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INTRODUCTION: FOLKLORE RESPONDS TO COLUMBINE AND ADOLESCENCE

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It may surprise you to know that this issue on adolescent folklore is a first. Its special claim is being a thematic set of essays focusing on adolescence as a social category of folkloric production by teenagers and for folkloric response by adults and children. This is not to say that folklorists have not been listening to teenagers since adolescence became known as a prominent life stage in the twentieth century. Especially in American colleges, folklorists fill archives with collections by and from adolescents, but they have rarely used these materials for a focused inquiry into the age. At the same time that some of the best known American folklore genres, such as contemporary legends and initiation rituals, derived largely from teenagers, it may be argued that, overall, age as a social category of folkloric production has been slow to be recognized, and adolescence as a vague period between childhood and adulthood has been given even less. To drive the point home, one can note that standard reference works in the field such as *The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* (ed. Maria Leach, Funk and Wagnalls, 1949), *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia* (ed. Jan Harold Brunvand, Garland, 1996), *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music and Art* (ed. Thomas A. Green, ABC-CLIO, 1997), *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (ed. Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud, Oxford, 2000), and *Penguin Dictionary of American Folklore* (by Harry Oster and Alan Axelrod, Penguin, 2000) lack entries for adolescence. This omission is compounded by folkloristic neglect of perspectives from psychological and human development or family and youth studies, with which studies of adolescence abound. Indeed, such perspectives, associated with sociological and psychological disciplines, have not been commonly incorporated into culture studies; although, family and youth is one of the pillars of folklore's "social contexts."

And why should such perspectives be incorporated into culture studies? The contributors to this issue may answer that inquiry into the ways that cultural expectations of age are formed suggests perspectives on *aging*. Within folklore studies, the field of children's folklore has been a location for observation of the cultural adaptation to aging. If the argument is made that folklore is a force in everyday life, then aging as a process all humans endure should be fundamental to

the expression of folklore. Further, if the argument is made that folklore persists in the modern world because it serves social and psychological functions for us as individuals and members of groups and society, then age relative to family and community raises many of the questions for which we seek answers of adjustment. In childhood above other ages, folklorists recognize rapid social change leading to cultural production as individuals age and form identities. Therefore the folklore in childhood that forms to communicate within a large semiliterate, age-stratified group is a conspicuous cultural marker. Folklorists are hardly alone in seeing the social connections that result from separation of children into school grades and affiliation with families. Still, they may be drawn to cultural differences by race, ethnicity, and gender precisely because they stand out physically before the ordinariness of age. They may also be lured to the analysis of texts categorized into genres or the context of region before age, because of the artistic composition inherent in folklore.

Then came the tragedy at Columbine High School in 1999 and a cascade of commentaries in the popular press on the troubled and at times menacing teen as a problem of age. Looking for explanation, early reports speculated that the tragedy was racially motivated, but interviews with participants revealed that scenario to be unlikely. Turning to questions of what was occurring culturally, and emotionally, for the pair of killers at their age, commentators tended to exaggerate the exotic life of the American teen with folkloric overtones—rumors, legends, beliefs, rituals, pranks, cults, and dress. Writers separated the innocent child from the menacing teen, since the assumption could often be heard that the troubled youths were "normal," happy children until they entered the dark door of adolescence. In the movie *Planet of the Apes* released in 2001, an ape warns a parent thinking of adopting a youthful human pet, "Be sure to get rid of it before puberty; one thing you don't want in your house is a human teenager." Implicit in such popular texts is a search for an explanation for the violence, rebellion, and alienation that seemed to be in the chemical mix of adolescence and, in the case of school shootings, were thought to have fired affected teens to the point of combustion.

