

THEY CALLED IT 'LIVING LORE': FOLKLORE AND FOLKWAYS
IN THE FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT OF THE
SOUTHERN COASTAL STATES

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INTRODUCTION

The South has many different faces. In his book Media-Made Dixie, Jack Temple Kirby, author and university professor, details some of the many historical images of the South that are prevalent in print and picture. Some of these representations include the "Grand Old South" in the film Birth of a Nation by pioneer American filmmaker D. W. Griffith and in Margaret Mitchell's sweeping novel Gone with the Wind; the poor degenerated South of novelists William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell; the tribal, passionate, neurotic "New South" of playwright Tennessee Williams; the mindless, soulful and occasionally wry South of singer Hank Williams; and the South of a new revisionist scholarship of black history and race relations. Most of these pictures overlap each other. The three main images that are important to this study, however, are the "Grand Old South"; sharecropper realism, a genre that deals with the yeoman class and the poor; and the new revisionist scholarship of black history.¹

¹Jack Temple Kirby, Media-Made Dixie (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), passim.

The 1930s was a time when something had gone wrong with the democratic system. The nation was plunged into an economic depression, and people, especially writers, were questioning the causes. Harvey Swados, editor of the anthology The American Writer and the Great Depression, suggests that out of a certain despair over their society's condition, people sought to get to the root of their common troubles and interpret the bewildering complexities of American life in order to determine their own identity and how they had arrived at their current crisis.² Writers tried to "bring to life the terror and the glory of their countrymen as they struggled to cope with the economic and social darkness that had descended upon them."³ Indeed, if readers could discover that other Americans could overcome problems, setbacks and failures, perhaps they could overcome their own.

The Federal Writers' Project (FWP) a division of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) begun by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration in order to create work for unemployed writers, gave similar reasons for compiling an American guide. Planners claimed that they

²Harvey Swados, ed., The American Writer and the Great Depression (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1966), p. xxxiii.

³Ibid., p. xxxiv.

selected the guide as the activity that would be of greatest public benefit because it would help the country know and understand itself.⁴ The American Guide Manual claimed, "The American Guide is being compiled primarily to introduce Americans to their own rich culture."⁵

Henry Alsberg, National Director of the FWP, stated in his foreword to the FWP publication American Stuff: "These guidebooks are unique, the Project believes, in that they attempt to organize a broad cultural picture of the American scene, past and present--its folkways, its social, political, and industrial economy, side by side with the more usual scenic and historic features."⁶

Proponents of the Project gave those reasons for writing guides. However, a close look at the guides for the Southern coastal states reveals that the guides ignored the present--the Depression. Reading those guides would help the reader know more about his country, but not to

⁴William F. McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), p. 735.

⁵Works Progress Administration, Instructions No. 9 to the American Guide Manual, 12 March, 1936, n. 20, cited by McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 705.

⁶Federal Writers' Project, American Stuff: An Anthology of Prose and Verse by Members of the Federal Writers' Project (New York: Viking Press, 1937), pp. v-vi.

understand himself and what was happening around him. For the books show only the South that people wanted to see-- the New South of industry, shipping, and trade, where tourists could look with pride, and envy, upon the new Houston ship channel; the South of the early French or Spanish explorers that left a legacy of ghosts, phantom ships, and legends of buried treasure; and the "Grand Old South" where ante-bellum mansions could become tourist attractions and Negroes and crackers had interesting folkways.

Two of the areas to be covered in each state guide were folkways--the customs and ways of a group, and folklore--the body of lore in relation to the life of the common, uneducated people that is transmitted orally. The popular definitions are closely related, and the guides use the terms interchangeably. Project workers traveled throughout the countryside collecting information concerning folklore and folkways.

In addition to work on the guides, the Project also instigated a number of important undertakings in the name of "folklore." The collecting of slave narratives became the first Negro studies conducted in the United States on a large scale. Some state offices combined

the slave narratives with research to create black history from the Negro's point of view. And the life histories tell the stories of the South's poor farmers and factory workers in the subject's own words. It is through the collection of these materials that another, truer picture of the South emerges.

Much of the material that Project workers collected as folklore later became historical source material for what was then the present and the remembered past. FWP interviewers documented the realities of the 1930s as they collected life histories. And the slave narratives reveal an untold history of the black man in the South. Some of the narratives collected were printed during the Project's existence or immediately afterwards. But only many years later could others publish more of the interviews and interpret them realistically. Some of the Project's publishable work may never see print.

Perhaps only through the perspective of time can people bear to view the grim side of reality. The population of the Thirties could only examine the past and the good things of the present but not the present conditions. Even the sharecropper realism that was emerging in the novels of the Thirties was fiction. The studies on folklore and folkways came close to reality, but writers called that reality something else--folklore.

CHAPTER I

FOLKLORE AND FOLKWAYS IN THE FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT

Dictionary definitions of folklore and folkways are very similar, and most people use the words interchangeably. Scholars, however, cannot agree on a definition of "folklore," and the word "folkways" was invented to define a very specific area of study. A general idea of what both people and scholars considered folklore and folkways is necessary to this study because the people who influenced and collected information on folklore and folkways in Federal Writers' Project (FWP) came from scholarly backgrounds as well as from many other former occupations.

The dictionary definition of the word "folklore" is apparently simple. The word may refer to the traditional beliefs, legends, and tales of the common, uneducated people that are transmitted orally; the comparative study of folk knowledge and culture; or a body of widely accepted but specious notions about a place, group, or institution. Scholars' definitions, however, are much more precise and complicated.

Since folklorist William Thoms, who had a major influence on the discipline of folklore, first suggested

"a good Saxon compound," "folklore," to mean "the lore of the people," folklorists have not agreed on just what folklore is.⁷ The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend contains twenty-one concise definitions of the word, reflecting some of this diversity of opinion. In the book, The Study of Folklore, five folklorists in as many essays attempt to define the essence of folklore and analyze its meaning.

A brief summary of some of the scholarly definitions in The Study of Folklore indicates something of the eclectic breadth of the subject. Even without such a guide, years earlier FWP workers had collected a wide range of folklore, and FWP publications contained a diversity of material on the subject. Folklorists claim that folklore is an "oral tradition", but the criterion of oral transmission by itself is not sufficient to distinguish folklore from non-folklore. For example--directions describing how to drive a tractor are transmitted orally, but are not an example of folklore. Conversely, some folklore may be written. If one defines the word by parts, "folk" may refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common

⁷Alan Dundes, The Study of Folklore (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 5.

factor, such as occupation, language, or religion. And "lore" is the unwritten literature of the group. A popular definition which appears in many contemporary standard dictionaries and was prevalent in the 1930s incorrectly identifies folklore only with peasant society or rural groups. Equally fallacious is the view that folklore is exclusively a product of the past and that people of today produce no new folklore.⁸ Alan Dundes, of the University of California, defines folklore comprehensively:

Although it may not be entirely satisfactory, a definition consisting of an itemized list of the forms of folklore might be the best type for the beginner. Of course, for this definition to be complete, each form would have to be individually defined. Unfortunately, some of the major forms, such as myth and folktale, require almost book-length definitions, but the following list may be of some help. Folklore includes myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, oaths, insults, retorts, taunts, teases, toasts, tongue-twisters, and greeting and leave-taking formulas (e.g., See you later, alligator). It also includes folk costume, folk dance, folk drama (and mime), folk art, folk belief (or superstition), folk medicine, folk instrumental music (e.g., fiddle tunes), folksongs (e.g., lullabies, ballads), folk speech (e.g., slang), folk similes (e.g., as blind as a bat), folk metaphors (e.g., to paint the town red), and names (e.g., nicknames and place names). Folk poetry ranges from oral epics to autograph-book verse, epitaphs, latrinalia (writings on the walls of public bathrooms), limericks, ball-bouncing rhymes, jump-rope rhymes, finger and toe rhymes, dandling rhymes (to bounce children on the knee), counting-out rhymes (to determine who will be

⁸Ibid., pp. 1-3 passim.

"it" in games), and nursery rhymes. The list of folklore forms also contains games; gestures; symbols; prayers (e.g., graces); practical jokes; folk etymologies; food recipes; quilt and embroidery designs; house, barn, and fence types; street vendor's cries; and even traditional conventional sounds used to summon animals or to give them commands. There are such minor forms as mnemonic devices (e.g., the name Roy G. Biv to remember the colors of the spectrum in order), envelope sealers (e.g., SWAK--Sealed With A Kiss), and the traditional comments made after body emissions (e.g., after burps or sneezes). There are such major forms as festivals and special day (or holiday) customs (e.g., Christmas, Halloween, and birthday).

This list provides a sampling of the forms of folklore. It does not include all the forms.⁹

Surprisingly, for a word that occurs so often in the history of the FWP and the guides themselves, there is very little scholarly material involving the term "folkways." The fields of sociology, ethnology, and anthropology include the study of customs, mores, and traditions, but the term "folkways" is little used, unusual, and specific. William Graham Sumner claims to have formed the word "folkways" on the analogy of words already in use in sociology to introduce his own treatment of "mores."¹⁰

The dictionary definition, "A way of thinking or acting adapted unreflectively by the members of a group

⁹Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰William Graham Sumner, Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1906) p. 5; Sumner was Professor of Political and Social Science in Yale University.

as part of their shared culture," does summarize Sumner's rather extensive comments on the term he suggested.

Sumner claims that folkways are a societal force, and are made unconsciously, often through impulse and instinct. Their origins are lost in mystery and they become accepted by virtue of uniformity, repetition and wide occurrence.

Moreover, he suggests that folkways are usually related to the primitive conditions of hunger, love/sex, vanity, and fear. They are associated with good and bad luck, the ills of life, goodness and happiness. Each group thinks of its own folkways as the only right ones and often shows contempt for other groups and their folkways. This prejudice is illustrated by the two essays in Mississippi guide, "White Folkways" and "Negro Folkways." Folkways are imaginative and sometimes formed on the basis of irrational and incongruous action, as when a pestilence broke out in Molembo soon after a Portuguese national died there; and afterwards, natives took all possible measures to keep a white man from dying in their country. Sometimes adherence to folkways overrules personal judgment and character. However, when folkways take on a philosophy of right living and a life policy for one's welfare (or community), they become mores.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 17-45 passim.

Despite the definitions of scholars or others, the guides use the terms "folklore" and "folkways" loosely and interchangeably. And whatever the exact meaning of the words, together they concern the ways and lore of people whose contributions are not usually detailed in history books. Yet their role is important, for without an understanding of people's folklore and folkways, the picture of that society is incomplete. Furthermore, planners in Washington claimed that understanding America was the primary reason for writing an American guide and after all-- the people are America.

The United States of America, land of opportunity, bastion of democracy and capitalism, whose entry into World War I meant victory for the Allies, was also victim of a world-wide depression. During the 1930s the country was in an economic slump. Unemployment was widespread. A series of droughts had created a dustbowl of the agricultural land in the Midwest. And many people were desperate for the bare necessities of life. Families and individuals wandered throughout the countryside seeking food, clothing, and shelter. But most of all, people wanted jobs.

The government, under the leadership of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, wanting to do something about the economic condition of the country and its people, began a

series of programs designed to help the country return to prosperity. This plan of action was call the "New Deal."

The Works Progress Administration was an important part of the New Deal policy. This federal agency initiated government projects designed to put some of the nation's vast numbers of unemployed persons to work. Many of the projects called for construction of buildings, roads, and dams that would benefit the country. Construction, however, involves mostly laborers. Yet, many people with other skills also needed jobs. Therefore, the government was looking for programs that would create jobs for all types of workers. Furthermore, workers' groups and unions were pushing for legislation that might create jobs for them. All of these factors tended to create a sense of purpose, activity, and hope in Washington that the government actually could put people to work without endangering private enterprise or the basic fundamentals of democracy. Government leaders and private individuals worked to put together a "New Deal" for Americans.

In the months preceding the creation of the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), the ideas of writing about folklore and folkways was constantly before the planners in Washington. As early as 1934 the Author's Guild had submitted a proposal to the Civil Works Administration

(CWA) for writers "to survey the varying aspects of everyday life as it is lived in all parts of the United States."¹² The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) had conducted a project concerned with gathering folklore and recording autobiographical material from ex-slaves. This project seemed worth continuing and expanding.¹³ Another proposal emphasized the idea of preserving as much as possible of the country's fading folk heritage. Still another plan which would almost eliminate the need to write involved composing an "iconography" that would be "a compilation of pictures, broad-sides, handbills, and all the other original source material that describes the events, attitudes, and customs of a given place, region, or group."¹⁴ Joseph Gaer, of California's newspaper

¹²Jerre Mangione, The Dream of the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935-1943 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1972), p. 36.

¹³Ibid., p. 45; CWA and FERA were early "New Deal" agencies established to create work projects for the relief of the unemployed.

¹⁴Monty Noam Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), p. 18.

project, even suggested that "Federal One" be called the American Folklore Project.¹⁵

A federal program for writers seemed to fit the needs of the times. It would provide employment for many while collar workers, and it might also produce a literary heritage that Americans could be proud of. Writers claimed that they would rather work than accept doles and that their work was as important as that of others already employed by the government. They picketed in New York City. Henry Alsberg, who later became the Project's director, talked with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, who was "the official godmother of the arts projects," and the FWP emerged as part of a program called Federal Project Number One.¹⁶

"Federal One," which began as four projects for cultural relief--the Federal Art Project, the Federal Music Project, the Federal Theater Project, and the Federal Writers' Project--existed as part of the WPA

¹⁵Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁶Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, p. 8.

between 1935 and 1939.¹⁷ The creation of "Federal One" was based on the ideas that the artist as well as the manual worker was entitled to employment at public expense, and the arts are and should be of immediate concern to the ideal commonwealth.¹⁸ Because of the needs and ideas of the times, on July 27, 1935, the government created a program for subsidized literature unprecedented in the history of this or any other nation.¹⁹ However, one editorial complained that now, "in addition to shovel leaners, the nation would now have pencil leaners."²⁰

There was much discussion about what constitutes a writer, and what and where federal writers would write. Other employees of "Federal One," such as painters and sculptors, could also perform creative work, often in the privacy of their own homes. But nothing they produced could create as much trouble as the written word.²¹ Planners realized that creative writing was too controversial an activity to begin on a national scale. They also

¹⁷Kathleen O. McKinzie, "Writers on Relief: 1935-1942" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1970), pp. 17-18.

¹⁸McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. i.

¹⁹Ibid., p. ix.

²⁰Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, p. 48.

²¹Ibid., p. 46.

realized that all kinds of people--lawyers, librarians, ministers, teachers, and other white-collar workers who had one skill in common, their writing ability--would be eligible for the Project. Therefore, the Project needed a broad, nonfiction program that could utilize diverse services and skills.

Several private citizens and government employees proposed the idea of writing an American guide similar to Baedaker's United States, written by Finley Muirhead, a book which was then obsolete and long out of print. Connecticut had already produced a state guidebook, the Connecticut Guide, sponsored by the CWA and FERA, other "New Deal" relief agencies.²² However, it took the peculiar ingredients of a Washington cocktail party to spur the official adoption of a plan to write a guidebook on a national scale. Arthur "Tex" Goldschmidt, assistant to the head of the Professional Projects Division, Jake Baker, recalled: "Baker left me stuck in the corner with garrulous gal who kept asking, 'What will you do for writers?' I couldn't easily escape and, besides, I decided to listen. You never knew where a good idea

²²Ibid., p. 46.

would come from. Her proposal was guidebooks."²³ The advice came at a propitious time. Apparently she convinced him, and he convinced Jake Baker, because afterwards, workers on Baker's staff focused on her proposal. The "garrulous gal" was Katherine Kellock, who later became the national editor for the guidebooks' "tours section."²⁴

Planners formulating the concept of the American Guide did not slight folklore. Rather, it became an integral part of the Guide under the direction of the FWP's national director, Henry Alsberg.²⁵ Born and reared in New York City's prosperous East Seventies, he was educated at the Sachs Collegiate Institute, a remarkable private school that prepared him to enter Columbia College at fifteen. After graduating from Columbia Law School and practicing law for three years, he declared that law was "a dirty business" and spent a year in Harvard's graduate English department.²⁶ Deciding that he disliked academic

²³Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 22.

