops in field photography, audio recording and video recording, and sessions about studying and presenting folk narrative, publicizing and marketing folk arts programs,

"making the case" in seeking funding for folk arts programs from corporations, private foundations and government funding agencies; and folk arts in education programming. The Roundtable is attended by about 50 folklorists and community members involved in folklife field research and programming. Since its establishment in 1986, it has been a major force in building a community of public folklorists in New York State. Many important regional and statewide projects have been initiated through discussions occurring at the Roundtable.

Many public folklorists around the U.S. are involved in folklore and education programs, which enable students, mainly in elementary and middle schools, to learn from artists teaching about their traditional knowledge and demonstrating their traditions. In many folklore and education programs students carry out field research about the traditions of their own families and communities. These programs occur within schools as well as in after school programs. Because arts and education programs of all kinds in the U.S. now emphasize teaching the arts in relationship to other areas of the curriculum, folklore and education programs are often designed to integrate traditional systems of knowledge and art as well as fieldwork methodology with other school subjects. In social studies classes, students learn through the folk arts about their own and other cultures, math classes teach about pattern, order, and the uses of number in folk arts, and writing skills are developed through students writing about the folk arts they have researched and observed. Teachers learn about how to develop folklore and education programs through institutes led by folklorists that engage teachers in exploring and sharing their own traditions and carrying out field research as means to understand folklore.

Folklore and education programs have also included presentations in school assemblies and classrooms by folk artists, and artist residencies structured and mediated by folklorists. Paddy Bowman indicates that there has been a shift to "collaborative" programs integrally involving both teachers and folklorists, and she contends that "the 1970s model of booking folk artists for assembly programs and residencies mediated by folklorists did not provide lasting impact upon pedagogy, although contact with folk artists then and today inspires teachers and students" (Bowman 2006: 71, see also Nusbaum 1995). Other folklorists prefer assembly programs and residencies to highly labor intensive collaborative programs which require connecting folklore to other subjects, and they feel that the older approaches appropriately represent folklore on its own terms.

TAPNET (http://www.afsnet.org/tapnet/) contains links to education curricula and other folklore in education resources. It also provides links to many other public folklore websites, including a link

for joining Publore, which is a listserv providing lively discussion about various aspects of our practice. Publore can also be joined at http://list.unm.edu/archives/publore.html

While presentations of music and dance represent the majority of American public folk arts activities, public folklorists also organize exhibitions and public programs in art, history and anthropology museums, produce films, audio and video productions, develop radio and television broadcasts, create web sites about their programs, produce CDs of music and verbal arts and develop cultural tourism projects as well as the folklore and education programs previously mentioned. Their exhibitions view folk art in terms of both the aesthetics and cultural contexts of the traditions represented, explore the techniques and ideas of the folk artists whose works are on display, and include objects chosen on the basis of their representativeness of the cultures which produced them and their artistic merit. Exhibitions at history museums have dealt with such topics as the traditional play and games of children, Calypso music, county fairs and maritime traditions. "Living history museums" with outdoor exhibits and public programs provide opportunities for the presentation of traditional agricultural and maritime practices, providing a link between past and present by showing living folk traditions with strong roots in the periods of the past emphasized in the museum (See Hall and Seemann 1987). Like most of the projects produced by public folklorists, exhibitions are generally based upon field research.

In recent years, many folklorists have become involved in cultural tourism projects. They have created CDs and printed guides designed for self-guided tours of a region's traditional culture by tourists driving in their cars along "corridors" on highway routes in various regions of a state. As they drive, they read about or listen to narratives, explanations of place names, music, accounts of crafts and occupational practices, and historical background about events in the past of a community, through the voices of community residents. These tours are produced in close association with community members, with the community members advising the folklorists about traditional culture tourist destinations which may be visited by outsiders who may interact with community members, and informing folklorists about other places which should only be observed from a distance.[1]

