American Folklife  
History 6203, Fall 2010  
University of West Georgia

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Office hours: Tuesday 1-4 and Wednesday 10-12 and 1-3 at the Center for Public History (Ingram Library). Monday office hours at the Atlanta History Center by request

Class Objectives

This class introduces historians to the study of folklore and folklife and to new methods of studying American social and cultural history. The American Folklife Center defines folklife as “the traditional, expressive, shared culture of various groups in the United States: familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, and regional. Expressive culture includes a wide range of creative and symbolic forms, such as custom, belief, technical skill, language, drama, ritual, architecture, music, play, dance, drama, ritual, pageantry, and handicraft. Generally these expressions are learned orally, by imitation, or in performance, and are maintained or perpetuated without formal instruction or institutional direction.”

This class may count as a public history seminar, but it be used as a history seminar to introduce students to new methods of historical inquiry and research. It also counts towards the Atlantic World concentration.

The goals of this class are:

1. **To understand the meaning of folklore and folklife and their value in studying American history and culture.** One of the primary goals of the class is to understand what folklife resources are and how these sources can enrich the study of American history and culture. As the field of history moves towards more cultural and social interpretations of the past, folklife research and scholarship can enhance the work of historians and create a more multi-disciplinary approach useful for both historians and public historians. We will examine a variety of genres of folklore and folklife throughout the semester.

2. **To learn how to conduct research and fieldwork to document folklife resources.** This course will teach folklife research methods that will be useful for both historians and public historians. We will explore how to conduct and archive fieldwork, how to find primary documents related to folklife, and how to interpret and analyze folklife sources. To gain a greater appreciation of the folklife resources in our own lives, families, and communities, students will be required to undertake several “mini-collection” projects during the semester, collecting examples of the genres we are discussing and presenting them to the class.

3. **To practice integrating folklore and folklife resources into an original research project.** Every student will produce an original research project using folklife sources. Students will be expected to provide appropriate documentation of their fieldwork and include it with their project.

4. **To learn about the best practices for the presentation of folklife sources to the public.** We will discuss current issues regarding the field of “public folklore,” particularly the ways in which we use folklife sources to present and interpret local and regional history. In addition to visiting fairs, festivals and local music venues, we will discuss on-line exhibits and other types of folklife documentaries and publications developed to share folklife traditions with the public.
Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this class each student will be able to:

1. Define folklore and folklife and identify the characteristics of different genres in the field;
2. Document folklore and folklife resources in his or her own life and in his or her family or community;
3. Conduct original research and write a research paper using folklife sources;
4. Develop his or her interpretations of American folklife resources as they relate to American history by explaining and defending them orally and in writing; and
5. Critically evaluate how folklore and folklife are presented to the public, particularly in the context of local and regional history.

Required Books


Barron, Robert and Nick Spitzer, eds., *Public Folklore*. University of Mississippi Press, 2007. 13-97819841110409


Course reserves:

Please note that additional readings will available on the class Course Den website.

Additional recommended resources to utilize this semester:

American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, on-line resources and exhibits available at [www.loc.gov/folklife](http://www.loc.gov/folklife)
Folkstreams.net, A National Preserve of Documentary Films about American Roots Cultures streamed with essays about the traditions and filmmaking. The site includes transcriptions, study and teaching guides, suggested readings, and links to related websites. Available at www.folkstreams.net

“Folklife,” various essays on topics related to Georgia folklife, New Georgia Encyclopedia, Georgia Humanities Council, are available at http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Categories.jsp?path=Folklife

This source provides overviews and articles on topics that could be useful in research projects related to Georgia. Please visit this website to learn more about our regional folklife traditions.

Course Requirements

Required Field Trips
All students will be expected to attend two field trips during the semester.

1. The first field trip will be to the Georgia National Fair in Perry, Georgia, on a mutually-agreed upon date. If for some reason you absolutely cannot attend with the class, you must attend on your own and you will be expected to document your visit with a ticket.

2. Each student will be expected to attend a field trip to one of two local music venues where students can experience regional music traditions. And of course, you are welcome to come to both events!
   a. The first option is the Outpost Music Barn in Buncombe, Georgia, just south of Tallapoosa. Stage shows are on Friday nights, starting at 7 p.m., and there is no admission unless there is a “national act,” although “donations are accepted weekly.” The Outpost features primarily Bluegrass and Gospel music. We will schedule a Friday night for whoever wants to go to attend together, as a group, or you may attend on your own, if you wish. For more information, you may contact owners Thomas or Betty Gray at 770-574-2759.
   b. The second option is a Sacred Harp singing at Holly Springs Church outside Bremen, which is held annually on the first Sunday in November. This year, the Sacred Harp singing will be on Sunday, November 2. Details about the Sacred Harp event and location are available under the class schedule.

Weekly assignments (30% of grade)
As you review the syllabus, you will note numerous small assignments due on a weekly basis. These assignments will require that you collect, document, and analyze examples of folklore within your family or community.