²⁴Ibid; For a more complete history of the creation of the Federal Writers' Project, see Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, pp. 9-29 and Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, pp. 29-50.

²⁵McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 704.

²⁶Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 18.

discipline, he joined the editorial board of the New York Post.

Alsberg, at heart a free, creative soul, really wanted to be a writer and see the world. His next years included several jobs that helped fulfill that ambition. He was secretary to the United States ambassador to Turkey. Writer Emma Goldman later remembered him as a foreign correspondent for the Nation and the London Daily Herald. She admired his "sincerity and easy joviality, directness and comraderie."²⁷ Under the American Joint Distribution Committee, Alsberg brought funds to starving Jewish refugees in the Ukraine. Then he produced his first book, a collection of letters by Russian dissidents written in collaboration with Don Isaac Levine. After Alsberg returned to the United States, he became producer and member of the Provincetown Players advisory board. Here he achieved literary recognition by translating, adapting, and producing S. Ansky's The Dybbuk in the United States.

In mid 1934 Jake Baker, then director of the professional Projects Division and later chief architect of "Federal One," asked his friend, Alsberg, who in a

²⁷Ibid., p. 19.

Columbia University alumni publication had listed his work as "saving the world from reactionaries," to come to Washington.²⁸ Baker asked him to write about the work of the CWA, a relief agency and forerunner of the WPA which had begun public work projects. The result, American Fights the Depression, by Alsberg, helped the author secure an appointment as supervisor of the reports and records issued by FERA where he would serve primarily as editor. Baker realized that his friend was weak in administrative ability and chose Reed Harris to assist Alsberg. Harris's appointment also helped counteract Alsberg's filing system which was based on these principles--" if he were interested, it went into his desk; if not, into his waste basket." Alsberg once said, "Hell, I don't keep carbons!"²⁹

Because Alsberg was in Washington, he was in close contact with the people who organized the FWP and played a vital role in formulating its structure. Jake Baker felt that he was "the right man, of some stature in the publishing field."³⁰ Alsberg also wanted the job and a chance to develop the proposed program.

²⁸Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, p. 56.

²⁹Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, pp. 20-21; Except where noted, the above biographical material about Henry Alsberg is from Penkower.

³⁰Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 28

As National Director, Alsberg's conception of what the guides would be determined their composition. And folklore and folkways were a very important aspect of that picture. William F. McDonald, author of the Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, later described some of his ideas:

Alsberg conceived of the Guide not as a revised Baedeker but as a discovery of the roots from which America had grown and a signpost of America's potentialities for the future. In a word, the Guide was to be an appreciation of America and a revelation to the democratic tradition, which, though it had never ceased to exist, had been obscured by an alien film. Emphasis upon folklore; the speech and mores of the common people, stress upon the contributions of minorities, like the American Negro, to the creation of a genuinely native culture; and an accent upon regional, sectional, and local characteristics that in their variety formed a manifold unity that only a decent respect for each would preserve--these principles guided the thought of Alsberg as he approached the creation of the American Guide.³¹

Through Alsberg the series of guidebooks was to become a diverse collection of essays which could "attract attention to the whole of American civilization and its development."³² He wanted FWP to write a book about the balladry and

³¹McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 665.

³²Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 21.

folklore of the Kentucky mountain regions but deferred this project to concentrate on the American Guide series.³³

It was Alsberg's job to select both the national office staff and the state directors. Clerks and typists came from the rolls of relief workers, but the rest of the national staff did not have to be certified by their local relief board as in need of relief funds. As a result of this arrangement, Alsberg could employ talent when he could find it; and he soon acquired writers and other professionals with varied specialties.

Alsberg persuaded the noted Texas ballad hunter John A. Lomax, who was formerly folklorist in residency at the Library of Congress, to be the national advisor on folklore.³⁴ He also asked Sterling A. Brown, who was recognized as an authority on Negro literature, to be the national editor of Negro affairs. Alsberg appointed Morton W. Royse national consultant for social-ethnic studies. These three people often worked together closely when folklore and folkways concerned more than one of them.

Specialists in the Project received manuscripts dealing with their specializations as the work came into

³³Ibid., p. 147.

³⁴McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 704.

the national office. Gradually, John A. Lomax became the "Folklore Section" of the FWP, and other specialists became "sections" dealing with their own areas of work. "Section," however, was frequently a misnomer. Usually a section was simply a special interest of one editor who worked on special material for the guides with the help of a secretary and an assistant or two. Nevertheless, editors of special "sections" often persuaded Alsberg to channel FWP manpower into producing publications devoted to their specialities.³⁵

Within a short time the speciality of folklore began to assume gigantic proportions in the FWP. The automobile, an important factor of the "tours" section of the guide, played a key role in the discovery that the United States is composed of many regions where people, the common people, with their folklore, folk music, and folk art are an object not only of interest, but of cultivation. So regular, ordinary, "back home" people came to be seen as human souls who were fashioning the new spirit of America. Thus, as writers searched for the unusual and interesting to make readers "see" the countryside of the

³⁵Ibid; McKinzie, "Writers on Relief," p. 148.

tours more vividly, the Washington staff began to discover the rich variety of the folk and folklore of the nation.³⁶

At first the guide was of primary concern, but before long folklore study in its own right asserted itself. On August 4, 1936, Alsberg and Lomax sent "Oklahoma Folklore and Folk Customs", a sample guidebook essay, to the state offices to serve as a model. A letter asking for a full collection of folk material from each state accompanied the manuscript. It also mentioned the possibility of making a collection of national folklore. In the letter Alsberg stated that the guide was to be of immediate consideration, but other folk material would be of great future value.³⁷ These instructions precipitated a deluge of folklore material.

As more and more material came into the Washington office, the character of the nation became more apparent. Although the American nature is predominantly Anglo-Saxon in character, its language and literature stemming from English roots, the FWP staff began to recognize other elements in the bloodstream of American culture. The staff

³⁶McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 648; Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 88.

³⁷McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 705.

members saw that the Negro, Jew, and Spanish American impressed their personalities on America and that this was not only a fact, but good. The discovery of these influences was a new phenomenon for Americans; Lomax, and, later, Benjamin Botkin, as well as Royse and Brown, submitted various proposals to study those ethnic influences.³⁸ Many of their projects dealt partially or specifically with the South.

Alsberg decided to include in each guidebook only an essay on black history and lore in each state under the editorship of Sterling Brown and his research assistants, Ulysses Lee and Eugene Holmes. However, to compensate for the sketchy treatment of the Negro in the guidebooks, Brown instigated a series of field projects conducted by black writers and researchers who, under his direction, investigated the story of the American Negro in depth. One of these projects resulted in the publication of the book, The Negro in Virginia, a goldmine of black history and folklore. It is widely regarded as a classic of its kind because it is one of the first histories of the Negro that is written from the black perspective.³⁹

³⁸Ibid., p. 648.

³⁹Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 140; Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, p. 259.

In 1936 Lomax emphasized the work on the Slave Narrative Collection formerly begun by the FERA. He issued a detailed set of questions designed to help some of the more than 100,000 ex-slaves still believed to be alive to talk about their former slave days.⁴⁰ He said, "Until we get the view as presented through the slave himself, the story of slavery and the Reconstruction could not be complete."⁴¹

Morton W. Royse, national consultant for social-ethnic studies, and Ben Botkin proposed a joint project described by Alsberg as "studying the ethnic groups from the human angle."⁴² Royse also proposed an ethnic study called 'Composite America' which he described in his initial letter to the Project's state directors as a proposal to construct a record of the building of America from colonial days to present. The crux of the story would be how the influx of peoples from all ends of the earth achieved social and cultural unity.⁴³

⁴⁰Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, p. 263.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 257.

⁴²Ibid., p. 278.

⁴³Ibid., p. 280.

Another project was proposed by William T. Couch, who served as regional director of the Southwest from 1938-39, as well as associate director of North Carolina's project. He asked neighboring states to use a "life-history" approach to relate the problems, regrets and hopes of dirt farmers, itinerant Negro field workers, mill hands, widows on relief, mechanics, truck drivers, and other workers. Many of these life histories were incorporated into These Are Our Lives, an FWP book published in 1939, largely through the efforts of Couch.⁴⁴ These were examples of proposals that resulted in instructions to the state directors to collect even more material about folklore and folkways in their states.

⁴⁴McKinzie, "Writers' on Relief," p. 154; Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 152; McKinzie, "Writers' on Relief," p. 155.

CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENT OF FOLKLORE BY FWP ADMINISTRATORS

How some FWP administrators perceived folklore and what it meant to them had a profound effect on both the type of folklore collected and the method of its collection. They had the final veto over what appeared in the state guides as well as other publications. The Washington staff came from various parts of the country and had different ethnic and educational backgrounds. As a group, they represented a wide range of philosophies and a variety of opinions on just what folklore should be. Regional and state directors also affected FWP folklore in their own states and sometimes in the national office.

John Alan Lomax served as director of folklore studies from June 25, 1936-October 3, 1937. At the same time he continued his journeys making recordings for the Archive of American Folksong in the Library of Congress. Although orthodox folklore scholars claimed that he was not academically qualified for the FWP job, his credentials were, nevertheless, quite impressive.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 704; Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 276.

Born in Meridian, Mississippi in 1867, John Lomax emigrated to Texas in a hickory split basket swung from a feed-box behind an oxwagon. He grew into manhood among singing cowboys on his parents' Texas cattle ranch.⁴⁶ Early in his life he began to write down the words, and later the music, of the songs they sang. As a child of nine he began his own "academy" in which his star pupil and beloved friend was an eighteen-year-old Negro.

When Lomax decided to attend Granbury College, he agreed to swap a wagonload of flour that he had produced himself for part of his room and board. He had to supplement this, however, by selling his pony, Selim, at an East Dallas horse lot. After a year at Granbury, he began to teach in public schools and colleges. But despite summer courses at colleges in New York State, he claimed, "I felt desperately aware of my lack of any substantial education" and he determined to attend the University of Texas at Austin.⁴⁷ While there, he said, "I grubbed doggedly at the roots of three languages the same way I had grubbed

⁴⁶ Federal Writers' Project, American Stuff, p. 296.

⁴⁷ John A. Lomax, Adventures of a Ballad Hunter (New York: MacMillan Co., 1947), p. 27.

at the pecan stumps in the Bosque County river bottom."⁴⁸

Professors who saw Lomax's early collection of cowboy songs called his samples of frontier literature "tawdry," "cheap," and "unworthy,"⁴⁹ It wasn't until he arrived at Harvard on a scholarship that the songs he collected met with any approval. When he proposed using them as a topic for his master's thesis, Professors Barrett Wendall and G. L. Kittredge approved and encouraged him to collect more cowboy ballads. While at Harvard, Lomax mailed letters to the editors of a thousand newspapers in the West asking people to send him native ballads and songs from their region. As a result, letters poured into his Cambridge address and still trickled in twenty years later.

Upon obtaining a master's degree from Harvard, Lomax returned to Texas A & M, where he resumed teaching. While there, he received three successive Sheldon Fellowships which he used for vacation travel in ballad hunting. Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads was the result of those efforts. Many songs that are still well known

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 32.

today--"Good-bye Old Paint," "Silver Jack," and "Git Along Little Dogies"--were first published in that book. The book also contains a ballad called "Hell in Texas," which a Texas newspaper claims was written by General Sherman. The words echo Sherman's legendary statement that if he owned both Texas and Hell, he would rent out Texas and live in Hell. The book was the first collection of native American folksongs ever printed with music.

In 1917 a local political explosion on the University of Texas campus and a clash with "Pa" Ferguson catapulted Lomax into a short career in investment banking. His paycheck was as large as that of the Governor of Texas, but Lomax disliked the job intensely. After two years and the impeachment of Governor Ferguson, Lomax returned to Texas as Secretary of the University of Texas Ex-Students Association. In 1925 he returned to banking as a representative of Republic Bank of Dallas. He was there when the stock market crashed.

Lomax was "worth less than nothing" when, in the late spring of 1932, he signed a contract with Macmillan Publisher to collect what became American Ballads and Folk Songs, a collection of Negro folksongs of the South.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Lomax, Adventures of a Ballad Hunter, p. 106.

After Lomax, with the help of his son, completed the book, he received a grant of three thousand dollars from the Carnegie Corporation to continue collecting folk music. He discovered "Stewball" and "John Henry" among the South's convict gang laborers and published Negro Songs as Sung by Lead Belly.

Lomax was the Honorary Curator and Consultant in American Folk Song in the Music Division of the Library of Congress when Dr. Luther Evans asked him, on behalf of Henry Alsberg, to evaluate the folklore material collected by the FWP and make suggestions for expanding it. Lomax, almost seventy years old at the time, agreed, provided he be allowed time and opportunity in his journeyings to continue making records for the Archive of American Folk Songs. Alsberg chose Lomax because he had spent most of his life pioneering techniques of collecting and interpreting folk music and folklore. Lomax's many speeches at universities and colleges had helped to make folklore a respectable discipline in America.⁵¹ Although he only

⁵¹Except where noted, the above biographical material about John A. Lomax is from his autobiography, *ibid*, *passim*.

stayed with the FWP a few months, Lomax convinced Alsberg of the value of a professional folklorist.⁵²

While he was folklore editor, Lomax, as well as Botkin, emphasized the Slave Narrative Collection, a record of anecdotes, reminiscences, folk tales and life histories of former slaves. He introduced a method of obtaining the narratives through planned questions and tape-recorded interviews. Lomax's ideas were particularly helpful in writing the guides' folklore essays, and his manual of instructions for collecting primary sources proved useful to Botkin, who took over the folklore section in 1938.⁵³

While Lomax was director, he was responsible for amassing a great deal of Negro lore and ex-slave interviews. The project also recorded a large number of folksongs.⁵⁴ It has been said that Lomax emphasized the South because of his interest in it and neglected the North.⁵⁵ In an interview with Kathleen McKinzie, Sterling Brown said that he suspected that Lomax's enthusiasm for former slaves did not extend to working with Negroes as equals on the FWP.

⁵²McKinzie, Writers on Relief, p. 149.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 49, 152; Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 148.

⁵⁴Benjamin A. Botkin, "WPA and Folklore Research: 'Bread and Song,'" Southern Folklore Quarterly 3 (March 1939): 13.

⁵⁵McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts., p. 707.

Privately, Brown considered Lomax an "unreconstructed Texan." There was no outward animosity, and the friction disappeared with the appointment of Botkin as folklore director.⁵⁶

The American Folklore Society, however, was skeptical of FWP efforts in folklore, and, according to Alsberg, antagonistic toward John A. Lomax because the project had been enjoying more newspaper publicity than had the society. The Society's members considered Lomax unqualified because he lacked proper academic credentials, a doctorate, perhaps, and they claimed that only a scientifically trained folklorist could collect "dependable folklore." Lomax's rebuttal was, "Presumably the collector must go out among the people dressed in cap and gown."⁵⁷ Lomax claimed that it was in an effort to gain the society's support that Alsberg replaced him with Benjamin Botkin, whose credentials were of a more academic nature.⁵⁸

⁵⁶McKinzie, "Writers on Relief," p. 152.

⁵⁷McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 717.

⁵⁸John A. Lomax, review of A Treasury of American Folklore in Saturday Review of Literature, July 1, 1944, p. 19, n. 40, cited by McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 717.

Lomax continued to collect folksongs for the Music Division of the Library of Congress.

