FROM THE BEGINNINGS OF THE AMERICAN STUDIES MOVEMENT, FOLKLORE AND FOLKLIFE research has lent authenticity to a claim for an American tradition. In American Humor (1931), often cited as a pathbreaker in opening American culture to interdisciplinary scrutiny, Constance Rourke explained the rise of a national consciousness in the development of folklore born of the American experience. “No other people has created its folklore and tried to assimilate it and turn it to the purposes of the creative imagination and of self-understanding, all within a brief span,” Constance Rourke later declared in The Roots of American Culture (1942, 243). Rourke believed that a distinctive American folklore formed out of the special circumstances of the new nation: “The wonder is that a people whose elements have been far from homogeneous should have steadily created a distinctive lore from its earliest days, and that the hold among us upon these materials should have been so stubborn against all the forces of modern civilization which tends to scatter them to the four winds” (Rourke [1931] 1959, 244).

For Rourke’s faculty colleague Martha Beckwith, American society was too diverse and derived too greatly from foreign sources to be described as a single tradition. She outlined many living ethnic and religious “strains in the process of creating an American cultural life” in Folklore in America (1931), published the same year as American Humor (see Beckwith 1931b, 64). In the phrasing of her title, Beckwith set her social vision as a contrast to “American folklore.” In her pluralist view, folklore as the possession of small social groups crossed national lines, and she drew comparisons with the material found in America to examples dispersed around the globe. We can only imagine the lively debates she and Rourke had in the English faculty lounge at Vassar, and their different keynotes reverberated in many public discussions of American identity through the twentieth century as momentous immigration, industrialization, and urbanization forced reevaluation of the relation of the future to the nation’s roots.

This tension between using folklore as evidence of a distinctive new national tradition or a diverse configuration of old imported traditions was especially noticeable in publications on American life from the 1960s into the 1980s. Richard M. Dorson, who championed the connection of folklore research to American studies since he emerged in the 1940s among the first holders of the Ph.D. in American civilization, was especially vocal in expressing an intellectual priority for locating an “American Folklore” over “Folklore in America.” He devoted several books, especially American Folklore (1959), American Folklore
and the Historian (1971), America in Legend (1973), Man and Beast in American Comic Legend (1982), and two special issues of the Journal of the Folklore Institute (1978, 1980) to the theme. In reviews, he railed against collections neglecting his Americanist theme such as Folklore in America (1966) edited by Tristram P. Coffin and Hennig Cohen, and Folklore on the American Land (1972) by Duncan Emrich.

To be sure, Dorson observed differences among Americans—regional, ethnic, and occupational—evident in folklore across the varied American landscape. His books Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers: Folk Traditions of the Upper Peninsula (1952), Buying the Wind: Regional Folklore in the United States (1964), and Land of the Millrats (1981) attest to that. Yet he saw these differences converging into a unifying American self under the weight of historical forces. At the first joint meeting of the American Studies Association and the American Folklore Society in 1957, he called attention to a distinctive set of historical patterns—exploration and colonization, revolution and the establishment of a democratic republic, westward movement, immigration, slavery and civil war, and industrialization and technology—that “shaped and created new folklore, or new adaptations of old folklore themes” peculiar to American society. This address, entitled “A Theory for American Folklore,” became the centerpiece of his influential book American Folklore and the Historian (Dorson 1971, 15–48).

Laying out his “American Folklore Bibliography” for American Studies International in 1977, Dorson continued his advocacy for American folklore studies highlighting historical themes and conditions unique to the United States. He further emphasized that this kind of American folklore research “is an indispensable component of any American studies program, for it deals directly with the lives and ideas of the average man and woman, of work groups, of minority cultures, ultimately of all segments of American society” (1971a, 23). In keeping with his approach, his bibliography gave first priority to studies of national folklore, especially historical events and heroes. Secondarily he covered studies of regional, urban, Afro-American, immigrant-ethnic, and Amerindian societies in America, but even then, he selected those studies that showed change from an older tradition into a new American form.

Primarily concerned with oral genres such as tales and songs, Dorson nonetheless recognized the expansion of the American study of folk traditions to material expressions such as art and architecture, but he devoted only one paragraph to “folklife and material culture.” Worried about the ethnographic challenge of folklife and material culture to his model, he voiced suspicion of the communitarian orientation of folklife research, and its uncovering of cultural persistence and diversity. He saved some of his highest praise for Constance Rourke’s historical literary work, and considered his own efforts as building on her ideas. Claiming that the realization of historical inquiry into folklore was only just emerging in American studies, Dorson’s forward-looking message in 1971 for the international American studies community was that “the best books on American folklore are yet to be written” (1971a, 23).