In this essay, once I began to discuss the current period of public folklore programming I only used the terms "public folklore" and "public folklorists," rather than also refer to "applied folklore" and "applied folklorists." Since the late 1980s, a large majority of folklorists practicing outside of the academy have referred to their work as "public folklore" rather than "applied folklore." As Nick Spitzer and I defined public folklore

in our book *Public Folklore*, it means the representation and application of folklore in new contexts, within and beyond the community where it originates, undertaken in dialogue and collaboration with the community members whose traditions are represented (Baron and Spitzer ([1992] 2007b:1). In contrast, "applied folklore" has emphasized the application and dissemination of the ideas and knowledge of the folklore discipline by folklorists acting in the presumed interests of communities. Over the years, applied folklore has involved such social and political agendas as nationalism, the control of native populations, social justice, and intercultural understanding. In stressing collaboration and dialogue, public folklorists reject the "top down" approach of applied folklorists acting upon communities and feel that folklorists should not impose a particular ideological agenda upon communities. Applied folklorists now stress the importance of collaboration. In "Notes from the Editors" in an issue of *The Journal of Applied Folklore* (no longer published, previously entitled *Folklore in Use: Applications in the Real World*), editors David Shuldiner and Jessica Payne credit the "contribution" of public folklorists to the "growing legitimation of applied folklore," which include "collaborating with, rather than simply working 'on behalf' of community members" (Shuldiner and Payne 1999:2).

While some applied folklorists view applied folklore as encompassing public folklore, most American folklorists working outside of colleges and universities self-identify as public folklorists. In suggesting that the approaches of applied and public folklore be brought together, Diana Baird N'Diaye has called for public folklorists to employ "applied" approaches in supporting traditional artists in maintaining and transmitting their culture, through folklorists "working with community members to support their efforts to use traditional knowledge to deal with practical issues affecting their lives" (N'Diaye 1999: 94).

While "public folklore" is most closely associated with the arts, "applied folklore" usually involves work in other areas of folklore. These include the application of folkloristic knowledge to health care, such as intervening with doctors and hospitals to incorporate traditional belief systems of patients from diverse cultures, and advising businesses on organizational development and management through applying the knowledge of folklorists about small group behavior, ritual and customs. Applied folklorists and public folklorists have also worked as journalists, as expert witnesses in court trials, in projects helping homeless people and with historic preservation organizations to preserve vernacular architecture and recognize places of local cultural significance (see Feintuch 1988, Hufford 1994, Jones 1994a and various issues of *The Journal of Applied Folklore* and *Folklore in Use: Applications in the Real World*).

In sharp contrast to the situation in the 1960s, public folklorists (and the relatively few who call themselves "applied folklorists") are now well integrated within the activities of the American Folklore Society, and we now make up half of its membership. All of the masters and doctoral folklore programs in American universities have courses in public folklore, teaching students about the history of public folklore and issues in public folklore theory and representational practices.

Since the 1980s, there has been a vigorous discourse among American folklorists, both within and outside of the academy, about major issues of public folklore theory and practice involving intervention, cultural brokerage and mediation, representation of community members through "objectification," advocacy and intellectual property.

American public and applied folklorists recognize that their work involves *intervention* by outsiders in the lives and institutions of a community, with an inevitable impact upon the traditions documented and presented. Following from David Whisnant's writings of the 1980's, public folklorists came to view their work, in Whisnant's words, as "unavoidably interventionist", requiring them to be aware and reflexive about the implications and consequences of their work upon tradition bearers and their communities. Whisnant's landmark study, *All that is Native and Fine*, demonstrated how folk song collectors, revivalists of older handicrafts, educators at settlement schools and folk festival producers in the fifty years after 1890 manipulated local traditions, preferring and promoting what they viewed as correct, "traditional" versions of Anglo American folklore in the mountain regions of the American south as they selectively ignored more contemporary traditions. Their representations fit with their own ideologies, which included an interest in promoting "old stock" traditions rooted in England, protecting these traditions in the face of the growing presence, and cultural influence, of immigrants from Europe. Their approach to southern traditions embodied their perspective as outsiders who treated southern mountain regions dominated by mining companies and cotton mills, as a kind of internal economic colony dominated by corporations of the northeastern United States (Whisnant 1983).

