

If folklorists would also consider the impact of consumption on a community, then they could better understand various under-theorized dynamics of folk groups. Nader and his small army of activists have spent a generation lobbying for the rights of consumers. Folklorists could stand to learn from this wealth of experience. By teaming up with regional and local consumer organizations, folklorists can better assess the impact of outside commercial interests and develop interventionist strategies to address threats to the well-being of community life.

Three Ideas for the Future of Folklore

Cathy Brigham, Indiana University

My dream for public folklore in the twenty-first century stems from my current position as both a graduate student and a public folklorist. Looking at folklore from both of these perspectives, I offer three visions for the future of the field.

First, relying on open communication and stronger networks, public folklore could become better equipped to train people entering the field. When I began my work in public folklore, I was frustrated by the amount of time I spent reinventing a wheel simply because I was ill informed about the work of public folklorists. Public folklorists need to develop and continually update the tools that allow newcomers and outsiders to identify resources. These tools could include a stronger network of contacts and a resource database—such as a Web site—that describes areas of public sector work, outlines successful models in each area, and lists resources to turn to for ideas and partnerships.

My second vision for the field is more difficult to implement: a system of mentorships. When I enrolled in graduate school, I entertained grandiose and exciting daydreams of one-on-one mentoring with my professors. I expected to work closely with a professor, participate in his or her field research, interpret the data as part of a team, and assist in any final written analyses. While I am deeply shaped by my graduate school training and by the input my peers and professors have given me, this version of mentoring was not part of my schooling—nor of the schooling of any folklorist I know. This kind of hands-on, attentive training would be invaluable in preparing folklorists for whatever career path they choose in folklore.

Third, I envision a future folklore world in which the profession is not split into a binary division of “public” or “academic.” Instead, folklorists would share a respect for the different interests within the profession, and this respect would be reflected not only in the way folklorists are trained but also in the way they interact with their peers. Too often, the current divisiveness within the profession is sanctioned by both the “academic” and “public sector” sides. As someone with a foot in each world, I repeatedly

see folklorists belittling the other side out of self-defense as they play an adult version of “they started it.” My vision is for this unproductive spat to end. We ought to acknowledge how the various approaches to folklore complement and deepen our own areas of expertise so that we can move the discipline forward. The focus for the field, after all, should not be on us but on the people and the cultural forms on which we base our livelihood.

Visibility, Functionality and Proactivity: Visions for the Future of Public Folklore

Susan Eleuterio

My vision for public folklore is that it will become more visible, more functional, and less reactive than it's been for the last part of this century. Many of public folklore's current activities, such as education at the K-12 level and for teachers at the college level, festivals, and public programs, are only visible to their creators and participants. We reinvent the wheel too often in public folklore partly because we lack visibility even to ourselves. It's often difficult for us to function well in the face of time constraints, lack of funding, and ineffective means of communicating both to ourselves and to others.

The last twenty years has brought us some security in the form of nationally based and state level folklorists. But even as we've become a part of formal culture (i.e., the government) we have continued to suffer from a lack of visibility and from a reactive rather than a proactive approach to our dreams, goals, and objectives. In addition, our functionality as a community seems limited to me. State level folklorists meet with each other at national conferences, but those of us who work as independent contractors suffer from a lack of means to get together (except in the corners at the American Folklore Society, when we can afford to go to the meetings). Our national folklorists, based in Washington, D.C., have made efforts to draw the rest of us in—but their efforts and publications do not often seem designed to serve the needs of those of us who are not attached to an organization.

New technologies, such as e-mail and the Internet, have begun to help us achieve greater visibility. At the same time, creative use of older technology—particularly radio—has raised the public's level of awareness of folklore as a field, and folklorists as professionals. For the cost of a local phone call, we can reach across the nation—and even outside its borders—to raise issues, ask for help, and plan our work together, improving our ability to function over time and space.

My last concern, reactivity, remains a problem for us to solve as the calendar turns towards the “twenty hundreds.” How often do we allow ourselves to take time to plan, reflect on, and evaluate our work?