As the historically oriented Constance Rourke had her anthropological detractor in Martha Beckwith, so too did Dorson have dissenting folklorists who sought behavioral connections to American studies. Writing in the 1976 bibliography issue of American Quarterly, Richard Bauman and Roger Abrahams with Susan Kalčík reiterated the split between American folklore and folklife in America and surveyed the familiar categories of
region, ethnicity, race, occupation, and genre. They closed with attention to “a social interac­tional perspective, centering around the notion of performance” that they felt was modifying the traditional organizing principles of American folklorists. In this perspective researchers observed varying individual “performances” of traditional behavior influenced by the immediate sociocultural context. This idea led to more consideration of the lives of individual American folk performers and artists from a wide range of backgrounds and the processes for learning and expressing folklore under various American conditions. Thus Bauman, Abrahams, and Kalcik pointed to studies of biography, repertoire, and performance style of folk performers leading to increased interest in “community, locale, and personal experience as formative influences” in diverse American contexts (1976, 377).

Although addressing changes in folklore studies, Bauman, Abrahams, and Kalcik equally implied a shift in the mission of American studies from one of uncovering, in Rourke’s words, the “common storage of experience and character,” usually centered on literary arts, to one seeking to describe American lives and identities in everyday cultural practice. This shift suggests questioning that leaves behind the issue of whether American traditions were created or imported (seen as a process, they are obviously both), and moves to the complex use of traditions by and for individuals in various settings that are part of American life. Additionally, inquiry can follow the ways that Americans carry multiple identities through their lives and the patterns of forming, expressing, and manipulating those identities. This kind of inquiry opens American studies to global applications, since these identities are in question when Americans or American expressions enter into surroundings outside the United States. This new questioning characterizes many new studies since the surveys of the 1970s on folklore and folklife in relation to American studies.

If there has been a trend since the 1970s, it has been that writing on folklore in American studies appears more “ethnographic.” The basis of fieldwork using interview and observation to describe the communication of symbols among people in contemporary cultural scenes and artifacts is conspicuous in many studies. And during the 1990s, a rejuvenation of the historical component of tradition is evident, thus forming a new folkloristic synthesis of art, literature, culture, and history. Rather than trying to describe America as a whole, more attention has been made to describe the complexity of American scenes and peoples that influence, and have influenced, the sense of the whole and its parts. Thus studies of Louisiana Cajuns, Pennsylvania Germans, city firefighters, and corporate humorists are all American studies that connect to cultural studies abroad. Implying the importance of social identities, these studies are complemented by a movement in folklore and folklife research to consider the importance of settings and practices they suggest (the schools, workplaces, and leisure spots) within the common scenes of American life.

Particularly in its emphasis on the processes of “tradition,” folklore and folklife research notably contributes to American studies by identifying longstanding values and beliefs inherent in socially shared expressions that connect to individual lives as part of the American experience. One indication of the scholarly appeal of folklore in American studies has been the rise of folklore and folklife courses in American studies programs and departments from a handful in 1971 to thirteen percent of all folklore courses offered in the United States in 1986. The previous domination of ballad and song gave way to American folklore and folklife as the dominant folkloristic subject taught in American colleges (twenty-six percent), just behind the introductory course (Baker 1971, 1986a). The numbers
are probably even higher today. One can understand the folkloristic connection by recalling that the basis of American studies methodology in "myth, symbol, and image" prevalent during the 1950s and 1960s borrowed heavily, even if problematically, from folkloristic ideas of mythology's connection to a shared cultural consciousness or worldview (see Dundes 1972; Toelken 1979; Smith 1950; Tate 1973). Further, terms representing attention to behavioral manifestations of social perceptions of the past and present such as "folkways," "tradition," and "memory," concepts again emanating from folklore and folklife research, have since the 1980s taken prominent places as keywords of new major American studies titles (Fischer 1989; Glassberg 1990; Kammen 1991; Levine 1992).

In this essay I will update the surveys of the 1970s with particular attention to new interdisciplinary arguments on the nature of American identities and lives using folklore as evidence. I therefore depart from the social organization of the older surveys to present a categorization emphasizing research problems of folkloric "processes" in relation to American studies. I begin with studies focusing on types of American folk expression and their performers. More studies now refer to "expression" rather than genres to draw attention to native perspectives on what is being said, sung, or made as an expression of self and society. I discuss aspects of ethnicity, region, and occupation in the next section on American "Identities and Communities." In this category, I also add a description of the growing bookshelf for identities of age, gender, sexual preference, and physical ability not described in earlier surveys. I then move on to consider studies of "Settings and Contexts" for these identities and communities. Under this heading, I especially cover studies of work, school, and recreational contexts as well as landscape and material culture. I will close with a brief guide to the study of American folklore, including Internet sources for historiography and bibliography.

