Spencer goes on to claim that through the practice of “descriptive and normative theomusicology” he can reconcile the profane—the “demonic,” secular black popular music—with black sacred music as “salvational,” and develop a “spiritual archaeology to excavate an ethics that is indigenous to black culture” (73-74). He gives examples from folk, pop, and classical black music, concentrating on the work of William Grant Still in the last category. However, he fails to address issues of acculturation, but rather argues that it is the “black church’s guardianship of biblical interpretation that is an essential source of black cultural normativity” (72). Spencer contends that application of theomusicology to black music leads one to extract an ethics indigenous to black culture, African American culture, that can put an end to the estrangement created by the usual opposition of the sacred and secular, because researching with theomusicology reconciles this opposition and therefore resolves the tension in a positive way.


Gregory Hansen

The numerous state writers’ projects of the 1930s have long been important but underutilized resources for folklorists and social historians. The materials collected under the Work Projects Administration’s (WPA) projects often preserved life histories and were used to develop guides to various states’ histories and cultures. They remain valuable documents that deserve more scholarly attention. Nancy Martin-Perdue and Charles Perdue have provided one model for using these types of materials. Talk About Trouble: A New Deal Portrait of Virginians in the Great Depression uses WPA life histories with photographic illustrations from the Farm Security Administration and the Virginia Writers’ Project to present a portrait of rural and urban social history at the close of the 1930s.

Their study is arranged in two parts. The first section is titled “Narrating Experience.” Its four chapters consist of excerpts from the WPA materials that describe changes in Virginians’ folkways, women’s experiences at home and in the workplace, men’s experiences on the farm and in the factory, and narratives by African Americans in which they describe facets of their experiences in Virginia. The second section, “Making a Living,” is essentially a study of occupational folklife within the agricultural, commercial fishing, and manufacturing industries. The book includes a well-written introduction that
describes the editors’ approaches and an epilogue that explains how the coming of World War II brought about further changes in the lives of Virginians.

The descriptions of occupational folklife are some of the most engaging chapters of the book. This section contains fine information on changes in agricultural practices and commercial fishing techniques that should be particularly useful in making diachronic comparisons within these two industries. John Flemming’s vivid descriptions of crabbing and oystering are particularly fascinating, and Federal Writers’ Project (FWP) fieldworker Sarah Moore’s questions show the high level of skill used by some of the WPA workers. The stories and ethnographic descriptions in this section should be especially useful for developing an in-depth understanding of the history of attempts to balance environmental concerns with the growth of small scale commercial fishing along the eastern seaboard. In this respect, the reader can see a common theme in Talk About Trouble; there is a nascent interest in governmental social programs such as workers’ compensation, safety inspections, environmental regulations, and changes in unionization and labor management practices. The reader sees the beginnings of issues and problems that continue to be dealt with by a range of legislative, economic, and social programs.

Throughout the book, additional themes display a resonance with other contemporary concerns. For example, lively narratives speak of social issues associated with the widespread use of the automobile. Parents address their concerns about teenagers being free to escape parental authority by means of cars, and several narrators note changes in their communities that have been brought about by easier access to urban areas. The book’s “talk about trouble” deals with a range of other concerns such as the demise of the family farm from economic pressure, as well as from threats on rural communities through the law of eminent domain that allowed for the creation of national parks. Finally, as can be expected, labor strife is a prevalent issue in the book. The editors show tensions from members of the working class as well as from small land owners who have problems with rebellious sharecroppers.

Nancy Martin-Perdue and Charles Perdue credit themselves as editors rather than authors of this study. The excerpts that they chose to present are well worth reading. Various texts are fascinating and could stand by themselves as strong narratives. Other excerpts could have benefited by more editorial and interpretive commentary. A careful reader can develop his or her own interpretations from the materials, but the book would have been stronger if the editors had drawn from the wealth of materials to provide a more in-depth analysis of the field materials that they present. They begin to do this in the book’s introduction as well as in the introductions to various chapters, but the lack of a unifying conclusion makes some of the stories read like dry transcripts of field tapes.
Furthermore, the editors could have dealt more explicitly with issues of representation. For example, although there are snippets of revealing commentary that suggests how the WPA workers regarded the people they interviewed, the reader is able to gain only a limited understanding of ways in which the ideology and research agenda of the WPA influenced the portrayal of life in Virginia during the era of the Great Depression.

*Talk About Trouble* is a welcome addition to the literature on the WPA writing projects and an invaluable historical documentation of Virginia folklife. When the WPA's state guides were first published, many of them were met with mixed reviews. With the benefit of 50 years of hindsight, the Perdues worked diligently and carefully to develop a study that shows the value of WPA field materials and allows the people interviewed to speak for themselves in a sympathetic manner that is not always evident in the original publications of the WPA.


Tom Mould

At a time in Folklore scholarship when performance theories appear omnipresent, context reigns supreme, and ethnopoetics demand attention in any translated text, the cross-cultural collection would seem a dying breed. But the comparativist dies hard in the folklorist, in the collector even harder, hence this dictionary of creation myths from across the globe amassed by David and Margaret Leeming. First published in 1994 as the *Encyclopedia of Creation Myths*, the book has been reissued in paperback as the *Dictionary of Creation Myths*. The name change appears to be an attempt at more accurate labeling: the entries far more closely resemble those of a dictionary—brief, suggestive, and heavily abridged—than more detailed encyclopedic entries.

The format is novel, the collection less so. The majority of entries have been amassed from previous collections of world creation myths. By summarizing many of the myths and including only the barest of contextual information, the book attempts to surpass previous collections of creation myths in sheer breadth. The collection covers the myths of small, ethnically organized groups such as the Cupeno Indians of California, as well as those of expansive, international religious groups such as Christians and Muslims. The entries also include a number of concepts and terms intended both to facilitate an understanding of creation myths as a genre as well as to unify the book thematically. In their brief introduction, the Leemings suggest that