The kind of folklore reported in the popular press through the spate of school shootings during the 1990s stressed the adolescent search, assumed to be characteristic of the age, for eerie supernatural realms, bizarre bonding rituals, and sexual adventures. Journalists voyeuristically documented shocking signifiers of identity in dress, hair, body-piercing, music, and tattooing, and a subversive development of alternative or counter-mainstream lifestyles (including formation of

gangs and even attraction to satanic and diabolical cults). For some, these are signs of a culture in decline, and folklore as a repository for anti-social values. For others, it shows a cultural creativity that comes with recognition of adolescence as an increasingly differentiated social movement at the heart of a vibrant popular culture. To be sure, it was not uncommon for published ethnographies and filmed documentaries to show high school culture to be essentially conservative, with revival of civic rituals of conformity and class loyalty surrounding football games, graduations, and proms.

Statistics kept on juvenile crime showed a decline in assaults and violence during the 1990s, and yet opinion polls revealed a popular perception that youth violence is spreading and juveniles are increasingly considered dangerous and feared. "Teen violence, school violence, and gangs" consistently shows up as a significant problem "facing the United States" in public opinion polls. When a national sample of Americans was asked shortly before Columbine by the Public Agenda Foundation for the "first thing that comes to your mind" to describe teenagers, the largest percentage, 27 percent, replied "generally negative comments." The next largest group was "Disrespectful/Rude/Lacking manners" at 12 percent followed by "Rebellious/Uncontrollable/ Wild" at 10 percent (Roper Center, 1999). And one thing for sure, they thought that teens faced more problems than they did (80 percent). A different survey organization asked parents of teenagers shortly after Columbine, "what is the most important problem facing people their age," and the leading answer was "social pressures (popularity and 'fitting in'), at 29 percent; "crime and violence" was at 8 percent (Roper Center, 1999). Especially indicative of this view is the answer with folkloristic implications to the question, "If your teen had to choose between fitting in with friends or becoming outstanding in some way, which would your teen choose?" The survey sponsor was surprised by the high number of Americans who replied "fitting in" (43 percent), and yet that observation leads to consideration of the intensity of the social groupings in adolescence that often rely on expressions of folklore for a sense of identity.

Against the background of such social surveys, folklore can be seen being "expressive" for teenagers and "attitudinal" for adults. Consider these examples of folklore of (production), and about (response), school shootings.

-October 1,1997, Pearl, Mississippi. At the June 1998 trial for Luke Woodham, 16, charged with entering his high school with a rifle under his trench coat and killing two students and wounding seven oth-

ers, he testifies that he was influenced by a group of youths calling itself "The Kroth." The youths engaged in violent role-playing games and conjured spells against their enemies.

-April 28, 1998, Pomona, California. Two boys, 14 and 17, are shot to death at an elementary school playground after a fight escalates between two rival "party crews," which stage parties with music and disc jockeys. A 13-year-old boy, whose name is withheld by authorities, is taken into custody and charged as a minor.

-April 20, 2000, Columbine, Colorado. Reports on the lifestyles of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold who murdered 12 classmates and a teacher before shooting themselves speculate on the planning of the assault to commemorate Adolf Hitler's 110th birthday. They are connected to a group called the "Trench Coat Mafia," described by columnist Joe Conason as "young alienated wannabes." Their preoccupation with "industrial" music, the columnist asserts, "suggests the possible influence of a fascistic youth subculture that has inspired horrific violence elsewhere."

-November 25, 2001, New Bedford, Massachusetts. Police arrest Eric McKeehan, 17, and two 15-year-olds whose names were withheld because of their age, for conspiring to commit a Columbine-style attack on the high school. The *Boston Globe* quoted Eric McKeehan's mother, as saying her son was not guilty. Ms. St. Hilaire, 52, said her son had been in rebellion since the sudden death of his father in September and had started wearing dark clothes and a Mohawk hairstyle and piercing various parts of his body. The *New York Times* on November 27 quoted parents of the three boys portraying the group as "harmless teenagers, somewhat troubled perhaps, but not capable of the violence they were accused of plotting."