Benjamin Botkin, who was folklore consultant from May 2, 1928-July 31, 1938 and folklore editor from August 1, 1938-August 31, 1939, was born of Lithuanian immigrant parents in Boston, where he also grew up. He studied literature at Harvard and Columbia, and in 1931 he earned a Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Nebraska. He taught English at the University of Oklahoma and was on leave studying on a fellowship when Alsberg asked him to join the FWP. Botkin already had a national reputation when he joined the Project. From 1929-1932 he had edited four volumes of a regional miscellany entitled Folk Say - a term he invented.⁵⁹

Like Alsberg, Botkin saw that the United States was composed of many cultures and rich with the life and fantasy of its ethnic minorities.⁶⁰ The new folklore director believed that people should view folklore material "dynamically as part of the process of cultural conflict,

⁵⁹ Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, pp. 269-270; McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 704.

⁶⁰ Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 270.

change, and adaptation."⁶¹ He wanted to explore the rough texture of life in the United States and collect what he called "living lore."⁶²

As folklore editor, Botkin emphasized the use of oral sources and studies in urban and industrial areas.⁶³ He, like other advocates of literary realism, wanted to move "the streets, the stockyards, and the hiring halls into literature." To him the life-history narratives were "the stuff of literature."⁶⁴ At the same time, however, he said, "We are not neglecting the lore of the more strictly rural folk, past and present. . . ."⁶⁵ Under Botkin project members gathered proverbs, songs, stories, street cries and games from many diverse ethnic groups and occupations.⁶⁶

When the various divisions of "Federal One" joined together to form the Joint Committee on Folk Arts of the

⁶¹Ann Banks, First-Person America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), p. xv.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 709.

⁶⁴Banks, First-Person America, p. xix.

⁶⁵Botkin, "WPA and Folklore Research," p. 10.

⁶⁶Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 272.

WPA, Botkin became its president. The group was organized to coordinate, utilize, and distribute all folklore materials collected by WPA agencies. Botkin was responsible for a series of recording expeditions involving close associations between all of the government art projects.

First John Lomax and then Benjamin Botkin broke down the barriers of academic formalism by stressing the contemporary aspects of American folklore. Before the Writers' Project, American scholars dealt with folklore as a part of the remote past; however, Lomax's and Botkin's and Couch's development of the life-history format helped make folklore a study of the present.⁶⁷ Botkin revised the questions issued earlier by Lomax to remove traces of bias and make them more workable.⁶⁸

Until Benjamin Botkin took charge of the folklore section in 1938, the snobbery of orthodox scholars had jeopardized the program. Through his public relations efforts, however, the Southeastern Folklore Society and the Folklore Council of the University of South Carolina both endorsed the FWP. Furthermore, the American Folklore

⁶⁷

Ibid., pp. 276, 269.

⁶⁸

Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 144.

Society reversed its former position that only a scientifically trained folklorist could collect dependable folklore and expressed its willingness to cooperate in the activities of the Joint Committee. Ironically seven years later, when Ben Botkin was president of the same society, he stated that many of the most vital items in his book, Treasury of American Folklore, came from the collections made by the FWP.⁶⁹ Since most FWP workers who collected folklore were not scientifically trained folklorists, this statement was the exact opposite of the society's former view.

When Congress disbanded the national office of the FWP in 1939, Benjamin Botkin became chief editor of the Library of Congress Writers' Unit. For two years it was his job to sift through thousands of folklore and ex-slave manuscripts gathered by Project members from throughout the nation. Struck with the potency of the material, he edited a series of folklore anthologies. One of these, A Treasury of American Folklore, combines Project-gathered material with material from other sources. Another, Lay My Burden Down, consists of ex-slave narratives. Although the FWP was now dead, these anthologies made the public

⁶⁹Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, p. 276; McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, pp. 718, 717.

aware that the federal agency had faithfully recorded a significant facet of the American story for posterity.⁷⁰ Botkin called the Projects' findings "the nearest thing we have to a national folklore."⁷¹

From the beginning of the program for the employment of writers, Henry Alsberg realized that unless the FWP produced books depicting the peoples of America to supplement the guides, there would be a gap in the national portrait. By 1938 the Project had produced a number of ethnic studies in the Northern States, such as The Italians in New York. Alsberg, however, was dissatisfied with them because writers had used mostly secondary materials, and the publications were not up to the literary standards of the guides. Therefore in April, 1938, he appointed Morton W. Royse as consultant on labor and social groups in order to improve the content and quality of future ethnic studies.⁷²

The new national consultant for social and ethnic studies came to the Project well recommended for the job.

⁷⁰Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, pp. 275, 274, 265.

⁷¹Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 154.

⁷²Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, p. 277;
McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 724.

An official at his previous place of employment, a workers' education training center in Puerto Rico, described him as "a man with a definite and well-defined social philosophy and unlimited courage and energy." The official added that the only criticism of him was that he was "somewhat outspoken."⁷³ Royse had earned two doctoral degrees from Columbia, one in law, the other in philosophy. His dissertation, "Aerial Bombardment," had become a textbook for students of military affairs, and a Princeton University professor described Royse's dissertation on European minority groups as the most authoritative treatment of the subject ever written by an American.⁷⁴

Royse threw himself into his new job with enthusiasm. He traveled throughout the country establishing new projects and trying to get FWP workers looking "at the world around them and writing in a natural way."⁷⁵ Everywhere he went, he speedily made friends or enemies. Royse proposed an ethnic study called "Composite America" which would reconstruct the building of the nation from colonial

⁷³Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 278.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 282.

days to the present. How the influx of people from all ends of the earth had achieved a social and cultural unity in the U.S. would be the crux of the story.⁷⁶ The director planned to substitute the "social-ethnic" for the "racial" approach and wrote, "We discarded the old patronizing attitude toward the immigrant--that of judging a group by the number of doctors, lawyers and business men it had produced."⁷⁷ They assumed that every individual contributed, whether he slung a pen or a pick axe.

McDonald states in the Federal Relief Administration and the Arts that social-ethnic studies fell into three classifications (1) intensive studies of single groups (nationalities or occupations); (2) cross-sectional studies of whole communities; and (3) extensive studies of larger areas (regions). In theory, the Social-Ethnic Studies Unit dealt with the life and customs of a group of people as a whole, while the Folklore Unit focused on the body of lore in relation to the people's lives. In practice the distinction was frequently blurred because

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 279, 278.

⁷⁷Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 151.

both units stressed the collection of first-person narratives, and both used the same pool of FWP workers.⁷⁸

Like Botkin, who joined the Project a month later, Royse felt that the Project's lack of trained experts could be an asset rather than a liability, and the data Project workers turned up might be more interesting and revealing than the dry analyses and statistics of conventional scholars.⁷⁹ Both folklore and the social-ethnic studies dealt with closely related subject matter that led to cooperation and correlation between the two fields.⁸⁰

Together, Botkin and Royse helped to change the prevalent view of American society as a "melting pot." The two men saw the nation not as an alloy but as a mosaic, as a democratic, pluralistic community composed of many disparate elements. They thought that the Writers' Project could present that vision by assembling ethnically and occupationally diverse life histories. The two men planned for each individual story to retain its integrity

⁷⁸Banks, First-Person America, p. xv.

⁷⁹Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 278.

⁸⁰McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 724.

yet join with the others to form a cohesive picture of the United States.⁸¹

The social-ethnic program was an integral part of the portrait of America, but it fell short for a number of reasons. For one thing, the programs required so much field supervision that Royse spent most of his time traveling; as a result, material accumulated faster than it could be edited and organized. Too, Royse was more gifted in collecting and supervising than in editing and writing.⁸² Moreover, numerous ethnic studies had been initiated before his arrival, and Royse launched even more. Too, in the South, Royse's efforts met with the open resistance of W. T. Couch, who regarded the social-ethnic program as an infringement on his own life-history project.⁸³ Another problem was that the social-ethnic studies played a minor role compared to the guides.⁸⁴ Finally, when it was obvious the Project was ending, the new national director, John Dimmock Newsom, was intent on completing the

⁸¹Banks, First-Person America, p. xv.

⁸²McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 725.

⁸³Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, pp. 283, 27.

⁸⁴Mangione, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 726.

guidebook series and had little interest in long-range studies on how America lives.⁸⁵

Although Royse influenced the work of FWP, virtually none of the studies that he initiated reached fruition. The only published Project book in which he could claim some participation was The Albanian Struggle in the Old World and the New, a product of his friend and admirer, Frank Manuel, regional director of New England. The book received favorable reviews, and critics regretted that Congress had curtailed such a useful activity as the FWP.⁸⁶

Sterling A. Brown was another major figure in FWP folklore studies. Public opinion and a sincere wish to give the Negro representation in the guides and in the writing of them prompted Alsberg to appoint him national editor of Negro affairs in the spring of 1936. An English professor and poet at Howard University, 35-year-old Brown was well qualified for the job. He had taught at Virginia Seminary, Fisk University, and Lincoln University in Missouri.⁸⁷ Critics had praised his book of poetry,

⁸⁵Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 285.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 282, 284.

⁸⁷McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, pp. 728-729.

Southern Road, and he was preparing to publish The Negro in American Fiction and Negro Poetry and Drama, two books that would later establish him as an authority on Negro literature.⁸⁸ He personally knew many Negro writers and had great understanding of and insight into Negro culture.

As a national editor he edited the guide essays and planned and directed special national and local books on the Negro in cooperation with the folklore and social-ethnic studies.⁸⁹ Brown had a congenial disposition and could work well with members of his own race as well as others. He traveled to a number of states to establish black study programs and to help resolve personnel problems involving Negroes. He often persuaded state directors to employ Negroes, and he once helped with a dispute in Oklahoma when white project workers refused to share a water fountain with their black colleagues.⁹⁰ Unofficially he served as counselor to many Negro writers on the FWP.⁹¹

Brown viewed his appointment as proof of "a serious effort to give qualified Negro writers and Negro subject

⁸⁸Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 258.

⁸⁹McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 730.

⁹⁰Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 258.

⁹¹McKinzie, Writers' on Relief, p. 138.

matter fair treatment in the FWP."⁹² With the support of his superiors, mainly Alsberg, Brown personally had a profound effect in promoting the fair treatment of Negroes in the guides.⁹³ Although it took him and his staff almost a year to make their editorial weight felt in the field offices, eventually they managed to persuade many state editors to include Negro materials in the guidebooks or to correct material that had been distorted.⁹⁴

Sometimes, however, the Negro affairs editor could only go on record as having objected to copy in its pre-final state.⁹⁵ This situation occurred when the Mississippi state project group overrode Washington's corrections by submitting the entire draft for the Mississippi guide in a rush and then including some objectionable references in the final edition. Brown had been able to delete one biased sentence, "The passing of public hanging was, in the eyes of the Negro, a sad mistake,"⁹⁶ However, meaningless generalities and a tone of amused condescension

⁹²Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 140.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, p. 259.

⁹⁵Pankower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 145.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 142.

remained in the Mississippi guide. Yet, even with its inadequacies, the American Guide series represented the first objective description of the Negro's participation in American life.⁹⁷

William T. Couch was another influential person in the FWP. During the first two years of the FWP, all guide copy passed through the national office where editors not only proofread everything, but often rewrote doubtful or objectionable passages.⁹⁸ This technical burden, the immense amount of work involved in it, and the probable end of the FWP in the near future caused Alsberg to appoint regional directors. He hoped that shifting some of the editorial responsibilities onto them would help clear the logjam of paper work in Washington and accelerate the completion of the state guides.⁹⁹

One regional director who had a profound effect on folklore was W. T. Couch, who directed Region V, an area consisting of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky,

⁹⁷ Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 259.

⁹⁸ Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, pp. 44-45.

⁹⁹ McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 677.

North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.¹⁰⁰ Formerly associate director of the North Carolina unit, Couch had managed the University of North Carolina Press for over ten years. Under his direction the Press had become one of the outstanding university presses in the country. He was also editor of Culture in the South, a pioneer effort in that area of study.¹⁰¹

In an interview, Couch claimed that he had developed the life-history approach while he was associate director of the North Carolina unit. He resisted the introduction of social-ethnic studies in the South because he felt they were inappropriate where immigrants had been thoroughly assimilated. More interested in the lives of Southern workers, Couch developed the life-history technique by borrowing from Plutarch's Lives, the contemporary studies of sociologist John Dollard; Erskine Caldwell's documentary book, You Have Seen Their Faces; and his own concerns about the different levels of life in the South.¹⁰²

His technique consisted of interviewing people from various occupations and social levels and writing the story

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 678.

¹⁰¹Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 45.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 152.

of their lives as they themselves told it. The technique began in the North Carolina project and gradually spread to other states in Regions V and VI. Couch believed that the life histories were an alternative to portraying Southern culture through novels, and he used them to emphasize the humanity and universality of people, to show the hardships endured during the Depression, and to underscore the diversity and richness of American life.¹⁰³

There was a certain amount of administrative friction between Botkin and Couch. When the national folklore editor requested contributions of folklore material for the planned book, American Folk Stuff, Couch wrote that he had other plans for the material from his region.¹⁰⁴ Botkin worried about the effect of too many "brutally frank" stories on his young, unmarried typists, and appeared uninterested in Couch's life histories. Couch, however, was totally committed to transforming the life histories into a documentary narrative for immediate publication.¹⁰⁵ He was responsible for the publication

¹⁰³McKinzie, Writers on Relief, p. 154; McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 678.

¹⁰⁴McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 679.

¹⁰⁵Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 152.

in 1939 of These Are Our Lives, a collection of these life histories, by the University of North Carolina Press.

As director of the university press, Couch was able to use his prestige as well as the press facilities to force the FWP to give credit to those who collected the stories.¹⁰⁶ When the national office would no longer permit the inclusion of the names of the editorial staff in FWP publications, Couch had other ideas. He held up publication until federal approval was granted. He claimed, "They sat on their permission, and I sat on the book."¹⁰⁷ A telegraph finally arrived and the presses rolled. As a result, credit was given to the FWP writers of God Bless the Devil and to the collectors of These Are Our Lives. Giving credit to the authors, a practice not normally followed in other FWP publications, helped folklore workers feel their work had significance.¹⁰⁸ Both as North Carolina's associate director and FWP regional director, W. T. Couch influenced Project publications.

One of Henry Alsberg's responsibilities as national director was to appoint state directors, with the approval

¹⁰⁶ McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 679.

¹⁰⁷ Penkower, The Federal Writer's Project, p. 223.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 223-224.

of the state WPA administrators. Subsequently, the director of a state writers' unit had two chief duties. He supervised the day-to-day operation of the state project office and directed the production of the state guidebook. These responsibilities were demanding ones. Between the passage of Federal appropriation bills, FWP finances were often subject to internal political winds. Therefore, in order to juggle funds, the state director needed to be both a businessman and a diplomat. He had to mesh funds from different sources, interpret WPA forms, and protect his project from petty jealousies and intrigues within the WPA. He selected workers to fill the relief positions in the Project offices and had to reduce his staff when Congress reduced FWP funds.¹⁰⁹

Lyle Saxon became one of the FWP's outstanding state directors. He received an appointment as state director in October 1935, and became one of the four state directors who retained his job from the beginning of the project to the end. He was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on September 4, 1891, where he grew up attending public schools. His grandfather, Michael Chambers, owned a bookstore in the city where Saxon, who loved books, spent

¹⁰⁹McKinzie, Writers on Relief, p. 35, 37.

much of his time. Perhaps Saxon acquired his interest in writing from his mother, society editor for the Baton Rouge State Times. In 1912 he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge and then taught school in Florida for a year. After deciding that he would rather write than teach, he spent ten years writing for newspapers throughout the country. During this time one of the newspapers he wrote for was the Times-Picayune of New Orleans, where he was reporter, special feature editor, and Sunday editor.¹¹⁰

Saxon then decided to devote his time to creative writing. Although he maintained residencies in New York and New Orleans, he wrote most of his short stories and novels in a cabin on the Melrose Plantation in Melrose, Louisiana. His "Cane River" won the O. Henry Memorial Prize for 1926, and several of his short stories were translated into German. Saxon's most notable works were Father Mississippi (1928), Old Louisiana (1929), Fabulous New Orleans (1928), and Children of Strangers (1937). These authoritative and lively books earned Lyle Saxon the title of "Mr. Louisiana" and the "Dean of New Orleans Writers."