Many, but not all assignments, will require a written response paper, which should be word-processed, double-spaced, about two pages in length. Please check the weekly schedule for details on each assignment and to determine whether a written assignment is required or an oral presentation is sufficient.

These assignments will be graded on a scale of one to ten, and then averaged together in computing your final grade.

Essay: Presenting folklife traditions (10% of grade)—due October 14.
During the early part of the semester, we will explore how folklife is presented and interpreted to the public through fairs and festivals. The class will visit the Georgia National Fair in Perry, Georgia. In
addition, students will attend a fair or festival in their community that features (or claims to highlight) elements of the region’s folklore or folklife.

Drawing on your visits to these two fairs (the Georgia National Fair and the fair that you chose to visit) and Leslie Prosterman’s book *Ordinary Life, Festival Days: Aesthetics in the Midwestern County Fair* about the county fair, each student will write a **three to four page** paper which analyzes the extent to which local and state fairs represent a community’s traditions and how successfully these fairs present and interpret the region’s folklife resources to the public. Please use specific examples from the fairs you visited. Photographs would be great! Do not forget to use Prosterman’s book as part of your analytical framework and reference it appropriately through footnotes, quotes, etc.

**Research paper proposal (5% of grade)—due September 30.**

Each student will turn in a two-page proposal for his or her research project, which will include the central question being asked, the research techniques you intend to utilize, a description of the folklore or folklife resources to be used, and a bibliography of at least five secondary sources on the topic.

**Rough draft of research paper (5% of grade)—due October 28.**

These drafts must be the full paper length and include the introduction, content, conclusion, and bibliography. At least some photographs are encouraged as well, depending on your topic, as they will help me in offering useful critique for your research paper.

**Final Research paper (35% of grade)—due December 9.**

Each student will complete a semester-long original research paper of approximately 12 to 15 pages, excluding photos and other documentation. This paper will involve the use of some type of primary folklife sources, which must include either original fieldwork that the student undertakes or archival folklife sources to explore an issue relating to history or public history. Details about the paper will be provided.

There are several potential avenues for student research. First, students are encouraged to think about how folklife studies and sources could contribute to their thesis or thesis/projects and craft a topic that would contribute to this work. Second, students may select any topic of interest.

In crafting research topics, students may draw upon several collections and recent initiatives at the Center for Public History. Over the past several years, the Center has compiled a large collection of oral histories related to Georgia foodways and music that would be useful for developing research topics ranging from chitlins and sweet tea to gospel and old-time string band music. The Center also has strong oral history collections in occupational folklife associated with the textile and apparel industry. If you are interested in writing a paper that could be used for an article in the New Georgia Encyclopedia, please let me know and we can discuss topics that might be relevant and needed.

In creating a project that involves original fieldwork, students should consider where they would archive their fieldwork. The Center for Public History welcomes regional folklife projects to be incorporated into its archive. However, students must use the Center release forms if you choose to archive your project here.

The Center houses a collection of folklife projects from previous classes, and students are welcome to read these projects for ideas.

**Class attendance and participation (15% of grade)**

Students are expected to attend class and complete the readings in advance of class. As a graduate seminar, this class will focus primarily on discussion. All students are expected to contribute to class discussion. Excessive absences will lower your course grade.
UWG Policies

Please review the information available in this link for policies regarding the American with Disabilities Act, credit hours, email, and the honor:
http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf

Class Schedule

Note that the schedule includes some “recommended” materials (including some on-line video documentaries or other resources) that will provide further insights into the topic under discussion that week. All “reserve” materials will be available on Course Den.

August 26: Class Introduction

September 2: Defining folklore and folklife
Read:
- Schoemaker, chapter 1;
- Burrison, introduction and chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6;
- Abrahams, “The Public, the Folklorist, and the Public Folklorist,” in Public Folklore
- Please visit the webpage of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, available at http://www.loc.gov/folklife/

Bring to class: a newspaper article you found that incorporates folklore or folklife and a one-page written summary describing how this example fits the definitions of folklife that you have been reading

September 9: Folklore Studies
Read:
- Williams, Great Smoky Mountains Folklife
- McCarl, “Public Folklore: A Glimpse of the Pattern that Connects,” in Public Folklore

Recommended: Siporin, “Public Folklore: A Bibliographic Introduction,” in Public Folklore

September 16: Material culture and folk cultural regions
Read:
- Glassie, Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States;
- Schoemaker, chapter 12;
- Joyner, chapter 1

Bring to class: a written response of one to two paragraphs that describes an example of some type of folklife resource that Glassie discusses that you have seen or experienced

September 23: Doing fieldwork
Read:
- Schoemaker chapter 2-3 and 20;
- Folklore and Fieldwork: A Layman’s Introduction to Field Techniques, available on-line at http://loc.gov/folklife/fieldwork
Profession,” in Public Folklore; “A Statement of Ethics for the American Folklore Society,” available at http://www.afsnet.org/aboutAFS/ethics.cfm;


Recommended: (next page)


Bess Lomax Hawes, “Happy Birthday, Dear American Folklore Society,” in Public Folklore

September 30: Folk art and craft

Read:

Glassie, “Folk Art,” on reserve;

John Michael Vlach, “The Twentieth Century: Grandma Moses, Modern “Primitive,”” on reserve;

Burrison, chapter 4;

“Folk Art and Craft” at http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?path=/Folklife/FolkArt&id=h-545

Recommended: View the permanent exhibit “Shaping Traditions: Folk Arts in a Changing Society” at the Atlanta History Center. Exhibit curated by John Burrison.