Added to the above suggestions of youth forming "esoteric" or subcultural folklife, are examples of "exoteric" adult lore about the shooters circulating on the Internet and through faxes:

1999. One of the boys who murdered his classmates in Littleton prepared by designing new computer games levels that resembled his school and peopling them with representations of his classmates (declared "false" on the Urban Legends Reference Pages at [http:// www.snopes2.com](http://www.snopes2.com))

1999. Chain letters are circulating with the text, "This forward is dedicated to all of the students of Littleton, Colorado. For every person this forward is sent to The City of Denver, Colorado will give .25 cents to the town of Littleton. Now this may not seem like much to you, but as soon as this gets around it all starts to add up. Please. If you just take the time to send this it will help the victims of the terrible incident that happened today. Send this to as many people you can and start building a new hope for the students." (Declared a

hoax, on Urban Legends and Folklore page at <http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/blchain4.htm>)

1999. Chain letters are circulating with the text, "As of right now, there are 25 confirmed dead CHILDREN and faculty and over 30 critically injured in yet another (High) school shooting spree. I'm asking you, as fellow members and friends to please pray and keep in your hearts these poor families of the victims." (Declared of questionable origin on Urban Legends and Folklore page at <http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/blchain2.htm>)

Probably the first folkloristic commentary on Columbine was published in the *New York Folklore Society Newsletter* by Steven Zeitlin in the Fall/Winter 1999 issue. Zeitlin, co-author of the book *City Play* (Rutgers University Press, 1990) and *Giving a Voice to Sorrow* (Perigree, 2001), warned against over-reacting to violent fantasies expressed in folklore such as "I met her in the attic with a semiautomatic" by thinking of them as confirmations of the violent intent of youth. He worried that "in the wake of Columbine, many teachers and administrators have tried to squelch children's fantasies." He drew attention to the shooters' creation of "adolescent folklore": they proclaimed death to all enemies, dressed in black, formed a club, hosted a web site, devised a suicide pact, even adopted a catchy name, the now infamous "Trench Coat Mafia"—and projected it on to reality." But despite spotlighting the folkloric aspects of a public issue, Zeitlin still casts his net widely over "American children's folklore" and treats these teens in a cast of "schoolchildren."

Bill Ellis in his book *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults* (University Press of Mississippi, 2001) also warned of public over-reaction to "rumor-panics," often connecting teenagers to the threat of, or the attraction to, devil worshippers. Documenting oral reports in May 1987 in Lansford, Pennsylvania, that a satanic cult planned shooting students attending a high school prom, Ellis focused on the event's multiple meanings for (production) and about (response) adolescents.

For some adolescents, making such a prom deadly may have heightened its status as a rite of passage, making their attendance doubly a proof of their adult status. The participants may not have been simply adolescents dabbling in the occult; the Lansford death threats, police later discovered, were written by a parent who had grudges against administrators and used the cult stories as an opportunity for revenge. For some school administrators, turning the prom into a show of force may have been a way of assuring edgy parents that they were, after all, in control of their children. . . . Finally,

for a few participants, the event may have been seen as a hoax proving that adolescent "quasi-satanic" rebellion was justified, since grown-ups are prone to hysterical delusions and really do not understand what [musician] Ozzy Osbourne is all about. Hence the event carries the seeds of future panics, and indeed, as we will see, the same material was recycled in the area in 1996, with similar results. (218)

Implicit in these interpretations is the treatment of adolescence as a special age because it is a cultural "coming of age." That "coming" could suggest a development as much onslaught as transition. It implies a vulnerability of a young initiate leaving childhood, and the threat of new virile power confronting adulthood. By relativizing the subject of adolescence in other cultures, Margaret Mead in her classic study *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) tried to show that adolescence need not be as troubled as it was in America. Her observations for the cultural expectations of the 1920s still echoes in reports after the school shootings of the 1990s: "Adolescence was characterised as the period in which idealism flowered and rebellion against authority waxed strong, a period during which difficulties and conflicts were absolutely inevitable" (1). Her relation of her experience in Samoa to the United States in the 1920s, however, differed in two respects from the concerns raised during the 1990s. One is that she admired the casual parental atmosphere that she thought led to an easy transition into adulthood. Many reports took the shootings of the 1990s to show the failure of permissive parenting. Second, she highlighted the experience of girls, not only because she thought that as a woman investigator she could be more intimate with her girl subjects, but also because she considered them more vulnerable as well as under-studied. In light of the reports of the 1990s that shooters were almost all boys, attention shifted to struggles of male identity in formation. Boys, once thought more in control of their situation than girls, suddenly appeared at risk, and much of their plight seemed cultural. In a post-feminist world, they could be seen questioning the proper expressions of various masculinities in American society.