¹¹⁰Ronnie Wayne Clayton, "A History of the Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana" (Ph.D. dissertation, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1974), pp. 36-37; Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 92.

WPA administrators agreed that he was the person best qualified to be FWP director of his state.¹¹¹

In addition to Saxon's personal qualifications as an editor and writer, other factors contributed to his success as state director. One reason for the high quality of the Louisiana Project was that Saxon personally interviewed most of his original staff. Since he was mainly a writer and editor, perhaps his success also lay in the fact that he had the good sense to appoint Edward Dreyer as assistant director. Dreyer capably handled administrative details in the state office.¹¹²

Since production of state guides was the primary objective of the FWP, Saxon set up State Operating Projects in each of the state's eight congressional districts to gather information for the guide. The New Orleans office soon took over the work of nearby Gretna, but other offices remained either until they completed their assignments or disbanded as a result of quota reductions. Saxon also organized the State Coordinating Project in New Orleans

¹¹¹Clayton, "The Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana," pp. 36-37; Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 40.

¹¹²Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 40; Clayton, "The Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana," pp. 35-36, 59.

to edit all work done by the state writers and administer the state writers' project.¹¹³

Lyle Saxon wrote only about the golden era of the South, where "darkies" were "happy" and cherished only affection for their masters. This enabled him to ignore the problems of the current depression around him. Yet, his personal attitude toward blacks enabled him to become a pioneer of his times. In the name of "folklore" and "history", he was responsible for beginning early investigations of the Negro facet of the Southern world that the guides were supposed to portray.

A romanticist in his understanding and description of his state's history, Saxon steered the project's topics to pre-twentieth century Louisiana. He sought to describe the state as he imagined it used to be, rather than the way it was. In a way, he played a hoax on the readers-- they were asked to tour a past that no longer existed, or perhaps never did exist except in the imagination of himself and other novelists. This romanticism enabled Saxon to avoid the political controversies that plagued other state directors, but it also resulted in a form of censorship.

¹¹³Clayton, "The Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana," p. 49.

He effectively precluded consideration of his own time.¹¹⁴

Saxon tried to present a balanced view of slavery in the Writers' Project with three major publications: the New Orleans City Guide, Louisiana: A Guide to the State, and Gumbo Ya-Ya, but he did so unconvincingly. In the utopia of which Saxon wrote, he gave no consideration to the slaves' opinion of the era, although they were as much a part of it as the white "old Southerners." Slavery, particularly in the Louisiana folklore book, was portrayed in an idealized manner, with emphasis on the lasting bonds of love and friendship between master and slave.

On the other hand, however, Saxon resented the racial views of the South that separated blacks and whites. Often, he would invite blacks to his St. Charles Hotel room for drinks. Once, he insisted that a black friend leave with him by the front door instead of the servants' entrance that his friend usually used. A tense situation arose, and Saxon's party feared for the safety of both. Saxon, regaining his composure, placed his arm around his black friend and feigned inebriation. This calmed the other hotel patrons who had previously seen Saxon in the same condition after a

¹¹⁴Ibid., pp. xiv, 333.

night on the town. Saxon and his black friends shared and laughed about this and other incidents.¹¹⁵

Saxon was responsible for setting up an all-Negro project at Dillard University which worked on ex-slave narratives and the history of the Negro in New Orleans and Louisiana. The project promised to produce a picture that would be totally different from anything previously done by the FWP, or anywhere else. When the FWP ended, Saxon made arrangements to leave the manuscript and other FWP materials at Dillard, a private institution, for completion.¹¹⁶ A storm supposedly damaged all of the papers in 1939, and librarians destroyed them. The persons at Dillard responsible for their deposition refuse to discuss what happened to the papers.¹¹⁷

In February, 1939, Saxon became Director of Region IV to help alleviate the load of editorial work in Washington. In this capacity he edited the materials from

¹¹⁵Clayton, "The Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana," pp. 329-330.

¹¹⁶Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 143; Clayton, "The Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana," pp. 305-308.

¹¹⁷Clayton interview with Geraldine Amos, January 29, 1974, n. 40, cited by Clayton, "A History of the Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana," p. 308.

Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma before they were sent to Washington. After the FWP ended, Saxon went to work in the central office in Washington as national consultant for the WPA. He presided over the Project's funeral arrangements, doing his best to dispel the gloom of the other six members who remained, and spent his last six months as a FWP employee writing final reports on the WPA projects.¹¹⁸

During his remaining years Saxon did all he could to assist young writers. Unemployed, ill, and facing death, Saxon tried to leave a legacy of future writers to continue what he had begun. Robert Tallant, one of his greatest disciples, wrote in his introduction to Saxon's Fabulous New Orleans: "Never rich, he gave away nearly everything he earned throughout his life. No one knows how many young writers he helped--with advice, with encouragement, with money" Friends claimed he created people.¹¹⁹ When he died a reporter wrote, "The heart of New Orleans stopped beating last night."¹²⁰

¹¹⁸Clayton, "The Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana," pp. 40, 224; Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 237; Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 368.

¹¹⁹Lyle Saxon, Fabulous New Orleans (New Orleans: R. L. Crager, 1950), p. xiv.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. xv.

Administrators were important to the development of folklore in the FWP. They established Project programs and policies, composed questions for interviewers, created a broader concept of the meaning of folklore, and assured a fairer treatment of the Negro in most FWP publications. They also edited all material to be included in FWP publications. However, while administrators may have decided what was to be done, Project workers did the actual research, interviewing, and writing.

CHAPTER III

COLLECTING FOLKLORE

FWP writers came from many different backgrounds and had varying amounts of writing experience. During its existence the FWP employed an average of 4,500-5,200 writers, researchers, clerical personnel, and administrators. Yet most of the people who held these jobs were not "writers." A 1938 survey claims that the FWP employed 29 recognized writers, 97 former editors, 238 new writers who had sold to newspapers, and 161 "writers with promise." In fact, a poll in Texas indicated that only 7 of the state's 104 workers could produce final copy.¹²¹ The rest of the 4,500 national employees had one skill in common-- they had found a job when jobs were scarce.

The small number of writers was due to the conditions surrounding the employment situation and the regulations and functions of the FWP. Harry Hopkins, WPA Director, claimed that the primary function of the FWP was to provide jobs for the unemployed, and whatever else it accomplished would be considered "gravy." In the beginning

¹²¹Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, pp. 62, 73, 222.

the Project hired only people classified as "writers" from the relief rolls, but soon that term was expanded to include former teachers, librarians, college students, and other persons of enough intelligence to gather information.¹²² Administrators sent each state a quota of relief workers to be hired based on the number of "writers" on relief in the state.

Metropolitan areas and heavily populated states usually had many workers eligible for the Project, but rural states, particularly the South, often had few qualified writers, and Southern states often accepted clerical workers in lieu of scarce professional talent. A twenty-five percent exemption rule passed in 1935, however, allowed a state to hire twenty-five percent of its workers from those not certified for relief.¹²³ This ruling accounted for many of the actual writers employed. Subsequently, as a result of government regulations and the employment situation of the times, the FWP employed people of many different backgrounds with a wide range of writing skills.

¹²²Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 48; McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 736.

¹²³McKinzie, Writers on Relief, p. 38.

The FWP workers' wages varied according to living costs in their area. Professional workers in New York received the highest wages, \$93.50-103.00. Their counterparts in Georgia and Mississippi received only \$39.00. Louisiana employees, and most others, normally worked six hours a day, five days a week. The coordinating staff, however, worked four hours on Saturday.¹²⁴ The hours were not long, the pay was relatively good, and the work not too demanding. The worst problem, however, was the stigma attached to the fact that most FWP workers had to qualify for relief, or the dole. This meant that a worker's local relief board had certified him as qualifying for relief because his financial status was low enough for him to receive government assistance. Many people submitted to this classification because it was the only way they could get a FWP job.¹²⁵

The many people who worked for the FWP had various feelings about their employment. The younger, less experienced employees often saw their work for the FWP as an

¹²⁴Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 62; Clayton, The Dream and The Deal, p. 53.

¹²⁵Grace Adams, Workers on Relief (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), p. 34.

opportunity to become writers and adjusted to the stylistic requirements set in Washington.¹²⁶ Others called their jobs "hack work" and used the money they earned to pay bills while they worked on their own projects.¹²⁷ Often faced with incompetent superiors, whose names appeared on the title pages of FWP publications, many writers did not take pride in their work because those who wrote for the guides did not receive credit for it. Furthermore, workers felt that the guides did not allow for creative writing. Even when the FWP asked for original compositions, as in the publication of American Stuff, few writers responded.¹²⁸ After all, all manuscripts produced on Project time became government property. Few writers cared to risk a best-seller as a contribution to the U.S. Treasury.¹²⁹ Workers frequently left the Project and took other work if they could.

On the other hand, the people who specifically gathered folklore as opposed to those who did research about places or history seemed to feel a special sense of purpose.

¹²⁶Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 138.

¹²⁷Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 56.

¹²⁸Collection of Project members creative writing.

¹²⁹American Stuff, p. vi.

Mangione, former FWP member and author of The Dream and The Deal, claims that "more than any other Project undertaking, the search for lore gave writers engaged in it a sense of literary creativity and the satisfaction of being directly involved with the current scene."¹³⁰ In the case of the slave narratives, workers felt a sense of urgency to collect stories from a generation of former slaves that would soon be gone. And the newly poor from middleclass backgrounds found collecting life histories an exhilarating experience-- a chance to "tell the stories of real people."¹³¹ Botkin expressed many scholars' sentiments in the Southern Quarterly when he wrote of the appeal of folklore:

Fortunately people are never too busy to make and swap and gather folk songs and tales. In the depths of the depression the WPA is not too busy building roads and bridges to collect and study American folklore. And those of us who have come from the academic grove feel that we are participating in the greatest educational as well as social experiment of our time.¹³²

Participants in the folklore division felt that they had a personal part in the Project's nationwide search for folk-

¹³⁰ Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 273.

¹³¹ Quote from poet Muriel Rukeyser; Penkower interview with Muriel Rukeyser, March 12, 1968, n. 12, cited by Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 243.

¹³² Benjamin A. Botkin, "WPA and Folklore Research," p. 10.

lore that would unearth, just in time, a vast amount of almost forgotten materials.¹³³

The fact that workers in the folklore division hoped to receive credit for their work appearing in separate folklore publications also contributed to their sense of accomplishment. Folklore workers used an interview technique to gather material. They traveled about the countryside asking people questions that led them to talk about folklore-related topics. Interviewers then submitted the material to their Project office. Interview material was signed by the worker who did the interviewing, and usually also included the informant's name. Sometimes a portion of the material would appear anonymously in the state guide. But FWP plans called for most of the narratives to appear individually in separate publications. Furthermore, William T. Couch, who was FWP regional director as well as director of the University of North Carolina Press, made a point of including the interviewers' names in the FWP folklore books which the press printed. The method of collecting the material, its planned format of presentation, and the results of Couch's influence led individuals who collected FWP folklore to believe they would receive credit for their work.

¹³³Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 273.

Personal information about Project members who gathered folklore material in the Southern coastal states reveals a diversity of backgrounds. They had many different former occupations, and their educational backgrounds ranged from limited formal education to law degrees. Some workers were inexperienced writers; others had published many books. For some, collecting folklore was a way of life. Others had to look in the dictionary for definitions of "folklore" and "folkways." Yet in spite of their diverse characteristics, as individual FWP workers they gathered information which later became books dealing with American folklore.

Harris Dickson, who collected folklore for the Mississippi Project, contributed the tale "Phrases of the People" for publication in the Project members' book of creative writing called American Stuff. Because of his contribution the following brief biography appears in "Notes on the Contributors":

Harris Dickson was born in Yazoo City, Mississippi, 1868; LL. B., Columbian (George Washington) University, 1894; has practiced law in Vicksburg since 1896; judge of municipal court; 1905-7 was correspondent in France for Collier's Weekly, 1917. Since 1899 has published some twenty books, the most recent of which is The Story of King Cotton, 1937; has contributed fiction and articles to leading magazines.¹³⁴

¹³⁴American Stuff, pp. 294-295.

Luther Clark, folklore collector of the Alabama Project, is also listed in American Stuff where his humorous piece, "Lookin' for Three Fools," appears:

Luther Clark, 27, born and brought up in Sumter County, Alabama, a section particularly rich in Negro lore. Very limited education. Has sold several pieces to the little magazines.¹³⁵

Genevieve Wilcox Chandler of the South Carolina Project contributed "A Gullah Story" to American Stuff. Many of the interviews she conducted appear in the South Carolina unit's folklore publication South Carolina Folk Tales. Her brief biography states:

Genevieve Willcox Chandler was born in Marion, South Carolina, attended Flora MacDonald College, Red Springs, N.C., and studied music and art in New York City and Liverpool, England. She was one of two young women from each state chosen by the General Federation of Women's Clubs to go abroad as entertainers for the Army of Occupation at the close of the World War. Her recent years have been spent largely among the Negroes of the South Carolina coast, about whom she writes.¹³⁶

Leonard Rapport, another folklore writer, whose interviews appear in Bundle of Troubles, First-Person America, and other Project folklore publications, described himself in an article for the Oral History Review, revealing a short auto-biographical sketch:

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 294.

¹³⁶Ibid.

I didn't grow up in tobacco but tobacco surrounded me. My childhood home in Durham was a hundred feet from a tobacco storage warehouse and two blocks from the Liggett and Meyers cigarette plant. My grade school looked out on the Bull Durham factory. Many of my schoolmates were children of the wage workers in the tobacco factories, who lived in the little houses between my home and the railroad tracks.

I didn't come to the common people or to the depression academically. After attending a junior college that cost \$100 a year and consisted of eighty-five students and seven rooms in the basement of a country high school, I roadshowed a moving picture through small towns and villages of depression America. The month FDR was first elected I saw what Pennsylvania mining towns were like when the mines closed down. I spent part of the week after FDR's inauguration idle in East Texas because the banks had closed and people could not afford the ten and twenty-five cents we charged children and adults. Later I worked a little while as a laborer on a dam and did some timber cruising.

In 1935, I graduated from the University of North Carolina. For the next four years I worked for that brilliant, bristly, controversial man, W. T. Couch, director of the University of North Carolina Press and the first and only director of the Southern Regional Writers' Project. In the last summer of 1938, Mr. Couch asked if I wanted to join him on the Writers' Project as one of a staff of four non-relief people. The job paid less than I was making and it had no future. Jerry Hirsch once asked why I took the job. I replied in four words, "I was a romantic."¹³⁷

. . . I never viewed either the writers' projects or the life stories with the seriousness that some others did. I didn't know any relief writer I considered a "writer." I didn't consider myself a "writer." But I had once collected \$40 for a story in the Virginia Quarterly Review, and \$25 for its reprint in Fiction Parade and Golden Book Magazine, and it had gotten a couple

¹³⁷ Leonard Rapport, "How Valid Are the Federal Writers' Project Stories: An Iconoclast Among the True Believers," Oral History Review, (1979): 9.

stars in Best Stories of 1937, and in the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed is king.¹³⁸

According to Rapport, W. T. Couch influenced him to work for the FWP. That "brilliant, controversial man" also influenced another writer, Bernice Kelly Harris, to collect interviews for the Project.¹³⁹

Born October 8, 1892, Bernice Kelly Harris earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Meredith College in 1913, and took special courses at the University of North Carolina. Harris had been a college English teacher and dramatics coach from 1917 to 1927, and published her first novel, Evidence, in 1931.¹⁴⁰

In the chapter "Distillation" of her book Southern Savory, she reminisces about working for the FWP:

Soon after my first novel was submitted, W. T. Couch, regional director of the Federal Writers' Project in addition to being director of the University Press, asked me to write for the Project. One of the objectives, in keeping with the spirit of the national administration, was to gather firsthand information about the underprivileged as well as about other groups in our society. Writers were paid a small salary to interview people in various social brackets. I had already been doing something like this for the little personal journal, "My Days." So I agreed to extend the experience and work for Mr. Couch.