Accounts by public folklorists of their projects in *The Conservation of Culture: Folklorists and the Public Sector*, published in 1988, drew from Whisnant's views of intervention in examining specific interventions and their consequences. Peggy A. Bulger, drawing from her experience with a folk festival in Florida, stated that "festival production, of necessity, involves the subjective choice of traditions to present and folk artists to validate, through the out of context medium of a festival." She indicated that festivals communicate the message that "folk arts and traditional

culture are valuable, marketable and sometimes endangered", involving an intervention with consequences for the understanding of traditions, and for the tradition bearers themselves (Bulger 1988: 77, 78). Jean Haskell Spear described an oral history and folklife program she designed at a rural library and community humanities center in Virginia. The program had the effect of validating and elevating the status of tradition bearers from the "non elites" and African American communities, which was met with disdain by some in the community. However, it also resulted in the first racially integrated audiences at the library during a holiday celebration. Materials from the project were also used by a local industrial development group as evidence that the community is culturally interesting, and attracted the interest of politicians running for office who recognized the political value of their own cultural heritage (Spear 1988).

As interveners in cultures, folklorists recognize their significance and potential value as "culture brokers," mediating among multiple parties—cultural institutions, artists, academic disciplines, traditional communities and audiences. As defined by Richard Kurin, cultural brokers "study, understand and represent someone's culture (even sometimes their own) to non-specialized others through various means and media." He adds that brokering suggests that these representations are negotiated and driven by a variety of interests on behalf of the involved parties. Cultural brokerage occurs whenever there is mediation involved in representing a culture (Kurin 1997:19). The cultural broker has unique access to different kinds of communities and constituencies, and they serve, in James Bau Graves words, as "facilitation agents," connecting communities to domains they might not be able to access on their own, like government, the media, funding sources and new audiences (Graves 2005:150).

Some anthropologists and folklorists critical of public folklore claim that it objectifies culture through representing tradition bearers and their cultures as objects, as "thing [s]... bounded and continuous in time and space," according to Richard Handler. He contrasts "unconscious lifeways" to "objectified 'tradition," and sees folklorists contributing to the "demise of folk society" through creating traditions which while "imagined as authentic" are in fact "objectifications of traditional culture" which make culture into an object (Handler 1988: 14,55,63). According to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "that we objectify culture has long been recognized; festivals, however, also objectify the human performers and implicate them directly in the process" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991:428). This critical perspective about public folklore sees power imbalances and class divides between folklorists and the community members whose traditions are presented. Power to represent is in the hands of the folklorist,

who constructs representations of traditional practices which substantially alter traditional culture while limiting or denying the voices of tradition bearers in representing their own cultures. These critiques of public folklore came at a time of considerable scholarship in anthropology about the politics of cultural representation, and a rise in "multiculturalism," which emphasizes community cultural self-determination and the rights of minority communities to practice their cultures on their own terms

This view of public folklore as objectifying culture overlooks the efforts of contemporary public folklorists to enable community members to represent their cultures through their own perspectives. Programs are designed in negotiation and collaboration with community members, enabling them to interpret traditions from their own, culturally based points of view, and to assume responsibility for producing events on their own after an initial period of development by a folklorist. Presentations of traditions not widely practiced to new audiences which have been made possible by the intervention of folklorists often inspire recognition of the value of these traditions because they have been validated by outsiders. Communities may then present and safeguard these traditions on their own initiative, "framing" them without the presence of a folklorist. Through renewed presentation, traditions then become less endangered.

Some academic folklorists have criticized public folklorists as advocates. As mentioned previously, Richard Dorson claimed that a folklorist could not be an advocate and a disinterested scholar at the same time, and Barbara Kirshenblat-Gimblett has claimed that advocacy can distort inquiry, mentioning specifically the impact of the need to obtain government funding (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett [1988] 2007:32-33). An entire issue of the *Journal of Folklore Research* (JFR) in 2004 was devoted to the topic of advocacy, with several authors arguing that folklorists have an obligation to advocate for the communities and the tradition bearers they study. This position is supported by the *Statement of Ethics of the American Folklore Society* (1988), which says that the primary obligation of folklorists "is to those they study," and states that when "there is a conflict of interest ... these individuals come first." Eliot Oring contends in the same issue of JFR that folklorists should not advocate for traditions which are morally reprehensible to them, and said that there are situations where advocacy for one community may conflict with advocacy for another(Oring 2006). Discussing Oring's argument in the preface to the new edition of *Public Folklore*, Nick Spitzer and I indicate that advocacy does not only consist of outright political advocacy, but can also involve representation of other interests of a community. Folklorists need not only represent communities as they see themselves, which Oring sees as the role of the folklorist, but

can also involve conflict resolution when folklorists work with multiple communities with competing interests(Baron and Spitzer 2007c: x).