As a coming of age, adolescence intensely involved folklore because it appeared to be a liminal state in need of ritual clarification. In Michael Moffatt's *Coming of Age in New Jersey* (Rutgers University Press, 1989), he found college students segregated by age particularly affected not only because of their "coming" stage of life, but also because of their transition between the "school life" they viewed as juvenile and the real world of the future. Much of the ritual clarification they sought concerned new social affiliations and sexual awaken-

ing. In folklorists reports of legends, rituals, pranks, and jokes as the common expressive genres of "coming of age" implied ritual components to claim new group identity apart from family, a departure from childhood, and an anticipation of the power of adulthood. The kinds of questions asked of teenage folklore become revised when challenged by the events of Columbine. Instead of concerns for narrative competency and genre definition found in many legend collections from the 1960s to the 1980s, approaches are possible that address perceptions of teenage angst as well as menace. A reinterpretation of cultural collections along some of the theoretical lines found below inform, or misinform, "the restlessness of youth" (Mead):

1. *Disease Theory.* Adolescence is an incurable or unpredictable pathology. Hormones rage, and strange bodily outbreaks of body piercing, satanic expression, and hair coloring are symptomatic of a problem outside of the individual's control. In much of the folklore stemming from this disease, there can be demonstrations of strength and bravado, and occasionally violence. There is the observation that the condition may be unrelated to the person's identity before or after adolescence, and indeed, these symptoms are something that individuals "get over." And some adults may consider "quarantining" as a response. Although the root cause of the disease is debatable, one common culprit is puberty, which is often assumed to be coming too early, or problems arise for individuals when it comes too late.

2. *Psychoanalytical/Anxiety Theory.* Adolescence is a period fraught with anxiety, and may be the time filled with the most conflict between individual desires and societal taboos. Anxieties of repressed sexuality, conflicts of identities (sexual and social), guilt over separation from parents (and occasionally attraction to parents), and issues of peer conformity and adjustment. Folklore is particularly used in adolescence as a fictive plane to symbolically confront or resolve various anxieties and adapt to psychological conflicts. Indeed, psychoanalytical interpretations have arguably been applied to adolescent legends and rituals more than they have to the traditions of other age groups because of the perception that anxieties especially need expression and resolution during adolescence. Although related to the disease theory, anxiety theory posits a psychological rather than pathological response to the age.

3. *Organizational Theory.* With the onset of adolescence, individuals gravitate to one another, and in that formation, create subversive, destructive organizations adults may think of as pernicious "gangs," and many teenagers view as identity-marking "cliques." There is the implication that these formations undermine the traditional val-

ues imparted through family and community. Another ramification is that these groups naturally compete for dominance rather than moving toward consensus. Alternative explanations for shooters are that they either fall outside these formations and become dangerous because of their alienation, or they come from one of these groups seeking to eliminate others.

4. *Societal Theory*. Adolescents suffer from lack of parental attention or inability to properly raise children, which results in asocial or amoral behavior. Teachers and school administrators as surrogates of society may also be responsible because they do not respond to the needs of teenagers or continue to treat them as children rather than take them seriously as young adults. An explanation for shooters according to this theory is that they seek revenge against parents and teachers because of their treatment. There is also the implication that the new society that adolescents dwell in is a mass society, reinforced by the growing size of consolidated schools. Individuals may feel increasingly lost within this mass culture.