¹³⁸Rapport, "How Valid Are the Federal Writers' Project Stories," p. 11.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁴⁰Contemporary Authors, 1969 ed., s.v. "Harris, Bernice Kelly."

My assignment was farm people and those whose work or profession was related to them. Firsthand information and opinion on the current farming situation were collected from an agriculture extension supervisor and from cotton ginners, from a judge of Recorder's Court, from ministers and school teachers, from landlords big and small, from the village insurance agent and the time merchant, from justices of the peace and even from the local undertaker. These, placed side-by-side with the stories of sharecroppers and other farm laborers, were often illuminating.¹⁴¹

In addition to her comments on interviewing people for the FWP, Harris also relates several Project interviews and explains how the people she talked to later became the basis for specific characters in her novels.¹⁴² She eventually authored a total of thirteen books plus a number of stories that have appeared in anthologies and magazines.¹⁴³

Zora Neale Hurston both edited Florida copy and collected folklore for the Florida Writers' Project. She was born on January 7, probably in 1901, in Eatonville, Florida, the first incorporated all-black town in America, and studied anthropology at Barnard College and Columbia University. Two weeks before she graduated from Barnard, in 1927, the Carter Woodson's Association for the Study of

¹⁴¹Bernice Kelly Harris, Southern Savory (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964) p. 181-182.

¹⁴²Harris, Southern Savory, pp. 181-205 passim.

¹⁴³Contemporary Authors, "Harris."

Negro Life and History awarded her a \$1400 fellowship to collect folklore in the South.¹⁴⁴ She said, "When I went about asking in carefully accented Barnardese, 'Pardon me, do you know any folktales or folk-songs?' the men and women who had whole treasures of material seeping through their pores looked at me and shook their heads."¹⁴⁵ She apparently changed her approach or her accent, for author Langston Hughes later said of her:

"She was full of sidesplitting anecdotes, humorous tales, and tragicomic stories, remembered out of her life in the South as a daughter of a traveling minister of God. She could make you laugh one minute and cry the next...."

"But Miss Hurston was clever, too--a student who didn't let college give her a broad 'a' and who had great scorn for all pretensions, academic or otherwise. That is why she was such a fine folklore collector, able to go among the people and never act as if she had been to school at all. Almost nobody else could stop the average Harlemiter on Lenox Avenue and measure his head with a strange-looking, anthropological device and not get bawled out for the attempt, except Zora, who used to stop anyone whose head looked interesting, and measure it."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴Robert E. Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography (Urbane: University of Illinois Press, 1977), pp. 13, 84.

¹⁴⁵Zora Neale Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1942) pp. 182-183.

¹⁴⁶Contemporary Authors, "Hurston, Zora Neale."

During the early months of 1935, Miss Hurston went with Alan Lomax, a young folklorist and son of John Alan Lomax, on a recording expedition for the Music Division of the Library of Congress. She was indispensable to the expedition, leading the collectors to backwoods communities to record songs and folklore with a recording machine. She even persuaded her co-workers periodically to wear black-face, not to fool black folks, who must have been amused by the strange sight, but to present a uniform color to white passersby at a time when the South was racially segregated by law. When a Florida sheriff arrested Lomax anyway, Hurston persuaded the officer to release him.¹⁴⁷ Lomax claimed, "She was almost entirely responsible for the success" of their first expedition.¹⁴⁸ She also worked for the Federal Theatre Project from fall, 1935, until she received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study Obeah (magic) practices in the West Indies.¹⁴⁹

When Hurston began working as an editor for the Florida unit of the FWP on April 25, 1938, she was already

¹⁴⁷Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston, p. 211.

¹⁴⁸Hemenway interview with Alan Lomax, New York City, May 1971, n. 27, cited by Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston, p. 211.

¹⁴⁹Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston, p. 277.

a folklorist and novelist of some stature who quite successfully combined folklore and fiction. She had published Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934), Mules and Men (1935), and Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937). Tell My Horse was in the process of being published when she joined the Project.¹⁵⁰ She wrote in the introduction to Mules and Men of her early work with the FWP:

I was glad when somebody told me, "You may go and collect Negro folk-lore."

In a way it would not be a new experience for me. When I pitched headforemost into the world I landed in the crib of negroism. From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that.¹⁵¹

Her biographer, Robert Hemenway, described her work with The Florida Project:

She stayed on the Florida project for almost a year and a half, with one brief hiatus, and she cut a memorable swath. Operating out of the main office in Jacksonville, she would frequently leave for a week or more at a time, telling no one where she was going. It was

¹⁵⁰ Contemporary Authors, "Hurstons"; Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston, p. 251.

¹⁵¹ Zora Neale Hurston, Mules and Men (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1935) p. 3.

assumed that she was collecting folklore for the Florida guide, but one was never sure. (It is clear now that she had also begun working hard on her next book, Moses, Man of the Mountain.) Admonished by the administrators for her truancy, she would reingratiate herself, pick up her weekly paycheck, and then sometimes disappear again. Her reputation on the project was that of an actress who loved to show off, a woman of remarkable talent and spirit, a loner, an unco-operative co-worker, an editor who hated to stay inside at her desk.

Zora became heavily involved in collecting and editing material for a project book to be entitled The Florida Negro. Sterling Brown, the writers' project national editor of Negro affairs, had outlined for the states an ambitious program to research the true history and present status of the black American experience. One of the most notable results of his stewardship was The Negro in Virginia, a comprehensive account of black Virginians past and present; the Florida book was patterned after this Virginia volume. By June of 1938 Zora was acting as supervisor of the Negro unit of the Florida Federal Writers' Project, traveling to Washington to charm Henry Alsberg, the FWP director, into supporting the effort. She wrangled a salary increase for the supervisor and more travel money for the folklore collecting, and by July she was visiting black communities in the Everglades with a recording machine liberated from Washington despite a mountain of red tape. For the rest of her employment on the project, Zora worked on this book, eventually overseeing the compilation of a two-hundred-page volume.

"The Florida Negro" has remained in manuscript, probably because it lacks a unifying structure. It contains many of the stories and songs Zora had collected before, as well as important slave narratives collected by the Florida FWP staff. The book was a composite effort of many editors, and Zora cannot be blamed for much of its sociological prose. The most interesting parts of the manuscript are clearly her work. She submitted a section on "Negro mythical places" such as "Diddy-Wah-Diddy"--where everything is in such a grand scale that "the dogs can stand flat-footed and lick crumbs off of heaven's tables--and she spiced up a rather drab narrative with folksongs:

Oh, Angeline, Oh, Angeline
 Oh, Angeline that great great gal of mine

You feel her legs, you feel her legs,
 You feel her legs and you want to feel her thighs

You feel her thighs, you feel her thighs
 You feel her thighs, then you fade away and die.

Less prurient but equally colorful were her tall tales about Florida weather: "They have strong winds on the West Coast too. One day the wind blowed so hard till it blowed a well up out of the ground. One day it blowed so hard till it blowed a crooked road straight. Another time it blowed and blowed and scattered the days of the week so bad till Sunday did not come till late Tuesday evening." Perhaps remembering Locke's attempt to affirm the spirituals as "classical" music by comparing them with Gregorian chants, she made sure that "The Florida Negro" included her notions on black music. In a section of the manuscript entitled "The Sanctified Church," Zora emphasized that the spirituals grew from a native black esthetic and could only be "twisted in concert... into Gregorian chants;" they were not "apocryphal appendages to Bach and Brahms."

In July of 1939, in a move long anticipated, federal sponsorship of the FWP was transferred to the states, and there was a large turnover in personnel. Zora had already begun to look for another job and had spent some time in Cincinnati doing a series of radio programs.¹⁵²

When speaking of her work, older black writers criticized the frequent crudeness and bawdiness of the tales she told while the younger generation claimed she should have been a better advocate for the injustices of her people. Judith Wilson, author in Current Biography, claims

¹⁵²Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston, pp. 252-253.

that "the bulk of her fiction is one of celebration of a black cultural heritage," and that, "Zora Neale Hurston had figured out something that no other black author of her time seems to have known or appreciated so well--that our homespun vernacular and street-corner cosmology is as valuable as the grammar and philosophy of white, Western culture."¹⁵³ She was one of the FWP writers who had a unique background and philosophy of folklore.

Stetson Kennedy, whose interviews appear in First-Person America, also collected folklore for the Florida Project. Born in Jacksonville, Florida, on October 5, 1916, he studied at the University of Florida and the New School for Social Research at the University of Paris. One of the writers who worked for the FWP early in his writing career, his experiences with the Project led him into activities that formed a basis for his later books.¹⁵⁴ The author of First-Person America, Ann Banks, described Kennedy's interview with Norberto Diaz:

Norberto Diaz, formerly a skilled cigar maker, was employed in the Key West Naval Station when he talked to Federal Writer Stetson Kennedy. His story about a Ku Klux Klan murder helped inspire Kennedy to

¹⁵³ Contemporary Authors, "Hurston."

¹⁵⁴ Contemporary Authors, "Kennedy, Stetson."

infiltrate the Klan as an undercover agent and gather evidence that sent a number of its members to jail. Kennedy has since published a number of books about race relations, including an account of his experiences, I Rode with the Ku Klux Klan, and an indictment of segregationist laws, Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A.¹⁵⁵

After his work for the FWP, his chief affiliations would be with labor, civil rights and peace groups as writer and spokesman, such as the CIO Political Action Committee and the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League. He would become a "sometime correspondent" for newspapers in New York, Baltimore, and Pittsburgh; a campaign speaker for the Progressive Party, 1948; an independent candidate for the U.S. Senate from Florida on the "Total Equality" platform, 1950; and press chairman of the U.S. delegation to the Congress of Peoples for Peace, Vienna, Austria, 1952. From 1952-1960, he would live and travel in Europe, Asia, and Africa, spending more than three years in Communist countries as a "non-party observer." Kennedy says he never intended to be a writer per se, but took up writing "as a tool to air human grievances."¹⁵⁶

Unfortunately, biographical information on people who collected folklore for the FWP is limited to those

¹⁵⁵Banks, First-Person America, p. 245.

¹⁵⁶Contemporary Authors, "Kennedy."

workers who were either well known when they joined the Project, or who later became prominent enough for their biographies to be printed. One already well-known writer of the 1930s might have worked for the Writers' Project but instead wrote for the WPA in another capacity. Eudora Welty, who earned her living during the Depression as a "Junior Publicity Agent" with the WPA, traveled throughout Mississippi taking photographs, interviewing people, and writing for newspapers. However, she did not work for the FWP.¹⁵⁷

Administrators assigned Project workers to collect folklore from a variety of sources and began to issue instructions that became more detailed as the Project became more firmly established. At first guidelines concerned only collecting material for the state guides. However, as Project administrators began to realize the wealth of folklore material that was available, they began to develop different ways to collect that information from various groups of people. In addition to the guides, administrators at all levels also planned future publications utilizing the material workers were collecting.

¹⁵⁷Susan Cahill, ed., Women and Fiction: Short Stories by and about Women (New York: New American Library, 1975), p. 96.

Work on the guides consisted of gathering the factual material, a task called fieldwork, editing the raw material, and writing the finished manuscript. In theory the writers with more competence and experience, with a "professional" rating, did the editing and writing while those who had a "skilled" rating did the fieldwork.¹⁵⁸ In reality the distinction was blurred. Soon after the Project's creation, workers were accumulating vast amounts of information for inclusion in the guides. Alsberg soon saw that Project members could gather folklore on a larger scale than ever before attempted in the U.S., and began instructing field offices in the art of reporting local customs and lore. On March 12, 1936, the national office issued its first formal instructions to workers collecting folklore for the state guides:

An introductory essay will cover the field as a whole. In states having large groups with different racial origins, it may be necessary to subdivide the introductory essay to cover the topic for each large group. The bulk of the material will be used in connection with the sectional descriptions or place descriptions.

¹⁵⁸ McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, p. 738.

For the purposes of the state guides, folk customs are more important than folklore because they can be tied to one place, one section, or one subject. . . .¹⁵⁹

At first folklore material was broken down into two divisions--folk customs and folk tales. Later a division for superstitions was added.¹⁶⁰

The national directors continued to issue further supplementary instructions. Guidelines emphasized that material should be collected from persons and not from books. Because definitions of folklore were so varied and Project workers submitted such a variety of material, directors also pointed out that popular poems, anecdotes of historical persons, and reminiscences of old people are not folklore unless they deal with supernatural forces, or are connected with present day customs. They also stated that biographies of celebrities are not folklore.¹⁶¹ These directions from the national office for collecting folklore included a questionnaire, originally sent out by the state director of Oregon, which John Lomax had revised and supplemented.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 705.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 707.

The questionnaire consisted of fourteen questions, plus five added by Lomax, designed to elicit information concerning folklore and folkways. The first four questions concern legends surrounding Indians, places, and animals. Other questions ask about local songs and ballads, religious and social customs, and special occasions such as holidays, marriages, and community gatherings. The addenda were mostly designed to uncover more oral literature such as graces, dance calls, rhymes, tall tales, jokes, and anecdotes. Questions about epitaphs and fortune-tellers were also included in the addenda.¹⁶² Information gathered using this questionnaire is extremely evident in the chapters on folklore and folkways in the guides for the Southern coastal states. Project workers were soon uncovering so much information that other administrators began making plans to utilize it.

While associate director of the North Carolina unit, William Couch was interested in finding out about the lives of Southern workers, he sent a woman to gather interviews, and then submitted to Washington an outline for an expanded study based on her notes. Alsberg did not encourage the

¹⁶²McDonald, pp. 707-708; A copy of the questions appears in appendix 1.

proposal, but Couch went ahead and asked neighboring Projects to send him similar copy. Within two weeks replies started coming in. Couch was totally committed to creating a documentary narrative for immediate publication, and the book These Are Our Lives resulted from his efforts.

Penkower, author of The Federal Writers' Project, states that the realism of the work "established a new form of historical research and, by so doing, the Project achieved a remarkable combination of literary worth and valuable social documentation."¹⁶³ FWP offices in other states soon began studies bearing a resemblance to Couch's work, using his guidelines.¹⁶⁴

Couch's "Instructions to Writers" appears in the final pages of These Are Our Lives. The instructions which Project workers used to collect Couch's "life histories" are quite extensive. They list ten points for the worker to observe when interviewing for the FWP. The first eight points concern the type of people to talk to, length of the life histories, point-of-view, kinds of stories, topics of discussion, and humor. The last two points are significant because Couch was adamant about giving credit of authorship

¹⁶³Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 153.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 152-153.

and forceful in carrying out his plans for the life histories. He requests that the material include the name of the writer, and the informant's name and address; and in the final point tells of the plans for the material collected. Following the ten points is a ten subject outline to guide interviewers in collecting information. It covers areas such as family, education, income, occupation, politics, and religion.¹⁶⁵

Another administrator who composed questions to use in interviewing people was Martin Royse, who was the national consultant for social and ethnic studies. Royse wanted to use a social-ethnic method of collecting folklore and folkways that would approach the subject in relation to immigrant groups, and apparently he sent his instructions to the Alabama staff. Couch, however, who was regional director over the area that included Alabama, claimed that Royse's approach was not suitable for use in the South where immigrants were scattered and more closely assimilated into the existing population. As regional director

¹⁶⁵Federal Writers' Project, These Are Our Lives (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939) pp. 417-421: A copy of the questions appears in appendix 2.

Couch was successful in keeping Royse's studies confined to the Northeast and Middle West.¹⁶⁶

Another approach to collecting folklore involved the slave narratives. In 1937 Lomax issued a set of instructions, including questions for the interviewer to ask an ex-slave in order to help him think and talk freely about slave days.¹⁶⁷ But the prejudice then so widely prevalent among many Southerners was a problem both in composing the questionnaire and in conducting the interviews, as it often influenced both the interviewer's questions and the material gathered. This problem is illustrated in the account of a Georgia worker interviewing the ex-slave Nancy Bouday:

Nancy's recollections of plantation days were colored to a somber hue by overwork, childbearing, poor food and long working hours.