**Expressions and Performers**

Surveys of folklore before World War II often pointed to folk songs as a primary example of America's rich folk heritage. Abundant collections attested to the preservation of old English and Scottish ballads while some such as G. Malcolm Laws in *Native American Balladry* (1950) indexed songs that are unique to the American scene. Most folk song surveys still available categorize both native and imported sources (See Cazden et al., 1982; Randolph 1982; McNeil 1987–1988, 1993; List 1991). Since the 1970s more folk song studies have examined the functions of musical traditions especially as they have adapted to popular culture associated around the world with American tastes. *Folk Music and Modern Sound* (1982), a collection of essays edited by William Ferris and Mary L. Hart, sets the tone for many books that explore folk music and folklore's relation to country music, blues, jazz, Cajun, zydeco, polka, and a variety of other ethnic expressions in America. Perhaps the most sweeping study relating folk tradition to commercial culture is Bill C. Malone's *Country Music, U.S.A.*, which first appeared in 1968 and was revised in 1985. He strongly argued for the influence of southern traditions on American musical culture and he expanded this argument in *Southern Music, American Music* (1979). Some challenge to his thesis along with a survey of a neglected northern country music tradition can be found in my *Old-Time Music Makers of New York State* (Bronner 1987). During the 1990s, country music has been a common ground for American studies scholars and folklorists, judging
from a spate of interpretative books such as Curtis Ellison’s *Country Music Culture* (1995), George Lewis’s *All That Glitters* (1993), and Cecilia Tichi’s *High Lonesome* (1994). While folkloristic works focus on the communitarian character of country music in regional and ethnic traditions, American studies scholars have been attracted to country music’s claim as America’s traditional music.


Besides what is sung, what is traditionally said holds a special interest for students of folklore. The proverb is a basic form of folk speech that is often used to express a shared cultural wisdom, and, appropriately, Wolfgang Mieder has surveyed the cultural unity and diversity of American proverbs in *American Proverbs* (1989), *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1991), and *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season* (1993). In keeping with the theme of this book of the importance of the rhetoric of tradition in public, often politicized, discourse, his contribution of *The Politics of Proverbs* (1997) should be singled out for attention. International in his scope, Mieder covers rhetorical strategies of proverb use by history-changing figures such as Adolph Hitler and Winston Churchill in addition to American leaders. Elsewhere, he has provocatively suggested the cross-cultural possibilities for comparing American proverbs to other national collections (see Mieder 1992). A suggestive ethnic study of proverbs examining cross-cultural encounters is Roger Mitchell’s “Tradition, Change, and Hmong Refugees” (1992), which analyzes the use of folk proverbs by Southeast Asian refugees to adjust to the startlingly different American scene.

Another traditional expression with international connections is the “modern” legend. Many of the legends deal with American icons such as cars, fast-food chains, corporations, fads, and celebrities. *American Folk Legend* (1971), edited by Wayland Hand, contained important general essays by Linda Dégh and Alan Dundes on the modern legend along with chapters on American historical legendry promoted by Richard Dorson (see Dorson 1971c, 1973a, 1982b). The overlap of legendary belief and documentary history in American

American folk humor, since Rourke’s day a strong link between folklore and American studies, has enjoyed renewed attention by folklorists. Recent studies and collections explore the diversity of American humor, modern forms of folk humor, and the symbolic meanings of joke cycles. Three praiseworthy regional collections, for example, are *Jokelore* (1986) by Ronald Baker, *Ozark Mountain Humor* (1989) by W. K. McNeil, and *Midwestern Folk Humor* (1991) by James Leary. Essays on modern joke cycles taken from different perspectives are featured in *Jokes and Their Relations* (1992) by Elliott Oring, and *Cracking Jokes* (1987) by Alan Dundes. Dundes, collaborating with Carl Pagter, has also been instrumental with books such as *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded* in opening photocopied folk humor often found in corporate America to scholarly scrutiny (1978, 1987, 1991). As with explorations of other narrative expression, a number of recent studies consider more closely the perspective of individuals and their often varying audiences. *Humor and the Individual* (1984a) edited by Elliott Oring brings together several such studies to raise questions about the role of the joke teller in American society (see also Dégh 1995, 285–305, 325–40).

Often combining legendary and humorous elements is the “personal narrative” or “personal experience story.” This recounting, according to traditional models of events in one’s life, is gaining notice for what it reveals about narrative process and contextual influences. Sandra Dolby Stahl contributed *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative* (1989) toward this study, and a spate of titles on the subject should be forthcoming judging from scholarship in journals (see Dorson 1977f; Titon 1980; Wilson 1991; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989a; Dégh 1995, 70–78). If these essays are useful to American studies for exploring the ways that Americans frame their experiences in narrative, another suggestive study, “Tales of America” by Knut Djupedal (1990), opens for inquiry the stories told about America by returning emigrants. More work could also be done on the culturally relative formation of narrative experience in childhood, as Brian Sutton-Smith has explored in *The Folkstories of Children* (1981) (see also Sullivan 1992; Bronner 1992d; Friel 1995).