American academic and public folklorists are also concerned with issues of intellectual property and folklore, a matter of substantial global interest at this time. Rights to traditional cultural expression and knowledge involve matters like biopiracy through commercial exploitation of traditional medicinal plants, the use of indigenous motifs and patterns by non-native designers and appropriation of traditional music through "sampling" in world music. In each of these areas, tradition bearers and their communities have frequently been uncompensated, with no patent or copyright protection. The American Folklore Society issued a policy statement on intellectual property issues, presented as a list of recommendations to the World Intellectual Property Organization(WIPO). It called on WIPO to recognize that the needs of member nations do not necessarily coincide with those of their indigenous and traditional communities, and may, in fact, be opposed to them, urged recognition of the knowledge and folklore of both indigenous and non-indigenous groups, and recommended technical assistance and leadership training in documentation and conservation for both indigenous and non-indigenous groups. It also indicated that "commodification and privatization ... may run counter to the rights and desires of holders of traditional knowledge and folklore" (American Folklore Society 2004:299).

In discussing the global dialogue on intellectual property, Nick Spitzer and I see these issues as raising fundamental issues of critical importance to public folklore: "Who owns folklore? Who speaks for a culture or community? What happens when culture is viewed as a commodity? How do traditional cultural creativity and issues of collective vs. individual rights to folklore relate to interest in local, national or global economic development?" (Baron and Spitzer c: xi).

These intellectual property issues point to the importance of public folklore initiatives in an increasingly globalized world where traditions experience rapid change. Folklore is both the treasured heritage of particular communities, and a means for different communities to experience and understand one another's culture. Folklorists have a vital role to play in safeguarding traditions, especially those which are no longer widely practiced. As Alan Lomax pointed out in articulating his concept of cultural equity in the early 1970s, the protection of cultural diversity is of comparable importance to the preservation of biodiversity. In his influential essay, "Appeal for Cultural Equity," Lomax suggested that the loss of cultural diversity might be "an even more serious problem" than the "pollution of the biosphere," and he asserted that "human adaptation

has been largely cultural rather than biological," and the flexibility of the cultural patterns of humankind "has enabled the human species to flourish in every zone of the planet"([1972] 2003: 285). While the global environmentalist movement has made us all aware of threats to the natural ecology of our planet, there is still much less recognition of the imperative to maintain our intangible cultural heritage, which is seen as less of a given than preserving art and architecture. Calling for cultural equity policies in the United States and throughout the world in an essay emphasizing endangered traditional musics, Lomax proposed creation of a "multi-culture, a world in which many civilizations, each with its own supporting systems of education and communication can live" ([1972] 2003: 288).

Public folklore provides techniques and conceptual tools for representing traditions across cultural boundaries, and for enabling communities to safeguard their own traditions. The representation of cultures brings with it substantial moral and ethical responsibilities, which public folklorists recognize as central to their roles as cultural brokers intervening in traditional cultures. Public folklore has enriched the field of folklore in the United States, deepening its relationships with the communities it studies and gaining greater public visibility for the work of folklorists through the communication of its knowledge about traditional cultures and methodologies of researching, presenting and safeguarding intangible and tangible cultural heritage.

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Notes

[1] Examples of cultural tourism projects developed by folklorists include the Northwest Heritage Tours from Washington Heritage Corridor Tours from Washington State, such as the *Southeastern Washington Heritage Corridor Tour* (1999), researched and written by Jens Lund; *A Wabenaki Guide to Maine* (1997), which features Native American basketry traditions; and *Roots to Routes: A Driving Guide* (2004) for the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, an industrial heritage region in Pennsylvania. The latter tour is discussed in Doris J. Dyen, "*Routes to Roots: Searching for the* Streetlife of Memory" (2006).

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