5. *Mental States Theory*. This concept points to the rebellion of adolescence that results from states of boredom or alienation common to the growing number of teenagers growing up in suburbia. Although depictions of "juvenile delinquents" of the 1950s were set in the inner cities, and a number of gang violence scares of the 1990s were also placed in the inner cities, shockwaves of concern could be felt because of the location of teen violence in suburban environments assumed to be healthy. Some explanations for trouble in suburbia include a need for "action" in a dulling environment, some form of special middle-class paranoia, increase of recreational drug use, and the unnatural extension of childhood in high school and even through college. This view often comes with a questioning of the effects of affluence and materialism on creating a civil society among teenagers.

6. *Hegemonic Theory*. Popular culture receives blame for spreading messages of violence and revulsion in this theory. It also may be credited for creating new subcultures revolving around fads and alternative lifestyles. Campaigns against violent or sexually explicit song lyrics, videos, magazines, and movies are based on the special reception that teenagers have for the extreme limits of popular culture. Teens are seen as dupes of corporate marketing of material settings of malls, shocking fashions, and rousing concerts. They are victims of cultural hegemony spread over adolescence by profit-hungry, amoral capitalists who seem insensitive to the destructive results of their marketing.

7. *Moralistic Theory*. A different take on the messages of violence and revulsion encouraged in popular culture which result in formation

of new adolescent folk cultures comes from a theory of moral decline. In the historical decline of structures of "traditional values," the theory holds, centers of moral education such as families, schools, and churches have lost their grip on teenagers, and there is a growing acceptance of once unacceptable behaviors. Instead of a value placed on following authority and the lessons of a previous generation, there is an attraction to defying authority or standing alone often in anti-social ways. Some will blame the decline on breakdowns in the loss of community, the breakdown of the traditional family, the rise of selfish individualism, or post-modern cynicism of organized religion.

8. *Regional/Environmental Theory*. From American studies, there are ideas of some regional or community environments that encourage aggressive forms of adolescence. One can hear references to the violent legacy of the South, for example, or the "hunting heritage" of Pennsylvania and the Upper Midwest, and the "gun culture" of the West. As teen shootings were reported in all corners of the United States, this theory was increasingly challenged, but questioning still occurred about the connection of the regional background of teenagers to their cultural behavior.

9. *Emergence Theory*. Performance theory suggests that adolescence is a particularly ripe age for emergence of new cultural forms. The desire to differentiate from other teens in school with whom adolescents are segregated, perhaps the need to symbolically express identities or confront suppressed desires and anxieties, the need for attention—often revealed in shocking or creative ways—and to structure experience around novelty and fashion lead to a constant renewal of cultural creativity. In this view, the formation of new cultural groups such as Goths and Wiccans, often with reference to tradition, is a natural and healthy process, but individuals who turn the emergent performance into sociopathic spectacle show the risk inherent in an open society.

Then there is the theoretical question of when adolescence begins and ends as a distinct physiological or cultural period. Popularly, adolescence is thought of as the teen years, or physiologically as a period between puberty and physical maturity. One cultural marker is the sharp break between a sense of adolescent production, or cultural creativity, and adult response indicated in a survey conducted by *American Demographics/Harris Interactive* (December 2001, 10). It asked a sample of Americans to associate visible tattoos or body piercings with certain characteristics. The survey was driven by the observation that young adults are the most active body artists, and demographic factors of race, gender, and ethnicity are not as much predictors of who is likely to have such work as age.

**PERCENT OF ADULTS WHO ASSOCIATE THE FOLLOWING TERMS
WITH VISIBLE TATTOOS OR BODY PIERCING,
BY AGE**

CHARACTERISTIC	18-24	25-29	30-39	40-49
Rebellious	63	49	71	68
Experimental	57	59	53	50
Immature	29	32	45	47
Freakish	29	34	37	32
Alternative	58	77	42	41
Artistic	53	34	29	23
Normal	46	19	20	19
Stylish	29	25	13	16
Fun	34	27	15	10
Gay	12	10	16	9
Sexy	22	25	12	12
Tough	8	10	9	7