Studies of customs including American holidays, folk medicine, games, and rites of passage lag behind those on song and story, although some excellent contributions have been

Ritual, festival, and play are related topics that combine interests in tradition and culture from a number of disciplines. Combining psychology, anthropology, and folklore, Brian Sutton-Smith has contributed now classic studies in play, such as *The Folkgames of Children* (1972) and *The Masks of Play* (1984, edited with Donna Kelly-Byrne). Two folkloristic books showing the diversity of games in America are *Texas Toys and Games* (1989) edited by Francis Edward Abernethy and *Step It Down* (1987) by Bessie Jones and Bess Lomax Hawes. These books are more collections than studies, but may be useful as guides to the range of activities engaged in by Americans, as will a collection such as *The Folklore of American Holidays* (1991), edited by Hennig Cohen and Tristram Potter Coffin. More in the way of studies that tend to emphasize the creative and pluralistic celebration of holidays are Jack Santino's *All Around the Year* (1994) and *Halloween and Other Festivals of Death and Life* (1994). A regional study of customs is *Ozark Baptizings, Hangings, and Other Diversions* (1984) by Robert K. Gilmore, and a focused study available for a holiday tradition is *O Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations* (1987) by William H. Wiggins, Jr. An overview of traditions related to the life cycle is provided in *Rites of Passage in America* (1992) edited by Pamela B. Nelson, and a focused study of a modern rite of passage is *Birth as an American Rite of Passage* (1992) by Robbie E. Davis-Floyd.

outstanding work for design and intention is Henry Glassie’s *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (1975). A forum bringing together these concerns from American studies, folklife research, archaeology, and history has been *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* (see Carter and Herman 1989, 1991; Cromley and Hudgins 1995). A global reference that includes an extensive North American section and discussion of folkloristic approaches to architecture is *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World* (1997), edited by Paul Oliver.


More studies could be done on the themes in verbal and visual art. Some texts that propose this approach are *The Pueblo Storyteller* (1986) by Barbara A. Babcock and Guy and


IDENTITIES AND COMMUNITIES

In *Folklore Matters* (1989), Alan Dundes understands the importance of folklore as “one of the principal means by which an individual and a group discovers or establishes his or its identity” (35). The advantage of folklore as evidence is that it, in Dundes’s words, “gives a view of a people from the inside-out rather than from the outside-in” (35). It allows scholars of American studies to grasp the complex ways Americans view their identities, often simultaneously held, of ethnicity, religion, region, community, gender, and family, as well as nationhood. Susan D. Rutherford, for example, offers folklore communicated through sign language as evidence of a distinctive cultural identity held among others in the “American deaf community” (Rutherford 1983). Because folklore is often shared privately among a group of people, it often reveals, as Rutherford discovered, the connections within a community as well as its deep-seated values and beliefs. Folklore is often gathered to give an intimate cultural view of communities and subcultural identities, although Dorson made a claim for an overarching American tradition based on a shared narrative knowledge in *America in Legend* (1973).

Cases for American regional identity typically use traditional speech, music, food, and architecture bound to a landscape for evidence. Dorson’s early survey of regional traditions in *Buying the Wind* (1964) emphasized isolated oral traditions, but later works tended to highlight regional “performances” and more symbolic evidence from festivals and material arts. While Dorson tended to assume that regional lore remains constant, the later studies explored the ways people in a region dynamically express distinctive traditions variously influenced by historic and ethnic conditions. Examples of this approach can be found in *Sense of Place* (1990) edited by Barbara Allen and Thomas Schlereth. In this view oriented more toward cultural lives functioning in communities than literary comparison across broad expanses, the cultural sense of place tends to be smaller and more adaptive than the larger sections of the South and West, for example, mapped earlier. Book-length studies and anthologies showing the “cultural lives” perspective are *The Ramapo Mountain People* (1974) and *Folk Legacies Revisited* (1995) by David Steven Cohen, *Pinelands Folklife* (1987) edited by Rita Zorn Moonsammy, David Steven Cohen, and Lorraine E. Williams, *Don’t Go Up Kettle Creek* (1983) by William Lynwood Montell, and *The Last Yankees* (1990) by Scott E. Hastings, Jr. The South has been especially well covered in regional studies, such as those in a series edited by Lynwood Montell for the University Press of Mississippi (see Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre 1991; Bucuvalas, Bulger, and Kennedy 1994; McNeil 1995a; Williams 1995). In addition to the identities fueled by the cultural lives in a region, a few anthologies and studies such as W. K. McNeil’s *Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture* (1995) and George H. Lewis’s “The Maine Lobster as Regional Icon: Competing Images over Time and Social Class” (1989) have explored the images of regional traditions held by those outside the region.


Sweeping ethnic folklore studies are now available for Italian Americans (Malpezzi and Clements 1992), German Americans (Barrick 1987), Mexican Americans (West 1988), Romanian Americans (Thigpen 1980), and Jewish Americans (Sherman 1992). More regionally focused studies cover Louisiana Cajuns (Aancelet, Edwards, and Pite 1991), Pennsylvania Germans (Burke and Hill 1991; see also Beam 1995), San Francisco Chinese (Hom 1992), Italian Americans in the West (Taylor and Williams 1992), and Laotian Hmong in Michigan (Dewhurst and MacDowell 1984). A collection of essays examining the adaptation of ethnic folklore in modern life is *Creative Ethnicity* (1991) edited by Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala. Examples of studies focusing on specific traditions related to ethnic identity are Yvonne Lockwood's "The Sauna: An Expression of Finnish-American Identity" (1977) and Larry Danielson's "St. Lucia in Lindsborg, Kansas" (1991).