"Master was a hard taskmaster," said Nancy. . . .

"I had to work hard, plow and go and split wood jus' like a man. Sometimes dey whup me. Dey whup me bad, pull de cloes off down to de wais'--my master did it, our folks didn' have overseer. . . ."

"Nancy, wasn't your mistress kind to you?"

"Mistis was sorta kin' to me, sometimes. But dey only give me meat and bread, didn' give me nothing good--I ain' gwine tell no story. . . ."

¹⁶⁶McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, pp. 726-727.

¹⁶⁷Benjamin A. Botkin, Lay My Burden Down (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), p. xi.

"But the children had a good time, didn't they? They played games?"

"Maybe dey did play ring games, I never had no time to see what games my chillun play, I work so hard."¹⁶⁸

Trying to remove traces of bias, Ben Botkin altered the questionnaire, but those interviewed still generally told white Project workers what they wanted to hear.¹⁶⁹ The questions issued by the national office are summarized in the introduction to the collection of slave narratives, Lay My Burden Down, published by Botkin:

In 1937 a set of simple and "homely" instructions and questions was issued with a view to getting the ex-slave to thinking and talking freely about the days of slavery. The questions covered the following subjects: Place and date of birth; parents' names and origin; brothers' and sisters' names; recollections or stories of grandparents; life in the quarters; kind of work; money earned, if any, and how, and what was purchased with it; food and cooking; clothing; owner and his family; the big house; overseer or driver and poor-white neighbors; size of plantation and number of slaves; daily schedule; punishments; slave sales and auctions; education; religion; runaway slaves; trouble between blacks and whites; patrollers; leisure-time activities; holidays, weddings, funerals, etc.; games, songs, stories, superstitions, etc.; health, medicine, and folk cures; the Civil War; the Yankees; the news of freedom; the first year of freedom; the Ku Klux and

¹⁶⁸ George P. Rawick, ed., The American Slave: A Composite Biography, 19 vols. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972), vol. 12: Georgia Narratives, pp. 113-114.

¹⁶⁹ Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 144.

night riders; marriage and children; opinions concerning Negro and white leaders; attitude toward slavery and the church. As the need of more information on life after freedom was felt, the following subjects were subsequently added: What the slaves expected of freedom and what they got; attitude toward Reconstruction; the influence of secret organizations; experience in voting and holding office; life since 1864; attitude toward the younger generation and the present; slave uprisings; stories of the Nat Turner Rebellion; songs of the period.¹⁷⁰

The representation of spoken dialect on paper was also a problem, and various instructions specified when and when not to use dialect spellings. Sterling A. Brown, editor of Negro affairs in the Washington office, issued a memorandum that emphasized that "truth to idiom be paramount and exact truth to pronunciation secondary."¹⁷¹

Numerous memoranda from state and national FWP editors suggested additional instructions on how to collect "folklore." Guidelines suggested that workers arrange life-history interviews through community or work-related organizations, but usually they interviewed chance contacts, friends, relatives, or acquaintances.

In the 1930s machinery for recording was cumbersome and expensive, and most interviews took place without use of recorders. Interviewers had to reconstruct the life-

¹⁷⁰ Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. xi: A copy of the questions appears in appendix 3.

¹⁷¹ Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 263.

histories from notes and memory. Their work included listening, writing notes, and remembering not only what was said but how the people said it.¹⁷²

Each life history became the record of a particular occasion when two people sat down to talk--one speaking, the other trying to capture the story.¹⁷³ Stetson Kennedy of the Florida Writers' Project said that he liked to establish a comfortable atmosphere for an interview. He favored techniques such as first establishing a good deal of rapport over a glass of beer. He also claimed, and most people agreed, "the more notes you took, the better they liked it."¹⁷⁴ And Leonard Rapport, a non-relief worker on the North Carolina Project, claimed that he wrote the narratives which he collected from people in the tobacco industry on the assumption that each person interviewed would someday read his own story and, in spite of the fictitious names, recognize himself.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷²Banks, First-Person America, pp. xvii, xx.

¹⁷³Ibid., pp. xxi-xxii.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., pp. xvi.

¹⁷⁵Rapport, "How Valid Are the Federal Writers' Project Stories," p. 13.

An interesting incident that illustrates the national folklore editor's lively concept of folklore is recounted by a former FWP worker. Jerre Mangione relates that his sharpest memory of Botkin was in a Chicago dive. During the performance of a mulatto belly dancer called Lovey, Botkin remained hunched over a notebook recording his observations, presumably under the heading of living lore.¹⁷⁶

The presence of a number of black interviewers greatly increased the candor of those interviewed for the ex-slave narratives. While ex-slaves mainly told white interviewers what they thought whites wanted to know, blacks remembering slavery were often more open with people of their own race. When Escott, author of Slavery Remembered, analyzes the slave narratives of the FWP, specifically those edited by Rawick, who published nineteen volumes of them, he states that several states employed at least one black interviewer. "Eight of the eleven writers who could be identified in Florida's Project were black; thirteen of Virginia's twenty interviewers shared the same skin color as their informants . . . almost one-fifth

¹⁷⁶Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 276-277.

(of the interviews) did not take place across a steep racial barrier."¹⁷⁷ Black interviewers were more likely to learn about tricks used by former slaves, such as adding stones to make the baskets of cotton heavier when they were weighed at the end of the day. Black interviewers also heard more about the ex-slaves' negative feelings.¹⁷⁸

But sometimes even blacks had difficulty gathering information from their own race. Negro cult leaders in New Orleans were suspicious of the all-Negro workers from Dillard University because of the workers' education. The cult leaders suspected that they could not trick the black college students like their uneducated customers. One Project worker in New Orleans improvised a way to overcome their suspicions. When visiting a black fortune teller, he posed as a pickpocket and asked which side of Canal Street to work. The fortune teller was deceived and began her conjuring, and the clever writer got his story.¹⁷⁹ Ann

¹⁷⁷ Paul D. Escott, Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979) p. 9.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁷⁹ Clayton, "The Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana," p. 180.

Banks states that she talked with eleven of the forty-one Federal Writers whose narratives appear in First-Person America, and their recollections of how they worked proved that things were not always done "by the book."¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰Banks, First-Person America, p. xxiii.

CHAPTER IV

FOLKLORE AND FOLKWAYS IN THE GUIDES

Many factors influenced the treatment of folklore and folkways in the guides. As noted earlier, the people who gathered folklore material and the way they collected it played an important role. The process of selecting, writing, and editing folklore material affected its composition. Conflicts over the type of material to be included in the guides and material concerning Negroes influenced objectivity. And the format of the guides as well as the state sponsors also affected the type of folklore contained in each guide for the Southern coastal states.

The people who edited the guides on the state level and those in Washington who approved the final copy determined the content and composition of the publication. The guides are an example of "collective writing," an idea peculiar to the 1930s.¹⁸¹ Carita Corse, state director of the Florida Project, described the process of compiling and writing the Florida guide in her preface to the guide:

So many individuals and agencies have contributed to this State guide for Florida that it may properly be described as a co-operative product. The Federal

¹⁸¹McKinzie, "Writers on Relief," p. 119.

Writers' Project acted as both a clearing-house for information and as a creative group. After extensive and adequate files of Floridana had been accumulated, our work became that of selecting, compiling, writing, and editing the book.¹⁸²

Other states used the same standard procedure in which many different people contributed to the guides, and each essay or tour was often the product of several different writers. This method of composition also meant that a select group in each state chose and edited the material that went into its guide. The material selected for inclusion in each state guide then proceeded to Washington for review. Sometimes, as in the case of the South Carolina guide, "each word represented a compromise between the State director and Sterling Brown," national Negro affairs editor.¹⁸³

On the national level, there were also other conflicts over the content and style of the guides. In Washington administrators argued. Alsberg, national director of the Federal Writers' Project, wanted the guides to be for readers, and Katherine Kellock, director of the tours section, claims that the guides should be for

¹⁸²Federal Writers' Project, Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. vii.

¹⁸³McKinzie, "Writers on Relief," p. 140.

tourists.¹⁸⁴ Obviously the two people compromised, since even the tours section, which often comprises about half of an individual state guide, is interesting to readers as well as tourists. And the tours section is more than just a tour guide.

On the state level there were also ideological conflicts concerning what the state guidebooks should contain. Stetson Kennedy of the Florida Project recalls that there was a major conflict "between those staffers who wanted to turn out 'touristy' guidebooks and others who were determined that the guides would be in step with the literary realism of those days and reflect as accurately as possible the quality of life in Florida without glossing over its more sordid aspects."¹⁸⁵ This realism often caused problems when it illuminated controversial issues, such as unfair treatment of blacks and laborers, that people, especially politicians, preferred to ignore.

Only occasionally do the sordid aspects show through, however, because of two important considerations--the sponsors, often the governor, a civic organization, or a university, hoped the guides would bring visitors and

¹⁸⁴Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 31.

¹⁸⁵Banks, First-Person America, p. xxii.

Nothern industries to their state. Showing the seamy side of life would be bad advertising and bad politics. Besides, most people preferred to ignore aspects of life in the Great Depression which were unpleasant and yet so close to them. A few Project members, such as Alsberg, Kennedy, Sterling Brown, and others, were responsible for the realism that does appear in the state guides.

Alabama--Alabama State Planning Commission
 Florida--State Department of Public Instruction
 Georgia--Georgia Board of Education
 Louisiana--Louisiana Library Commission and Louisiana
 State University
 Mississippi--Mississippi Advertising Commission
 North Carolina--North Carolina Department of Conser-
 vation and Development
 South Carolina--Burnet R. Maybank, Governor of South
 Carolina and South Carolina State
 Department of Education
 Texas--Texas State Highway Commission
 Virginia--James H. Price, Governor of the State of
 Virginia and the Virginia Conservation
 Commission

Figure 1. State sponsors for the guides of the Southern coastal states.

Only relatively small portions of the guides included in this study objectively portray the South of the 1930s. And those parts that are realistic frequently appear either in the name of folklore or as descriptions of the ways and customs of Negroes, crackers, Cajuns, or Mexicans as ethnic groups. The major portion of each guide, however,

shows the elaborate homes and genteel folkways of "the grand old South," the modern industry of a progressive "new South," or only the bright side of a South that was actually in a depression. Occasionally the plight of the Negro or the sharecropper realistically shows through. But for the most part the guides ignore the present state of the economy, the reasons for the WPA projects, the soup lines, and the poverty and downtrodden lives of the "folks" whose ways they recorded.

Because the study of folklore and folkways deals with groups that are often racial minorities, prejudice, which also affected objectivity, is often evident in the guides. Sterling Brown's influence usually kept the stereotype image and the patronizing tone out of portions that deal with the Negroes. But sections of the state guides dealing with other minorities frequently show the lack of an advocate for their groups in Washington as well as a lack of sensitivity on the part of the writer.

With the exception of Idaho, all guides follow Washington's uniform format. Part I consists of essays on history, government, education, folklore, etc., with topics varying. Part II contains information about the state's major cities and towns. And Part III is divided into tours

which guide the traveler through the state.¹⁸⁶ Information on the topics of folklore and folkways appear throughout the different parts of each guide for most states.

All of the guides for the Southern coastal states, except Georgia, include a separate essay on folklore and/or folkways in Part I. The word "folklore" occurs in the essay titles of six out of the nine guides involved in this study; and "folkways" also appears in six out of nine guides. Whether or not the title contains both words, each essay embraces both topics and includes information about both the ways of the people in that state and their lore.

Alabama - "Folklore and Folkways"
 Florida - "Folklore"
 Georgia - None
 Louisiana - "Folkways"
 Mississippi - "White Folkways"
 "Negro Folkways"
 North Carolina - "Folkways and Folklore"
 South Carolina - "Folklore and Folkways"
 Texas - "Folklore and Folkways"
 Virginia - "Folklore and Music"

Figure 2. Titles of essays in Part I of the guides for the Southern coastal states containing the words "folklore" and/or "folkways".

Some of the guides also include related essays, such as "Racial Elements," "Social Life," "The Negro," and "Music,"

¹⁸⁶Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 354.

which contain a considerable amount of material concerning folklore and folkways. Many of the lines that reveal a realistic picture of the South appear in Part I as Negro folkways, but frequently they also appear along with misconceptions and stereotyping.

Part II in the guides for the Southern coastal states does not usually contain much about folklore or folkways. Since this portion of the guide is about cities and towns, it is more concerned with the history and progress and bright descriptions of each municipality. Occasionally a legend is included among the historical facts, and sometimes the "points of interest" section will have a tale about how or why that place was named or the story of a resident ghost. A list of annual events will often include folk festivals. But the "folk" information in Part II is scanty, perhaps because, with the exception of Louisiana and Florida, most people in the Southern offices did not associate folklore and folkways with city and town life. This was possibly due to the popular definition of folklore which associates it with rural groups and primitive societies. There is little mention of Negroes and their ways in Part II either. Penkower claims, "The silence concerning Negroes in the city and town descriptions represented

the most common defect in state copy, especially in heavily populated black areas of the South."¹⁸⁷

However, Part III, the tours section of the guides, in contrast to Part II, usually contains a considerable amount of information about folklore and folkways. This section of the guides outlines various routes that a tourist may travel, in order to see the countryside by following a point to point itinerary. Each tour is complete with descriptions and interesting information about the places along the route. The emphasis upon location allows the guides to incorporate accounts of almost forgotten people from the past, and legends and customs not usually mentioned in formal histories. Folklore and folkways helped to relieve the otherwise dry tour format of Part III.

A survey of the treatment of folklore and folkways in the guides for the Southern coastal states reveals a product reflecting the methods whereby workers collected the material, the system used to compile the information, the editing that occurred in both the state and national offices, and the very makeup of the state itself. The topic of folklore and folkways in each guide has a character of its own.

¹⁸⁷Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 187.

The state guides were written during a time of mounting racial friction in the South. Negroes were demanding the equality under the law and freedom promised to all U.S. citizens. Led by intellectuals and activists such as Walter White and W.E.B. DuBois, they were struggling to gain fair treatment for blacks in all aspects of life, including a fair representation in American literature. While some people sympathized with blacks, many others, especially among white Southerners, were frightened by the unrest. They remembered the carpetbag rule that followed the Civil War. Often the victims of their own prejudice, they preferred to keep the Negro "in his place." The conflict between the two opposing forces and the outcome of that battle is particularly evident upon a close reading of folklore and folkways in the guides. Prejudice against other minority groups is also present.

Folklore in Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South combines prejudice with objectivity. "Folklore and Folkways," an essay in Part I, as well as the rest of the Alabama guide, was influenced considerably by a change in the Project's State directors. The last paragraph of the preface states: "The Guide was begun under the direction of Myrtle Miles, former State supervisor. Final work was

done with the cooperation of Stella Bloch Hanau of the WPA Writers' Program."¹⁸⁸ Miles, while an able director, could not conceal her prejudice. She omitted any reference to Booker T. Washington, influential black leader and Alabama educator and founder of Tuskegee Institute, a vocational school for blacks in Tuskegee, Alabama, and sent biased accounts to her Washington superiors. In addition, parts of the essays planned for inclusion in the guide were factually incorrect. When she was no longer director, editors from other states who helped prepare the Alabama guide for publication decided to rewrite it entirely. Because of Hanau, "darkies," which appeared in the original copy, reads as "Negroes" in the finished publication.¹⁸⁹

The outstanding feature of the Alabama guide is that it combines objectivity and prejudice in its treatment of blacks. And the material about the race often deals with folklore or folkways. Negro folklore heroes appear along with Confederate heroes, outlaws, Creole pirates, and Indians. And, by explaining how several Negro words entered the English language, such as giving Alabama its nickname,

¹⁸⁸Writers' Program, Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South (New York: R. R. Smith, 1941) p. viii.

¹⁸⁹McKinzie, "Writers on Relief," p. 140; Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, pp. 91, 222, 141.

