

NOTE ON THE HUMAN RELATIONS AREA FILES

As stated in the Guide to the use of the Human Relations Area Files, the Files (HRAF) were established in 1949 as a non-profit corporation to collect, organize and distribute information of interest to the natural sciences and the humanities. To carry out its program of facilitating comparative study in the sciences concerned with mankind, HRAF has developed a new kind of research library which brings together, in a single file, scattered data on individual societies.

The HRAF Files at Indiana University (one of the twenty-three HRAF member institutions in the world), are located in Rawles Hall 105 and operate under the auspices of the Research Center for the Language Sciences. Thomas A. Sebeok, Chairman of the Research Center, is currently Director of HRAF at Indiana University.

Before a new file is opened, the HRAF research staff at Yale University conducts an extensive bibliographic inquiry to determine the extent of sources, the reliability of each source, and the training of the author. Data in HRAF is coded according to subject content, following Timothy J. O'Leary's Outline of Cultural Materials; a system which assigns numbers to various cultural traits or features. Processing of selected new file material consists of the analysis of every page of source material by a HRAF analyst and his subsequent subject notation in the margins of each page.

One file drawer (or group of drawers) is devoted to housing the material on one particular culture or area. This drawer contains complete photocopied books and articles selected for the Files. Following the complete texts, individual pages are filed separately behind subject divider cards. All file material is in the form of 5X8 slips, and provides the researcher with exact duplicates of original sources. Foreign texts with English translations are included in the Files, but are not processed by subject. By glancing at the top of any page, the researcher is able to obtain the name of the author, the field date, publication date and the HRAF evaluation of the source and author. Complete bibliographic information is provided in each file, as well as the central bibliographical file which contains information filed under the author's name and culture area.

Data is now available at each member institution on roughly two-thirds of the societies listed in George P. Murdock's Outline of World Cultures. This outline and the Outline of Cultural Materials are the two keys to the Files, and these, as well as the HRAF Research Guide are available for use in the Files.

HRAF contains much information useful to the folklorist, including data on customs and folkways, folk medicine, mythology, folktales and religion. HRAF may be consulted for background when planning a field trip, as well as for testing ideas and hypotheses (especially cross-culturally). A research tool such as HRAF should neither be overlooked, nor should its value be underestimated by students of folklore.

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