African-American folklore and folklife scholarship claims a rapidly growing bookshelf. The "folklore in America" question of imported traditions continues in publications such as *Africanisms in American Culture* (1990) edited by Joseph E. Holloway. Coverage of African-American folklore and folklife has been greatly expanded by the publication of *Afro-American Folktales* (1985) edited by Roger D. Abrahams (standing in contrast to Dorson's *American Negro Folktales* [1967] which argued for primary influence on the narratives from European and American sources), *Afro-American Folk Art and Crafts* (1986) edited by William Ferris, and *By the Work of Their Hands* (1991) by John Michael Vlach. The classic study of Afro-American folk preaching has meanwhile been revised as *Can These Bones Live?* (1988) by Bruce Rosenberg complemented by a study by Gerald L. Davis, *I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know* (1985). For contrast in the contemporary African-American experience, one can compare the isolated Sea Islands community in
Following Tradition


A growing trend in American studies is consideration of occupational identity expressed in folklore and folklife (see Green 1993). The intellectual grounding of such an approach is offered in Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife (1978) edited by Robert H. Byington; it implies that the social organization of “community” and “class” is imbedded in the formation of occupational traditions. Several studies examine the lore and life of fishermen; see The World of the Oregon Fishboat (1986) by Janet Gilmore, I Heard the Old Fisherman Say (1988) by Patrick Mullen, and Lake Erie Fishermen (1990) by Timothy C. Lloyd and Patrick Mullen. On dry land, some exemplary studies are Robert McCarl’s The District of Columbia Fire Fighters’ Project (1985) and Maggie Holtzberg-Call’s The Lost World of the Craft Printer (1992). A special issue of New York Folklore (1987) edited by Mary Arnold Twining on migrant workers opens an important field for further investigation. Farming and mining probably deserve more cultural attention in American studies as “occupational” (and in the case of hunting and fishing “recreational” cultures) than they have received; some suggestive studies are Threshing in the Midwest (1988) by J. Sanford Rikoon, Backwoodsmen (1995) by Thad Sitton, Buck Fever
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(1990) by Mike Sajna, and Tinged With Gold: Hop Culture in the United States (1992) by Michael A. Tomlan. Especially contributing to American studies, Allen Tullos demonstrates in Habits of Industry (1989) the ways that a regional folk culture became transformed by the textile industry in the Carolina Piedmont. While the emphasis in studies of occupational folklore has been on craft labor and industrial work, corporate life receives attention in Inside Organizations (1988) edited by Michael Owen Jones, Michael Dane Moore, and Richard Christopher Snyder. Often taking a behavioral approach, this kind of study is less on the formation of “class” and more on the processes and symbols that mediate between needs of the individual and the organization and those that sustain cultural continuity among organization members.


Many American folklorists are reexamining the ways that traditions collected from women express an identity of gender. The anthology Women’s Folklore, Women’s Culture (1985) edited by Rosan A. Jordan and Susan J. Kalcik is not exclusively about American women or concerned with American studies, but most of the essays explore American settings. Espousing a “feminist” approach to “gendered” traditions, a variety of scholars contributed to Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture (1993) edited by Joan Newton Radner and Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore (1994) edited by Susan Tower Hollis, Linda Pershing, and M. Jane Young. Similarly, a special issue on “Folklore and Feminism” in the Journal of American Folklore (1987) edited by Bruce Jackson contains several feminist perspectives on “traditional gender roles” in America, including articles on American Mormon and Pentecostal women, Amerindian mythology, and the American ritual of birth (see also Stoeltje 1988). Consideration of manliness as a developed tradition in America can be found in The Men from the Boys (1988) by Ray Raphael. Joseph Goodwin takes up the special identity of gay men expressed through folklore in More Man Than You’ll Ever Be (1989).

Settings and Contexts

The studies in this section typically have concerns that overlap with those in previous sections, but because they often present as their focus the contextual influence of American settings, it is worth considering them as a distinctive area of exploration in the relation of
American studies and folklore research. One indication of this shift of focus is a special section of the journal *New York Folklore* on “Folklore in the Industrial Workplace” (1988) edited by Mia Boynton. The rhetoric of the workplace as a setting is important to interpret the ways that participants symbolically respond to one another as well as to the setting as part of the complex “American scene.” For example, essays examine the function of humor in a lumberyard and the expressive responses of a woman in a typically male setting of a steel plant. *Inside Organizations* (1988) edited by Michael Owen Jones, Michael Dane Moore, and Richard Christopher Snyder is especially suggestive for American studies. It contains studies of typical American settings such as Girl Scout camps, booster festivals, military hospitals, and service agencies, as well as restaurants, aircraft factories, health care agencies, and corporate offices. Michael Owen Jones includes several studies of his own on restaurant, academic, and corporate settings in *Exploring Folk Art* (1987). He particularly scrutinizes the symbol-making power of organizations and the metaphorical value of their verbal and material culture.

