

From the Guest Editors

It may be that we are being forced to realize that society can no longer afford the luxury of “pure” disinterested scholarship without reference to its practical applications; it may also be that we are coming to realize that theory and method—the central concerns of the scholarly folklorist—may be advanced as well by applied folklore, insofar as the latter affords opportunities to test methods and hypotheses and draws attention to new problems for investigation.

—Richard Bauman, 1971

A number of motivations factored into the creation of this special issue of *Folklore Forum*. For both of us, the kernel of the idea began in fall 1996. That year, the AFS annual meeting in Pittsburgh burst with old animosities between academic and public (or applied) folklorists following a series of panels on applied folklore organized by Jessica Payne and Bill Westerman and a plenary session organized by Illana Harlow that examined the term “folklore” on the 150th anniversary of its first appearance. While many of us in the field thought that the two branches of the discipline were well on their way to being reconciled, obviously feelings still ran deep among some people in both camps.

As folklorists with over thirty years of combined experience in the public sector, we were especially dismayed that many of our colleagues in institutions of higher learning seemed to remain unaware of the range of activities created and coordinated by our colleagues in public folklore. Moreover, despite the growing literature on public folklore work, presentations and forums at the Pittsburgh meeting too often revealed that many professors and graduate students displayed a lack of understanding of the value of applying folklore research outside of academe. Surely the profession had moved beyond the era in which public folklore was denigrated, derided, and even demonized, but it was shocking to witness a public squabble between people on either side of the “mistaken dichotomy.”

Delving into the history of applied/public folklore, we were also aware of the fast-approaching thirtieth anniversary of another meeting in Pittsburgh. Held at Point Park College in 1971, the meeting was devoted to the subject of applied folklore. A number of the papers delivered there, including the

one excerpted above, were published in a special issue of *Folklore Forum*. So it seemed only natural that we approach the present-day editors of the journal to discuss a new special issue on public folklore, and to assess where the field has been going and where it is headed.

At the Mid-Atlantic Folklorists' Retreat in bucolic Starlight, Pennsylvania, in fall 1997, Betty witnessed the fomentation of interesting visions for the future of public sector folklore. That experience spurred us to collect bold future visions. Likewise, we were inspired by recorded sessions at several recent AFS meetings conducted by Rita Moonsammy and Miriam Camitta, who invited folklorists to speak about their personal motivations in becoming folklorists. Consequently, we invited folklorists working in the public sector to submit short essays on one of these two topics: 1) "evoking the past," that is, recounting a pivotal moment in their careers that epitomized something good, or particularly revealing, about their personal involvement in the profession; or 2) a vision, as practical or as pie-in-the-sky as the writer wished, of the future of public folklore.

Our plan was to create a resource that presents the idea of public folklore in an accessible and compelling manner. We wanted to offer a space for graduate students and professors to learn more about the work of public folklorists. More importantly, we wanted the issue to serve as a forum for discussing controversial issues that emerge in the practice of folklore work. We did not wish to provide a historical study or a "how-to" manual for doing public folklore projects. Rather, we assembled this issue to put into print a record of what motivates and continues to inspire folklorists to work outside of colleges and universities. A major goal is to provide students and teachers with an increased understanding of what can be accomplished by working outside of academe.

We hoped that, by trampling the academic conventions of soliciting scholarly articles, well documented with footnotes, references, and comprehensive bibliographies, we would free a number of public folklorists to reflect and dream in a manageable format. We announced the call for essays through listserves, newsletters, and personal cajoling, and we selected twenty of the essays that we received for publication.

To complement and provide counterpoint to the essays, we decided to follow the successful *Folklore Forum* practice of publishing interviews, in this case with five prominent folklorists who have made important contributions to applied and public folklore. The point of the interviews was to allow these individuals to fully express their opinions about the history and current state of public folklore and their personal involvement in the field. The interviews in some cases amplify the themes of the essays; in other cases, they disagree with them. This is just what we wished to

do: to create a dialogue in print, a forum for many opinions and personal views.

To round out the issue, we invited Tim Evans, currently a professor teaching public folklore at Western Kentucky University, but for many years a practicing public folklorist in Wyoming, to submit an annotated bibliography for those interested in delving further into the growing literature on public folklore. We hope that Tim's bibliography will provide a reference source for readers interested in the more formal scholarship that has been completed on public folklore over the past fifteen years.

Setting the tone for the issue is an essay by Archie Green, whom many look up to as a mentor and model for work in the public sector. Despite his recent ill health, Archie was extremely gracious in writing this eloquent piece, affirming the work of public folklore for those who are worn down by the daily grind of the work as well as for those young graduate students considering taking up the standard. Without getting sentimental or maudlin, Archie reminds us all that public folklore is "good work" with the best of intentions, reflective of political history and personal commitment. He challenges each of us to act in the present using both the wisdom of the past and the inspiration created by thinking of the future. Archie's insight and vision best sums up what we wish to offer in this issue of *Folklore Forum*.

This issue should be read as a forum. Every folklorist offers ideas and perspectives that can be challenged not only intellectually but also may prove challenging to enact. There is a tension between concerns that folklore work legitimizes ideologies such as classism and nationalism and the folklorist's goal of increasing understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. There is a tension between limiting the subject matter of folklore to various forms of expressive culture and opening up the idea of folklore to all aspects of culture and even banishing the very term "folklore" from contemporary folklorists' vocabularies. Numerous other tensions will emerge in this volume, many very personal to each reader depending on his or her viewpoint. But we offer this volume in the dream of eliminating the tension that initially motivated us to complete this project: namely, the dangerous dichotomy of "public folklore" versus "academic folklore" work. Although the goal of eliminating the tension is perhaps too utopian, our fervent wish is that this issue contribute to a more fruitful discussion of folklore work that will strengthen not only public folklore but also the field as a whole.

This issue is designed to encourage friendly debate and discussion. We offer the fine thinking, writing, and speaking of all of our contributors, and we are thankful for the services offered by editor Carla Borden and interns Tracy Clonts, Laura Simcock, Jill Vogel and Rebecca Tallan. We

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