One way to read these responses is the large change among age groups as to the issue of whether the behavior is "normal." The response for the group in their late twenties to the one from the late teens to early twenties dropped 27 percent. This response suggests a perception of some customs as normative for adolescents. Note, for instance, the rise of the perception of the custom as immature from 29 percent among the group in their late teens to early twenties to 45 percent among the group in the early thirties. The group in its early thirties also felt more strongly than the group in its late twenties that the behavior was "rebellious." In this regard, one wishes that the survey had also asked about the characteristic of "adolescent," to see if there is a correlation between a perception of rebellion and adolescence. One of the traits one has to notice in the above survey is that the youngest group felt much more artistic than the group in the late twenties. One has to question the largest change in viewpoint concerning "alternative" from the group in its late twenties to the group in the early thirties. This response might suggest that the group in the thirties associated the distinction of the body markings with adolescence while a considerable portion of the group in the late twenties considered the markings still an option or choice that could be "sexy," "fun," or "stylish," rather than a sign of a younger age. But the answers to "immature" and "artistic" beg the question of traditions associated with a period we might designate as adolescent. From there we might question how "adoles-

cent" becomes not only a marker of age, but an adjective for kinds of behavior and customs. So we are left again to ask about folklore as an expression of age.

I could argue that folklorists have to get over their sense of surprise at adolescent folklore before confronting theoretical questions of age. In folkloristic literature, authors frequently express surprise that recognition to adolescent folklore came so late, and further, they express astonishment that adolescents produce as much material for folklorists as they do. The surprise in the former stems from the admission that many folklorists are teachers of adolescents, and yet have not adequately examined them as a folk group. The shock in the latter probably owes to the perception that adolescents discard the rhymes, songs, and tales abundantly collected among pre-pubescent children. What is not anticipated are the new materials generated in the form of legends, jokes, speech, and rituals. And what is generally not interpreted are the ties of this material to a sense of cultural disconnection. Oriented as they are to finding continuities, historical and social, folklorists are challenged by adolescent material to explain the cultural emergence, and frequent social fragmentation, common among teenagers.

The late folklorist Sue Samuelson expressed amazement in her review of adolescent folklore published in 1995 that the first American study to consider adolescent folklore separately from childhood was Martha Dirks' "Teen-Age Folklore from Kansas," appearing in *Western Folklore* in 1963. Dirks' point was to show that teenagers, often dismissed as tradition-bearers, had a formidable repertory of humor, slang, customs, and songs. Her survey sought to find continuities of this material with other traditions, but lacked a developmental approach. Even before Dirks' survey, groundbreaking studies by Brian Sutton-Smith sought connections between distinctive genres of adolescence and the developmental needs of the age. His "The Kissing Games of Adolescents in Ohio," first appearing in the journal *Midwest Folklore* (1959), posed the question of the social and psychological function of such games in the post-pubescent sexual development of teenagers during the 1950s. Other "adolescent" genres receiving this treatment included drinking games (see Monique Young's 1981 M.A. thesis at the University of California, Berkeley), graffiti (see Peter Peretti, Richard Carter, and Betty McClinton, "Graffiti and Adolescent Personality" in *Adolescence* 1977, and Susan Gelman's "Toward a Study of Postal Graffiti: Text and Context in an Adolescent Girls' Genre" in *Western Folklore* 1978), scary and sexual legends (see Gary Alan Fine and Bruce Noel Johnson, "The Promiscuous Cheerleader:

An Adolescent Male Belief Legend" in *Western Folklore* 1980, and Sue Samuelson, "The White Witch: An Analysis of an Adolescent Legend" in *Indiana Folklore* 1979), legend trips (see Patricia Meley, "Adolescent Legend Trips as Teenage Cultural Response," *Children's Folklore Review* 1991), gross jokes (see Simon Bronner, "What's Grosser than Gross?" in *Midwestern Journal of Language and Folklore* 1985), ritual insults (see Millicent Ayoub and Stephen A. Barnett, "Ritualized Verbal Insult in White High School Culture," *Journal of American Folklore* 1965), ritual and play (see Michael Licht, "Some Automotive Play Activities of Suburban Teenagers," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 1974), and material culture (see Ariane Sains, "The Latest Teen Rage? Embroidery" *Children's Folklore Review* 1990). It is not coincidental that the word "rage" frequently enters into the rhetoric of these works, both to reflect the quick circulation of material among adolescents and the trope of aggression in adolescent folklore.