"the Yellowhammer State," the race is portrayed in a position of influence. A line describing Negro housing states that homes for blacks in Birmingham range "from the tumble-down, poorly constructed 'shotgun' type to the well-kept, comfortable houses occupied by business and professional men."¹⁹⁰ This statement acknowledges the individuality of Negroes, but it still views their housing in terms of race, a logical viewpoint in a segregated South. However, the following statements show a stereotyping that is in direct contrast to the objectivity of the former statements concerning influenced on the language and housing: "Since Reconstruction days Selma's Negroes have lived in an atmosphere of sympathetic understanding, tinged by a friendly paternalism on the part of the whites," and "He (the Negro) doesn't mind dying nearly so much if he feels assured of being "funeralized big."¹⁹¹

The change in state directors had a profound effect on the style and content of the Alabama guide. The new director treated the material concerning Negroes more objectively than her predecessor, who had let her prejudices

¹⁹¹Ibid., pp. 237, 128; Except where noted, the above material about the Alabama guide is from *ibid.*, *passim*.

influence the original copy. Because of the work of Stella Hanau, the Alabama guide presents a more balanced viewpoint of the state's population.

Folklore in Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State treats Negroes objectively but gives unfair treatment in other groups. Compared to the guides for the other states, Florida contains a noticeably large amount of folklore, perhaps because of the influence of Zora Neale Hurston, editor, and Stetson Kennedy. However, while Negro folklore and folkways are lively, interesting, and mostly unbiased, the same adjectives do not describe the folklore and folkways of other groups in the guide.

The essay entitled "Folklore" centers on the four strains whose superstitions and beliefs have influenced Florida life: the cracker, Negro, Latin American, and Seminole. The essay then proceeds to describe each of the groups and its folklore. The four descriptions vary in their style and tone. The one about the cracker is condescending. The lines about the Seminoles show a lack of awareness that they existed in the present. The Latin-Americans are viewed only in light of their contributions to the history of Florida and their festivals. Only the Negroes receive fair treatment in the folklore essay.

A description of the Florida cracker begins, "The cracker, a pioneer backwoods settler of Georgia and Florida, has come to be known as a gaunt, shiftless person, but originally the term meant simply a native regardless of his circumstances."¹⁹² The paragraph continues to explain that the term in Florida derives from earlier days when drivers "cracked" rawhide bullwhips to keep the oxen that hauled lumber and turpentine moving. Unfortunately the paragraphs that follow revert back to describing the "gaunt, shiftless person."¹⁹³

A patronizing tone characterizes the cracker section of the essays "The cracker's wants are simple--his garden plot, pigpen, chicken coup, and the surrounding woods and near-by streams supply him and his family with nearly all the living necessities."¹⁹⁴ The Florida guide adds that the cracker's economic status "is known by his transportation, which falls into four categories: mule, Model T, Model A, and V-8; but the garage is the same, an open shed or lean-to."¹⁹⁵ Somehow, the reader senses that these are statements a cracker would not make about himself.

¹⁹²Federal Writers' Project, Florida, p. 128.

¹⁹³Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Ibid.

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

Only two paragraphs in the folklore essay deal with the Seminoles. They describe only a few of the Indians' beliefs associated with warnings and the ceremony surrounding the making of a dugout canoe. The essay describes only the Seminoles of the past and mentions nothing of the present. They seem to be a people from a different time and place--not real. The paragraphs about Latin-Americans include only a history of the peoples' migration into Florida and a few brief descriptions of their festivals.

The portions of the folklore essay dealing with the Negro, on the other hand, are entirely different. While one paragraph describes Negro voodoo practices, the next describes a Negro voodoo doctor who stripped his patients, burned their clothes, immersed them in a creek, and "cussed" the evil spirits out of them--for \$25. The contrast between these two passages and others breaks the stereotype of the Negro as ignorant and superstitious. A line referring to John Henry as a black Paul Bunyan implies that Negroes really aren't that different from their white counterparts. One story relates how the Negro word "jook," which means "to attend a nightclub," entered the language of Florida white people when a judge incorporated it into a State

supreme court decision.¹⁹⁶ The incorporation of the word is an example of blacks' influencing the English language. The portions of the essay about black folklore and folkways do more than describe. Because they present blacks as individuals with ingenuity, influence, varying degrees of affluence, and folk heroes like those of whites, they represent a statement of black people about themselves. Unfortunately, the Florida Project did not hire cracker, Latin-American, and Seminole writers to write about their own culture.

Another feature of the Florida guide is the frequent imaginative incorporation of folklore into the tours section. For example, rather than state that the soil is extremely fertile around Belle Glade, an amusing little tale says it better:

The fertility of the soil in this region is reflected in the Negro story of two boys who were planting corn one morning and discovered that it was sprouting immediately behind them. One boy shouted to the other to sit down on some of the seeds so that all of the corn would not grow to fodder before they finished planting. Next day the sitter dropped down a note, 'Passed through Heaven yesterday at 12 o'clock, sellin' roasin' ears to angels.'¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ "Jook" is the origin of the words "juke joint" and "juke box."

¹⁹⁷ Federal Writers' Project, Florida, p. 474.

There is also an intriguing tale of how the gopher got its name. There are some delightful Negro folktales about mythical cities and countries, which are discussed and referred to in everyday conversation as if they actually existed. Diddy-Wah-Diddy, Beluthahatchie, Heaven, and West Hell described in Tour 7 are attributed to Zora Neale Hurston.¹⁹⁸ Tours of areas near turpentine camps contain several humorous stories about Daddy Mention, a Negro convict. Many lively little tales make reading the tours section of the Florida guide a pleasure.¹⁹⁹

Writers who wrote about other folk groups for the Florida guide tended to write only about what they saw on the surface. However, only when someone is a part of a group or dedicated to the study of its culture can he see below the surface. Perhaps the reason that Negro lore is so lively in the Florida guide is because of Zora Neale Hurston's influence. She was both black and committed to the study of her own culture and its lore.

Folklore is not evident in Georgia: A Guide to Its Towns and Countryside. In fact, the outstanding feature concerning folklore and folkways in the Georgia guide is

¹⁹⁸ Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 398.

¹⁹⁹ Except where noted, the above material about the Florida guide is from Federal Writers' Project, Florida, passim.

the publication's lack of it. It is the only guide for a Southern coastal state that does not contain an essay on either subject, nor do the guide's essays, such as "The Negro" and "Religion", take a folkloristic approach. In fact, neither "folklore," "folkways" nor "folk-anything" is listed in the index.²⁰⁰ The Georgia guide, unlike other guides in the South, is more concerned with facts and current issues as illustrated by the following:

There were 4,986 Negroes engaged in professional services (including trained nursing) in 1930, according to the U.S. Census. The group included 2,056 clergymen, 86 college presidents and professors, 190 physicians, 59 dentists, 573 trained nurses, and 6 engineers. Many of these workers were educated in Georgia institutions founded to train Negroes for professional careers.

Negroes have no direct influence and virtually no part in Georgia politics. Most of them are virtually disfranchised by the white primary system and discriminatory party rules. In 1935 there were only 65,972 Negro poll-tax payers on the lists, as against 337,992 white poll-tax payers. Literacy is judged by the registrar, who may disqualify voters by means of tests left to his discretion. For all practical purposes, the primary system serves to disfranchise the Negro completely. Consequently Negroes hold no office in Georgia, although they are sometimes called for jury service.²⁰¹

The Georgia Writers' Project did produce the folklore book Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies among the

²⁰⁰ See Writers' Program, Georgia: A Guide to Its Towns and Countryside (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1940).

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 84.

Georgia Coastal Negroes, which could be viewed as a guide to the Negro communities of Georgia. The book, which describes twenty communities, the people in each, and their lore, supplements the state guide. In some measure it compensates for the state guide's lack of Negro folklore. However, other minority folk groups are left out of the FWP's description of Georgia.

Although Louisiana: A Guide to the State contains a great deal of folklore, most of it pertains to ante-bellum days as a result of Lyle Saxon's influence. When Samuel Tupper, Georgia's FWP State Supervisor, wrote an article in the Atlanta Journal expressing his regret that the Louisiana guide virtually ignored the twentieth century, he was certainly justified in doing so, for there is a marked contrast between the progressiveness of the Georgia guide with its lack of folklore and the nostalgia in the Louisiana guide with its abundance of it.²⁰² Tupper's observation is reinforced by a modern interpretation: "In fifteen pages of Louisiana history, only two pages pertain to this century."²⁰³ Similarly, the essay, "Social Life"

²⁰²Clayton, "The Federal Writers' Project in Louisiana," p. 187.

²⁰³Ibid., p. 210.

ends with the Civil War. However, the guide's preoccupation with the past creates a natural background for the delightful and extensive amount of folklore in it. The population of Louisiana contains ethnic groups such as Creoles and Cajuns, plus the Negro race, that are well known for their folklore and folkways. Their presence also accounts for the extensive coverage of the subject.

The essay "Folkways" in the Louisiana guide, is delightful. It begins with the statement, "Old Negro women will tell you that when a Louisianan dies and goes to Heaven and finds there is no gumbo [a stew made with okra and served with rice] he comes right back."²⁰⁴ A few ghost stories are followed by the customs, legends, and tall tales of the Creoles, Cajuns, and Negroes. After absorbing the nostalgia and charm woven into the folklore sections as well as the rest of the guide, the reader is persuaded that the Louisianan comes back for more than gumbo.

Other essays in Part 1 also contain a considerable amount of information on folklore and folkways. The essay "Racial Elements" explains the ethnic background of Louisiana's population and defines terms such as "Creoles,"

²⁰⁴Writers' Program, Louisiana: A Guide to the State (New York: Hastings House, 1941), p. 90.

"Cajuns," and "free people of color." It also explains the elaborate terminology, no longer in use because of lack of genealogical records, once employed to distinguish gradations of Negro blood. Louisiana writers also treated folkways in the "Social Life" section of the chapter, "Social Life and Social Welfare." The essay mentions the customs at the Quadroon Ball and includes a defense of the relationships established as a result of it. The section also contains descriptions of Carnival season and the customs and celebrations of ante-bellum plantation life. Unfortunately, according to the viewpoint expressed in the guide, when sharecroppers took over the great plantations, all that was left was "social welfare," described in the succeeding essay. While the essay "Literature" is not about folklore and folkways, it certainly cites many authors who wrote on the subject.

The "Music" essay contains much interesting information about the folk music of all the major ethnic groups in Louisiana. But it has been criticized as giving too much credit to the music of colored people and too little to whites. Some critics have claimed that music among Negroes is socially more significant, but musically it is

to be questioned.²⁰⁵ A close reading shows the essay to be a well-rounded treatise about many types of music. A full five of the eleven pages discuss Anglo-Saxon community singings, formal compositions, opera, symphonies, singing clubs, music clubs, philharmonic societies, and music education. The criticism may have been the product of Southerners' prejudice.

The essay "Cuisine" treats the preparation of food mostly from an ethnic viewpoint, with an emphasis on Creole cooking. While folklore and folkways occur only occasionally in the "Cities and Towns" section of the guide, they are scattered copiously throughout Part III, the tours section. The Louisiana guide seems to contain more about folklore and folkways than any other guide of the Southern coastal states.²⁰⁶

The treatment of folklore and folkways in the Louisiana guide reflects the influence of someone who had a deep appreciation of Louisiana's past and the many kinds of people who had helped to create it. Because each group is treated objectively and as consisting of individuals, any

²⁰⁵ Clayton, The Dream and The Deal, p. 159.

²⁰⁶ Except where noted, the above material about the Louisiana guide is from Writers' Program, Louisiana, passim.

Louisianan who reads the state guide could be proud of his heritage. The guide's outstanding flaw is that it deals mainly with Louisiana's past. However, that past is so well presented that upon reading the guide, one wants to travel to Louisiana to be a part of it. The person responsible for the writing of the Louisiana guide was Lyle Saxon. Even a brief study of his life reveals the personality so evident in the Louisiana guide.

Folklore in Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State reflects the prejudice of the people who wrote it. The subject of folklore is narrowed down to what whites saw as the two major "folk" groups in Mississippi, blacks and whites. The unqualified acceptance in one essay is in direct opposition to the rejection, stereotyping, and patronizing tone present in the other. The contrasting tones highlight whites' acceptance of each other and their rejection of blacks--which is prejudice.

As mentioned earlier, there was often a conflict between the editors in Washington and the state directors over controversial material. All copy for inclusion in the guides was supposed to be approved in the national office. When copy concerning Negroes did not meet with Negro editor Sterling Brown's approval, it was returned to the state to

be rewritten. Brown went on record as disapproving of much of the Mississippi guide and did succeed in having some of the objectionable phrases removed.²⁰⁷ However, when the Mississippi FWP overrode Washington's corrections by submitting the entire draft in a rush, Mississippi writers still included some objectionable passages in the final edition. A tone of amused condescension still characterizes the treatment of the Negro in folkways sections of the Mississippi guide.²⁰⁸

There is a dramatic contrast between the two essays on folkways written by Mississippi writers. When white Project workers of the Mississippi unit wrote about Negro life in "Negro Folkways," the result was quite different from the more objective essays of other states that received the editorial approval of Sterling Brown's office. "Negro Folkways" is patronizing, dry, and impersonal. On the other hand, "White Folkways" glows with warmth and praise.

The essay about whites in the Mississippi guide was written in the first person--". . . we Mississippi white folk. . . . Our faith is in God, next year's crop, and the

²⁰⁷Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 145.

²⁰⁸Ibid., 142.

Democratic party."²⁰⁹ The essay covers farming, politics, and church in a lively, charming fashion. A pleasant description of Sunday dinner is enlivened with the observation: "The person taking the last biscuit is obligated to kiss the cook."²¹⁰

On the other hand, "Negro Folkways," which follows the essay about white folks in the Mississippi guide, is written in the third person. The problem with white people writing about Negroes is stated, perhaps unconsciously, in the opening paragraph. "He [the Negro] seems to see all things, hear all things, believe all things. But ask him a question and he will have neither seen, heard, nor believed. He counsels with himself and walks his way alone."²¹¹ The white person cannot realistically write about Negroes when there is a communication gap as broad as that revealed in that passage. Whites could write only what "seems," and their perspective is conducive to neither empathy nor objectivity.

The contrast between whites' differing attitudes toward themselves and blacks is evident when comparing the

²⁰⁹ Federal Writers' Project, Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State (New York: Viking Press, 1938), p. 8.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 22.

style of the two essays. The following two statements say essentially the same thing, but note the difference in the way they say it. "His [the Negro's] religious leader is more an emotional expert than a practical theologian," says the same thing, but not nearly as kindly, as the similar statement in "White Folkways": "The preacher, whether our pastor or an itinerant evangelist, understands our preference for feeling rather than knowing, and he builds his sermons on the fact."²¹² Further evidence of whites' lack of understanding and sensitivity is present in the arrangement of the material in the essay on Negroes. Near the beginning there is a statement, "In the distant future he [the Negro] hopes to be buried in style."²¹³ Later, a discussion of funerals and burial superstitions concludes the essay, leaving the impression that death is all the Negro has to look forward to.

Under the heading "Archeology and Indians," Indian customs and lore receive a bit kinder literary treatment in the Mississippi guide than the Negro. Unfortunately, the essay ends in 1832 when all but three thousand Indians were removed to the West between 1832 and 1834. So, white

²¹²Ibid., pp. 24, 20.

²¹³Ibid., p. 22.

Mississippi FWP writers' overall treatment of the Indians really wasn't much better than their attitude toward Negroes. Even a portion of the guide on white folkways in one of the tour descriptions has a condescending tone when describing the descendants of the French Catholic immigrants who settled in Mississippi during the latter part of the 18th century. Writers noted that "in the humble cabins barefoot women and children, often wearing clothes made of sugar sacks, express their love of beauty in the flowers they create to sell in the shops along the coast."²¹⁴

Although Sterling Brown was able to slightly modify the treatment of folklore in the Mississippi guide, the style, tone, and arrangement of folklore still reflect the prejudices of the writers.²¹⁵

After reading about folklore and folkways in the Mississippi guide, the reader might reach the conclusion that the material was written by and for white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. As noted earlier, friction between blacks and whites was already rising in the South as blacks sought fair treatment for their race. The reason for that

²¹⁴Ibid., p. 433.