Bring to class: An example of folk art or craft. Be prepared to describe how it meets the definition of folk art or craft. No written assignment about these objects is required.

Bring to class: Research proposal

October 2-14: Date TBD--Field trip to the Georgia National Fair

Before visiting the fair, visit the website at www.georgianationalfair.com/

Be sure to click on the section titled “Competitions,” and read the descriptions for entries and schedules for livestock and agriculture, home arts and fine arts, and FFA and 4-H

Read: Prosterman, Ordinary Life, Festival Days

October 7: Foodways

Read:

Sam Hilliard, “Hog Meat and Cornpone: Food Habits in the Antebellum South,” on reserve;

Donald E. Vermeer and Dennis A. Frate, “Geophagy in a Mississippi County,” on reserve;

Catherine Palmer, “Chitlin Strut,” on reserve;

“Church suppers: The Salzburger Gathering,” on reserve


Bring to class: An example of traditional foodways from your family. No written assignment is required, but students will interpret their food to the class.
October 14:  Fairs and the public presentation of folklife

Read:
- Schoemaker chapter 9
- Cantwell, “Feasts of Unnaming: Folk Festivals and the Representation of Folklife,” in Public Folklore

Bring to class: essay on “Presenting Folklife Traditions”

October 21:  Occupational folklore

Read:
- Schoemaker, chapter 13;
- Review two American Memory websites that focus on occupation folklife,

Bring to class: a two-page written example of occupational folklore, which could be student/university folklore or an example from a particular occupation.

October 28:  No class

Turn in research paper draft. These drafts must be the full paper length and include the introduction, content, conclusion, and bibliography. At least some photographs are encouraged as well, depending on your topic, as they will help me in offering useful critique for your research paper.

November 2: Sacred Harp Singing at Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church, all-day singing beginning at 9:30 a.m., Bremen, Georgia. Directions are available on the “Fasola” website at http://www.fasola.org/maps/?index=79&size=small

Visit the following websites for more information and to prepare for the singing:
- “Sacred Harp Singing in Georgia” at http://www.atlantasacredharp.org/
- “What to Expect at a Sacred Harp Singing” at http://www.atlantasacredharp.org/beginner.html

November 4: November 11: Folk Music

Read:
- Schoemaker, chapters 10-11; 6
- Kip Lornell, “Anglo-American Sacred Folk Music,” on reserve;
- Joyner, chapters 10-12;
- Sheehy, “Crossover Drama,” in Public Folklore

Recommended:
- Georgia Harmonies, Georgia Humanities Council and Center for Public History, 2011. Copies are available at the Center for Public History;
- Review “Atlanta Bluegrass Happenings” website at http://atlantabluegrasshappenings.com/
“Sweet is the Day: A Sacred Harp Family Portrait,” Film by Jim Carnes, Produced by
Erin Kellen, Copyright: 2001, The Alabama Folklife Association, 59 minutes, Color,
available at http://www.folkstreams.net/film.44 Please review the associated research
materials on the film website.

Bring to class: a two-page written analysis of the music event you attended, either the Sacred
Harp singing or the Outpost Bluegrass Barn (or, if you attended both, you are welcome to
compare them)

November 11: Religious folklore; Children’s folklore
Read:
- Schoemaker, chapter 7 and 17;
- “Revival Cooking,” on reserve
- Peter Opie, “The Lore and Language of School Children,” on reserve
- Black Delta Religion, Film by Bill and Josette Ferris, Produced by Center for Southern
  Folklore, Copyright: 1973, Center for Southern Folklore, 14 minutes, Black and White,

Bring to class: an example of children’s folklore described and analyzed in two pages

November 18: Family and Ethnic Folklore
Read:
- Schoemaker, chapters 14, 15, 16, and 18;
- Burrison, chapter 3;
- “Ethnic Celebrations,” at
  http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?path=/Folklife/CustomsandLocalTra
ditions&id=h-774

Recommended:
- “Weaving Bitter with the Sweet,” Film by Ann Rynearson, Copyright: 2003, International
  Institute of Metro St. Louis, 30 minutes, Color, Available at
  http://www.folkstreams.net/film.196
  Practice during Perestroika,” in Public Folklore

Bring to class: an example of folklore or folklife from your family described and analyzed in one
to two pages

November 25: No class for Thanksgiving Break

December 2: Oral and written lore: narratives, speech, beliefs, jokes, and riddles
Read:
- Schoemaker, chapters 4-6, 8;
- Jan Brunvand, “The Hook and Other Teenage Horrors,” on reserve.

Bring to class: a two-page description and analysis of a narrative which you have heard

December 9: Research paper presentations
Due at class: Final research projects