There is a decided emphasis in these previous studies on defining the limits of adolescent genres and documenting characteristics of folkloric performance, but interpretations of social and psychological function can lead to more developmental approaches. Kenneth A. Thigpen in his extensive survey, "Adolescent Legends in Brown County" (*Indiana Folklore* 1971) for example, declares his textual purpose of "a survey of legend content of a segment of a community," but concludes with a developmental observation of the "basic adolescent need for adventurous involvement." What he means by this is a distinctive theme of using legends in adolescence for tests of daring designed to show maturity. He noted a sense of danger, a simultaneous attraction to and revulsion by death, and a building on tensions between teenagers and adults that is inherent in these adventures. Although he did not comprehend the full implications of folklore representing subgroups, or friendship cliques, of teenagers, he offered balance to the stereotypical view of the menacing teen. One group he called "Middle American" is characterized as "highly individualistic; politically, religiously, and socially conservative; rebellious against authority as it pertains to them individually, but not opposed to the concept of the present system; preferring alcoholic stimulation, particularly beer and liquor, as symbols of maturity and substances of experimentation and titillation" (209). The other he called "counter-culture: communal in social orientation (especially within the peer group); politically apathetic, though leaning toward liberalism; religiously apathetic, though tending to substitute ideas associated with the occult for traditional religious concepts; preferring non-alcoholic drugs (except for wine) such as marijuana, as symbols of maturity and substances for experimentation and titillation" (209).

In light of Columbine, the adolescent social landscape appears more complex and ideas of adolescent imagination more challenging. One needs to account for previously unheard of groups such as "The Trench Coat Mafia," as well as more widely spread labels of Goths, Raves, Skinheads, Jocks, and Wiccans. The commentary on school shootings was as much a cultural critique of adolescence and its baffling social landscape as it was a political concern for school violence. Folklorists as cultural professionals frequently working with teenagers began reviewing their positions. The Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society opened discussion on the folkloristic response to Columbine at its meeting in 1999 and invited participants to share research that would shed light on the traditions of teens in modern society. The hope was to promote more studies that would offer folkloristic views on the publicized problems of teenagers and schools. The gathered panelists in 2000 spoke to a standing-room only crowd, and the heated discussion inspired this publication to continue the initiative for folkloristic inquiry into adolescent traditions-both dangerous and benign. *Children's Folklore Review*, as a location for this folklore first, is appropriate because of its inclusion of developmental approaches to age-related folklore in its illustrious publishing run, but the essayists hope that other journals will subsequently take up the theme.

The theme intentionally goes beyond Columbine and the issue of school violence to the cultural worlds of adolescence today. It has to integrate the folk culture that adolescents construct for themselves and the popular belief that adults express about naturally rebellious or violent youth. The essayists tackle the interconnections of identities that adolescents pursue and the threatened feelings about those identities that popular culture perpetuates. Bill Ellis, for example, considers the significance of "Hitler's Birthday" as an occasion for the rumors of school violence that circulated. JoAnn Conrad deals with the cultural implications of political reactions to violent youth in California. Responding to the public perception of the danger of "Goth" identity among school shooters, Allen Berres separates the esoteric lore of Goth identity that adolescents commonly practice and the exoteric beliefs about Goths in popular culture. Charlie McCormick reminds readers in his essay on "cruising" about precedents for the kind of discourse on the menacing adolescent encountered in school violence discourse. This issue's theme of "folklore that responds to Columbine and adolescence" is therefore both in the form of practice traditionalized by adolescents and narrative or belief expressed by

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adults. As evidence for a developmental study of culture and a reflection on folkloristic purpose, it reveals the coming of age.

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