Richard Dorson realized the contextual trend when he devoted the largest section of his last major work, the *Handbook of American Folklore* (1983) to “American Settings.” Under this heading, he included brief overviews of “Office Folklore,” “Factory Folklore,” “The Folk Church,” “Urban Folklore,” “Suburban Folklore,” and “Hanging Out: Recreational Folklore in Everyday Life,” among others. Although not constituting a large bookshelf, work in organizational and contextual studies steadily grows. Michael Bell’s *The World from Brown’s Lounge* (1983) examines a bar setting for black middle-class play. Also using a bar setting, *The Cocktail Waitress* (1975) by James Spradley and Brenda Mann is an exemplary ethnography of “woman’s work in a man’s world” and includes discussions of narrative and customary traditions in response to the bar’s social and material environment. I devoted the book *Piled Higher and Deeper* (1995) to the expressive culture of students on college campuses and over the Internet (see also Baker 1983; Toelken 1986; Mechling 1989c). An exceptional study of an ethnic setting is Barbara Myerhoff’s portrait of life in a Jewish senior center in *Number Our Days* (1978) (see also Heilman 1976). A suggestive study exploring the folk rituals and customs of modern hospitals is “Customary Observances in Modern Medicine” (1989) by David Hufford.


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(1990) by Amanda Dargan and Steven Zeitlin applies a similar analysis to New Yorkers’ adaptation to the urban setting of sidewalks and stoops.

What could be a more basic setting than the home? Yet many studies have neglected the varying ways that Americans have viewed and used this setting for material and verbal performance. I have contributed to the inquiry in Grasping Things (1986), and other publications include Homeplace (1991) by Michael Ann Williams, Getting Comfortable in New York (1990) edited by Susan L. Braunstein and Jenna Weissman Joselit, Home Sweet Home (1983) edited by Charles W. Moore, Kathryn Smith, and Peter Becker, and “Living Room Furnishings, Ethnic Identity, and Acculturation among Greek-Philadelphia” (1979) by Robert Thomas Teske. Studies of how setting alters verbal performance can be found in “Inside Millie's Kitchen” (1990) by Felicia McMahon and “A Traditional Storyteller in Changing Contexts” (1981) by Patrick B. Mullen.

GUIDES, HISTORIES, BIBLIOGRAPHIES, AND INTERNET SOURCES

American Folklore: An Encyclopedia (1996) edited by Jan Harold Brunvand is the latest reference guide for students of American studies to the topics and approaches within American folklore and folklife research. Brunvand published a third edition of his widely adopted textbook The Study of American Folklore in 1986 and revised it further in 1998. He asks, “Does America Have a Folklore?” and spends the next 555 pages demonstrating that indeed it does, with examples of items and genres “found in” America and those “originated” there (Brunvand 1986, 38). Richard Dorson’s Handbook of American Folklore (1983) emphasizes even more than Brunvand the American studies connections to folklore in contributors’ brief essays under large sections on “American Experiences,” “American Cultural Myths,” “American Settings,” “American Entertainments,” and “American Forms and Performers.”


Making a great contribution to the recognition of folklore research and American studies has been the spate of biographies of individual folklorists. Richard Dorson’s career as folklorist and Americanist has yet to be fully chronicled, but an assessment of his contributions is discussed in “Richard M. Dorson’s Views and Works: An Assessment” (1989) and “Special Section: Richard Dorson” (1989), both edited by Robert Georges (see also Brunvand 1982). Other biographies of figures in American folklore research are Good Friends and Bad Enemies: Robert Winslow Gordon and the Study of American Folksong (1986) by Debora Kodish, Folklorist of the Coal Fields: George Korson’s Life and Work (1980) by

While these previous studies typically focus on academic figures who contributed to American folkloristic scholarship, the history and practice of "public" folklore in government, arts agencies, and historical and cultural organizations have received attention in several edited volumes, including The Conservation of Culture (1988) edited by Burt Feintuch, Public Folklore (1992) edited by Robert Baron and Nicholas R. Spitzer (1992), and Conserving Culture (1994) edited by Mary Hufford. The bookshelf of historical works in public folklore has not been adequately developed, but two foundational studies are a study of the first state folklorist in my Popularizing Pennsylvania: Henry W. Shoemaker and the Progressive Uses of Folklore and History (1996) and a survey of a public-oriented folklore organization in The Texas Folklore Society (1992) by Francis Edward Abernethy. Several critical essays on public folklore have taken up the symbolic uses of folk festivals, especially the Smithsonian's prominent Festival of American Folklife (see Bauman, Swain, and Carpenter 1992; Cantwell 1993; Price and Price 1995). This cultural criticism bears comparison to historical studies of "uses of tradition" in public fairs, parades, and pageants, such as David Glassberg's American Historical Pageantry (1990), John Bodnar's Remaking America (1992), Robert Rydell's All the World's a Fair (1984), and Susan Davis's Parades and Power (1986) (see also Kammen 1991). Expanding the consideration of folkloristic practice is Putting Folklore to Use (1994) edited by Michael Owen Jones, which sets "public" folklore (usually conceptualized as cultural programming for governmental and arts agencies) as "applied" folklore alongside museum agency, medical practice, social work, occupational and psychological therapy, urban and regional planning, economic and organizational development, cultural tourism, and education. A statistics-filled report containing essays on the impact of "applied" public programs in America devoted to traditional arts is The Changing Faces of Tradition (1996), edited by Elizabeth Peterson (see also Auerbach 1996a).

David Shuldiner has done a great bibliographic service for folk traditions of the elderly in *Folklore, Culture, and Aging: A Research Guide* (1997).


As the last bibliography shows, folklore is material that often invites cross-cultural comparison. Susan Steinfirst's general guide to the international reference shelf of folklore and folklife research (1992) may be helpful for placing American work in global perspective. In addition, the Modern Language Association annually updates its bibliographic volume on folklore and makes it available in print as well as electronic form. On-line resources for American folklore are archived in Gopher and World Wide Web pages for the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. Print references with strong folkloristic contents are *America: History and Life* (also available in CD-ROM form), *American Studies: An Annotated Bibliography* (Salzman 1986), and *Arts and Humanities Index*. Online sources such as *Anthropological Literature*, UnCover, *Current Contents*, *Table of Contents*, *Religion Index*, and *Sociofile* cover a number of folklore and folklife journals. Many serials featuring American material such as the *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, *Pennsylvania Folklife*, and *Kentucky Folklore Record* have separate volumes devoted to indexes. Especially important are the *Centennial Index* and supplement to the *Journal of American Folklore* (Jackson, Taft, and Axlerod 1988; Taft 1994). A special volume indexing folklore theses and dissertations, in need of updating, has been prepared by Alan Dundes (1976), and in addition to having a catalogue of more recent folklore dissertations, University Microfilms Incorporated in Ann Arbor has a service for searching for specific titles and subjects of dissertations.

Folklore and folklife research abounds in films, videotapes, and sound recordings as well as in print, and the Center for Southern Folklore has produced two volumes entitled *American Folklife Films and Videotapes* (1982) to guide users. Recordings also provide important research materials; since 1984 the American Folklife Center has annually published a list of outstanding recordings in *American Folk Music and Folklife Recordings* coordinated by Jennifer Cutting. The American Folklife Center additionally issues helpful "sourcebooks" such as *Folklife Sourcebook* (1994) compiled by Peter T. Bartis and Hillary Glatt and *Maritime Folklife Resources* (1980) compiled by Peter T. Bartis. The sourcebooks cover organizations, journals, and recording companies, to name some of the contents. Significant discographies of American folk material include *Traditional Anglo-American Folk Music* (1993) by Norm Cohen and *Ethnic Music on Records* (1990) by Richard K. Spottswood. A few guides to field recordings in archives are also available, such as the Native-American materials in *A Guide to Early Field Recordings (1900–1949)* at the Lowie Museum of Anthropology (1991) by Richard Keeling and regional records in *The Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History: A Catalog of the First 1800 Accessions* (1986) by Rita Breton, Joan Brooks, Catherine Fox, Florence Ireland, and Edward Ives.
Resources for “getting into traditions” seem to multiply daily on the Internet. Folklore discussion groups often post reviews and announcements in addition to featuring conversational “threads” on folklore topics. Lively nonspecialist newsgroups exist for general topics of folklore (folklore), urban legends (alt.folklore.urban), and college folklore (alt.folklore.college). “Moderated” lists encourage professional participation on legends (alt.folklore.suburban) and folkloristic issues (afs-l and newfolk). If that does not satisfy the net surfer, lists can be found for folk music, ballads, storytelling, folk dance, medicine, foodways, humor, military folklore, ghost stories, mythology, material culture, and a multitude of ethnic and international traditions. Sites on the World Wide Web offering graphic capabilities have quickly grown in number and degree of usefulness. The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress offers handy bibliographies and guides, and connections to its tremendous Archive of Folk Culture (http://lcweb.loc.gov/folklife). The center runs a regularly updated service on-line called “Folkline” which lists jobs, fellowships, internships, grants, and conferences involving folklore. The homepage of the Smithsonian Institution’s Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies has significant resources such as materials for educators, an index to the Smithsonian Folkways catalogue of recordings, and detailed information on the annual Festival of American Folklife (http://www.si.edu/folklife/start.htm). The American Folklife Society website contains information on its publications and activities (http://afs-net.org). A valuable feature is a set of links to its many “sections” covering special interests such as history, education, folk belief and religion. For the broad heading of American studies, with ample representation of matters of tradition, one can consult the “Crossroads” site at http://www.georgetown.edu/crossroads.

More than a dozen American university folklore programs run homepages that have links to folklore resources in addition to describing educational approaches to the study of traditions. They also often provide useful information on research projects, special events, publications, syllabi, and student and faculty access. The one I go to most is Harvard’s because of its extensive set of links and clear organization (http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~folkmyth). Among the connections to be found are folklore archives, centers, societies, electronic journals, publishers, syllabi, information guides, and special projects. One can click on announcements for the American Folklore Society annual meetings and newsletters through the site. Another impressive homepage is at UCLA, which in addition to making guides available to its immense set of archives, offers a glimpse of future developments with special text and graphic collections on-line in brilliant color for folk art and Los Angeles folk culture (http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/ humnet/folklore/archives). It also offers an innovative public service with the interactional site called “Ask the Folklore Expert!” Some sophisticated homepages for folkloristic figures and topics are popping up as publishing on the Internet becomes more popular, and they increasingly offer valuable illustrations and photographs in addition to texts. For this book, for instance, I made use of websites for Joel Chandler Harris (http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug97/remus/remus.html), Lafcadio Hearn (http://www2.gol.com/users/steve), Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (http://www.rockefeller.edu/archive.ctr/aar.html), George Washington Cable (http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/huckfinn/hftourhp.htm), Vance Randolph (http://lcweb.loc.gov/spcoll/193.html), and John and Alan Lomax (http://www.surfin.com/users/alperry/Alan_Lomax.html). Others with bibliographic guides can be found for topics as wide-ranging as urban legends (http://www.snopes.com, http://www.urbanlegends.com, and
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http://www.nardis.com/~twchan/afuref.html), folklore from Vietnam veterans (http://129.162.150.173/folk.htm), life histories collected by the WPA folklore project from 1936 to 1940 (http://rs6.loc.gov/wpaintro/wpahome.html), cross-cultural data on trickster narratives (http://members.aol.com/pmichaels/glorantha/tricksref.html), and folk arts in basic education (http://www.carts.org). Some sites take the form of electronic journals such as American Folk for folk artists (http://www.americanfolk.com) and Newfolk for New Directions in Folklore (http://www.thunder.ocis.temple.edu/~cbaconsm/newfolk.html).

The most global set of links to folklore topics I have found is at a site called "Mythology, Folklore, and a Little Bit of Religion Compiled by Sarah Craig" and can be accessed through Harvard's folklore homepage. It is alphabetically arranged by areas from Afghan to Zoroastrian, but users should be forewarned that the links range widely in quality. It has a section devoted to American folklore connecting to sites for Mexican-American tales of La Llorona and, inescapably, Paul Bunyan. There are even links to "Cowboy Hat Terms" or "Folklore of the Color Green" if you happen to be searching for that information. Other sections at the site relating to American tradition include Afro-Caribbean, Canadian, Caribbean, Cherokee, Christian, Guam, Hawaiian, Hopi, Iroquois, Latino, Lenni-Lenape, Native American, Navajo, Nez Perce, Potawatomi, and Sioux.

All these traditions that can be explored electronically also suggest more studies in the future on traditions of the Internet, and there is a volume announcing the arrival of Internet Culture (1997) edited by David Porter. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett specifically questions the ramifications of computer communication for the study of folklore in her essay, "From the Paperwork Empire to the Paperless Office: Testing the Limits of the 'Science of Tradition'" (1996). I consider the impact of folklore over the Internet for college students in the Afterword of my Piled Higher and Deeper (1995). Other exploratory essays on the folklore of computer communication have been written by Karla Jennings (1990), John Dorst (1990), and Michael Preston (1996a, 1996b).

Premise and Promise

Since 1977 when Richard M. Dorson anticipated that the best books on American folklore had yet to be written, an impressive library of works has appeared proclaiming the social diversity and cultural complexity of American lives. Besides expanding the range of folklore to folklife concerns of material culture and community formation, researchers increasingly seek out the multiple cultures that interact in an American commonwealth (see Hufford 1991). There is probably more consideration now than in Dorson's day of America, and individuals affected by America, in an increasingly transnational world. Researchers can be heard asking more questions about the influences of tradition on the behaviors and attitudes that Americans take on in many settings, organizational and physical, in the United States and abroad. The guiding problem for the relation of folklore and folklife research to American studies no longer revolves exclusively around the simplistic opposition of imported and emergent traditions, an opposition that in its formation portrays American culture as a completed project, and an exclusive one at that. The tendency in the growing library of settings and performers, expressions and identities, has been to view America in process. The main problem statement therefore concerns the rhetorical uses of traditions from various perspectives—the individual, the community, the region, the
nation—and the way those uses help construct cultural meaning. The task of interpreting intellectual construction and cultural production undergirds many new American studies of tradition waiting for the light of print and screen. The promise of these studies is their inquiry into the adaptive nature of everyday lives, and the ways that those lives can reveal the varied nature of cultural experience.