²¹⁵Except where noted, the above material about the Mississippi guide is from *ibid.*, *passim*.

friction is certainly evident in both the problems surrounding the editing of the Mississippi State guide and in the book itself.

Folklore in North Carolina: A Guide to the Old North State has several unusual features. The guide has a structural unity that is introduced by a unique opening essay that sets the theme for folklore throughout the guide. Folk groups are divided according to geographical regions rather than on an ethnic or racial basis. Then, the folklore of Negroes is treated separately.

Other essays in the state guide also use a folkloristic approach. An extraordinary feature of the North Carolina guide is its first essay. The composition, "Tarheels All," is the only essay in any guide written by a Southern coastal state that gives credit of authorship. It is written by Jonathan Daniels, editor of the Raleigh News and Observer, and it contains some unique aspects concerning folklore and folkways.

The first paragraph of the essay begins with a legend about the boundary between North Carolina and South Carolina and ends with the conclusion that in North Carolina there is a "continuing conviction that one man is as good as another and that if you don't believe it he'll show you

he's a damn sight better."²¹⁶ The essay continues to describe the very different characteristics and customs of the people in the East, the Piedmont, and the Mountains, as well as Negroes, who comprise one-third of the population. However, it emphasizes that these peoples, at least three distinct North Carolinians, are most of all native Americans, and introduces a theme of "things shared and things different" that carries over into the essay "Folkways and Folklore." The author also claims that one of North Carolina's "interesting groups which, without losing the characteristics of section yet creates a unity. . . that may very well be called North Carolina. . . is the alumni of the University of North Carolina."²¹⁷ The essay concludes with a summing up of "things shared" and ends with a sobering praise of North Carolinians. The passage is unusual because it mentions the economic depression of the 1930s.

But a depression placed in neat relation to his progress taught him much. He is now less proud of the distance he has gone than aware of the distance he must go. He knows he has the "Greatest State on earth" and that he is as good as anybody in it. But he is by no means sure that this is good enough.²¹⁸

²¹⁶Federal Writers' Project, North Carolina: A Guide to the Old North State (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), p. 3.

²¹⁷Ibid., p. 6.

²¹⁸Ibid., p. 7.

In the North Carolina guide, the essay "Folkways and Folklore" begins with a summation of North Carolina folkways as a whole, describing people's ways of doing, acting, and talking, no matter what their occupations or regional or ethnic differences. Southern hospitality, revivals, holidays, celebrations, and barbecues are all described as indigenous to the state. The essay investigates folklore and folkways of the three distinct regions as well as the Negroes.

The folklore and folkways aspect is continued in a later essay, "Eating and Drinking," with lines such as: "Old recipes have been handed down by word of mouth and in a few cookbooks, but few people today have the knack of interpreting directions that require 'a handful of sugar,' a 'pinch' of salt, or a 'dash' of mustard."²¹⁹ Readers are tantalized with pungent lines about food: "Biscuits always mean hot biscuits, and are usually made with buttermilk, soda, and lard. They are lightly kneaded to produce a fine texture, rolled, and baked in a hot oven until brown, then split open and buttered while hot."²²⁰ The conclusion

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 103.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 103.

emphasizes the theme that characterizes folklore and folkways in the North Carolina guide:

Thus cookery in North Carolina is as varied as the State topography. Every section--Coast, Sandhills, Piedmont, and Mountain--offers a distinctive food to lure the gourmet. Yet all parts of the State share²²¹ in common many of the food customs of the old South.

The many unusual characteristics of folklore in the North Carolina guide point to the influence of someone with an extraordinary concept of that subject as well as a special talent for writing, compiling, and editing. W. T. Couch, North Carolina's associate editor who later became an FWP regional director, was that person. As noted earlier, he had the ability to insure that credit for authorship was given in the opening essay. He was a man with unique ideas about collecting folklore as shown in his plan for collecting life histories. And he had the ability to give folklore in the North Carolina guide its unusual format, theme, and style.

Folklore in South Carolina: A Guide to the Palmetto State reflects some of the characteristics of the North Carolina guide. It contains an introductory essay that is

²²¹Ibid., p. 106; Except where noted, the above material about the North Carolina guide is from *ibid.*, *passim*.

peculiar only to the guides of North and South Carolina although the essay for South Carolina does not give credit of authorship. This is perhaps because the North Carolina Press under the directorship of W. T. Couch published the North Carolina guide, and the South Carolina guide used another press for publication. The South Carolina guide also has a theme that ties together its folklore, which appears in other essays as well as throughout the book. However, the guide is unique in its treatment of Negroes as a group.

Like the North Carolina guide, the South Carolina publication has an introductory essay describing the people of South Carolina. It claims, "The South Carolinian is a Low Countryman or an Up Countryman, with the native of the mid-section having characteristics of both."²²² The essay has a motif of "contrast and compare" that is also similar to the folklore theme of the North Carolina guide, with the emphasis on the "contrasts" and the antagonism between the two groups. The essay claims: "For many years there was almost war between Up Country and Low Country. . . and in order to have a unified state, . . . the capital was shifted

²²²Writers' Program, South Carolina: A Guide to the Palmetto State (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 3.

from Charleston to Columbia, a State college was established in the new capital, and suffrage was extended to include the small farmers of the Up Country."²²³ Only then did the tension lessen between the more industrious, thrifty Up Country neighbors and the Low Countryman who still softens his "r's" and slurs his words, takes an afternoon nap, reveres his ancestors and entertains with courtesy, ease, and graceful hospitality.

Although the word "Negro" appears only twice in the essay, the guide does not neglect his culture. The essay is unusual in the way it groups the Negroes and whites of an area together, explaining that people in each region of the state have a distinct personality regardless of class, color, or creed. Moreover, later the folklore essay explains the differences between the Up Country and Low Country Negroes more fully. The tone and features of the introductory essay carry over into the essays concerning folklore and folkways that appear later in the guide, except the antagonism is left behind with the moving of the capital.

The folklore essay is remarkable for its unbiased, objective coverage of people in Up Country, those in the

²²³Ibid., p. 6.

Low Country, and the Negro, both separately as individual entities and together as regional groups. Especially noteworthy are the lovely mountain ballads, a description of a tilting tournament that still takes place in Charleston, and a description of the Gullah, Negroes who live along the coast. It seems almost as though the information on folklore and folkways of each group was written by a member of that group. None of the people are criticized, either openly or subtly.

Other essays continue the pattern of contrasting and comparing South Carolina's regions, sometimes treating Negroes as a folk group and sometimes discussing them along with the whites of a region. The essay "Handicrafts" is the only one of that title appearing in the guides for the Southern coastal states, and the "Music" essay has portions on Up Country music, Negro spirituals, Gullah chants, and the "Charleston" of the 1920s. The essay "Cookery" also follows the pattern of compare and contrast. Perhaps when people realize others' similarities as well as their differences, and are willing to compromise, there is less patronizing, and more respect among all.²²⁴

²²⁴ Except where noted, the above material about the South Carolina guide is from *ibid.*, *passim*.

After studying the South Carolina guide one wonders if W. T. Couch, as regional director, may have influenced the treatment of folklore in it as well as in the North Carolina guide. There are many similarities in the format, theme and style of folklore in the two guides. Furthermore, the South Carolina guide also reflects another administrator's influence. The portions of folklore concerning the Negro are quite different from the other guides for the Southern coastal states. They are certainly an outstanding result of the fact that in the case of the South Carolina guide, "each word represented a compromise between the State director and Brown [national Negro Affairs Editor.]"²²⁵ The North Carolina guide reflects the attitudes of the people who influenced its development.

With its 267,339 square miles of territory extending from the plains of the Panhandle to the Gulf of Mexico, Texas is so large that a person can travel 800 miles in a straight line within its borders.²²⁶ Its area is so great and its topography so varied that the joint resolution of Congress providing for the state's annexation to the Union

²²⁵McKinzie, "Writers on Relief," p. 140.

²²⁶Robert N. Richardson, Ernest Wallace, and Adrian N. Anderson, Texas: The Lone Star State, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 1-2.

stated that as many as four additional states might, with the consent of Texas, be formed out of its territory.²²⁷

The super abundance of material covered by one guide, which might have filled five separate books, caused information on folklore and folkways in Texas: A Guide to the Lone Star State to be fragmented and too brief.

In the Texas guide an essay, "Racial Elements," acts as a prelude to "Folklore and Folkways." It divides the state's population into ethnic groups and explains some of their background and ways. The population cross-section includes large groups of Anglo-Americans, Indians, Mexicans (in three classes), Irish, Germans, Alsatians, Wends and Poles, and Negroes. The description of the Mexican peons claims that most "Mexicans south of the Nueces River exist in a system not unlike medieval feudalism. (See Tour 9c)"²²⁸ Upon turning to the tour, the reader finds a discussion of the folkways and lore that contains a stereotyping of Mexicans much like the Mississippi guide's stereotyping of blacks. The section begins with the words "Mexicans live in stark simplicity," and ends with the

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 130.

²²⁸ Writers' Program, Texas: A Guide to the Lone Star State (New York: Hastings House, 1940), p.

generalization that "Mexicans' wives are expected to do all the domestic work, and fade early; but they and their large families usually live happily--though in primitive fashion--to ripe old ages."²²⁹ The Negro receives comparatively fair treatment in the guide, probably as a result of some of Sterling Brown's influence, and also due to the fact that white Texans saw more threat in the Mexican culture than in a subservient Negro culture.

Aside from the stereotyping, the above passages also reflect another feature of the Texas guide-- the reader must flip from page to page of the publication in order to follow a "folk" topic because folk institutions are so fragmented in the guide. The folklore essay begins with the statement, "Folk institutions of Texas have a range that corresponds to the size of the State and the wide diversity of racial influences."²³⁰ That range is certainly reflected in the location of folk-related material in the guide. The essay "Folklore and Folkways" mentions many things briefly and treats nothing fully. It contains numerous instructions to turn somewhere in the tour section, or cities and towns part, or to another essay. The Texas guide is one of the few for the Southern

²²⁹Ibid., pp. 460-461.

²³⁰Ibid., p. 92.

coastal states that contains large amounts of folk material in the cities and towns section. However, upon following directions the reader is often confused and disappointed to find only one line about something that sounds interesting.

Other essays in the Texas guide are written from a "folk" perspective or contain large fragmented amounts of material concerning folklore and folkways. "Music" contains sections on cowboy songs, German folk music, Spanish and Mexican folk songs, Negro spirituals, and more. Portions of "Arts and Handicrafts" describe the crafts of folk groups. And the essay "Architecture" mingles descriptions of types of buildings along with comments about the ethnic groups that built them. Often the information in the essays is scanty and disappointing. After reading in the folklore essay, "Among the contributions of the Texas Negro outside of his labor, those to music and folklore are probably most valuable." The reader turns to the music essay to find only one short paragraph about Negro music.²³¹

Folklore and folkways in the Texas guide, while much in evidence, is, however, a victim of the "condensation and elimination" necessary for "one volume of portable size" to

²³¹Ibid., p. 91.

"cover so large and diversified a state," as warned in the preface.²³² It is scattered in bits and pieces throughout the guide, and lacks the cohesiveness and continuity necessary to present the subject with coherence. The reader has a difficult time learning about Texans and their lore from the Texas guide.²³³

Eudora Ramsay Richardson, state director of the Virginia Project, had a profound influence on the treatment of the Negro in Virginia: A Guide to the Old Dominion. Because Virginia is considered the birth place of American slavery, she wanted the Virginia Project to serve as a model for other states in its treatment of the Negro. She shared Sterling Brown's desire to give the Negro fair treatment in all of Virginia's publications. She not only saw that a Negro wrote the sections concerning his own race, but gave him credit for his work in the preface.²³⁴ This fair treatment is certainly evident in the folklore portions of the Virginia guide that deal with the Negro.

²³²Ibid., p. vii.

²³³Except where noted, the above material about the Texas guide is from *ibid.*, *passim*.

²³⁴Writers' Program, Virginia: A Guide to the Old Dominion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940) p. viii.

Unlike the Texas guide, folklore and folkways are concentrated in a well-written, concise essay entitled "Folklore and Music" in the Virginia publication, and little information on the subject appears elsewhere. Although all the essays concerning folklore and folkways in the guides for Southern coastal states contain some information on folk music, the Virginia guide is the only one that combines the two in the title. Guides in the other Southern states often have a separate essay "Music" that encompasses many types of music.

In the Virginia guide, the examples of the folklore and folksongs of the Mountain region are beautiful, and the descriptions of ante-bellum days cover both blacks and whites. The portions of the essay on the Negro are informative and contain a considerable amount of insight, as illustrated by the line that claims "Steal away Jesus" was first sung as a notice to other slaves on the plantation that a secret religious meeting would be held that night. According to the preface, "The essay on the Negro and Negro sections of several other essays are the work of Roscoe Lewis, of Hampton Institute and the staff of the Virginia Writers' Project."²³⁵

²³⁵Ibid., p. viii.

While the essay "The Negro" is mainly an historical account, its last paragraph is about the "street" in every city and town "that serves as the social and business center of Negro life." The paragraph ends with a poignant observation: "No matter how carefree the outward appearance of Negroes may be, behind their happy dispositions is the imprint of poverty, disease, and suffering--birthmarks of a people living precariously, but a people wholly Virginian."²³⁶ The line reflects a tone that is in direct contrast to that of the Mississippi guide, perhaps because Eudora Ramsay Richardson, State Director of the Virginia Writers' Project, was a Southern lady of keen literary sensibility, unencumbered by any racial bigotry.²³⁷

The best part of folklore and folkways in the Virginia guide is the last paragraph of the folklore essay, which so well describes folkways in both Virginia and America:

As hard-surface roads reach inward to the hollows and settlements, bringing or following radios, gas stations, movies, and dine-and-dance halls, the old customs undergo a gradual change. Some compromise with urban ways of living is necessary when the last

²³⁶Ibid., p. 86.

²³⁷Mangione, The Dream and The Deal, p. 259.

frontier may be only a few hundred yards from an express highway, sandwiched between a billboard and a mountain. On fence lines, telephone poles, and barn sides, from mining towns in southwestern Virginia to farm lanes in the Shenandoah Valley, posters proclaim the union of hinterland and city and advertise the virtues of 'Effie, the Hillbilly Striptease Dancer.' This type of artist, born of crossroad and urban music hall, appears at local theaters with a noisy hoedown band that probably had its origin in the woods of Manhattan and borrowed its folk-songs from Tin Pan Alley. But it is by such blending that a people will find themselves and create a native art and culture-- a culture that ranges from symphonic compositions of the city to Negro spirituals of the lowlands and from story-ballads of the hills to trade rhymes of heavy industries. It is Virginia and America.²³⁸

Workers in Virginia, the remainder of the Southern coastal states, and also the rest of America worked individually and together to portray a picture of their country. The writers who worked specifically with folklore sought to make that picture complete by writing about people's ways and lore for inclusion in the guides. It is amazing that folklore in nine guides written under the same agency, administered on a national level, utilizing the same guidelines, and following the same format or three parts could be so diverse. The only factors that differed from state to state were the people who did the writing and the state they

²³⁸Writers' Program, Virginia. p. 146; Except where noted, the above material about the Virginia Guide is from Writers' Program, Virginia, passim.

wrote about. Yet those two factors made quite a difference. Meanwhile, as those Project members were busy collecting information, and putting the guides into a publishable form, other events were occurring in Washington that would drastically affect their jobs and the material they had collected.

CHAPTER V

THE DEATH OF THE FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT

A few major factors precipitated the ending of the FWP. Liberal analyses of controversial subjects antagonized a number of self-appointed patriots. Accusations that the Project was a "hotbed" for Communism led to Congressional hearings and unfavorable publicity. And rising anti-New Deal sentiment caused drastic cuts in FWP funding.

Passages in the guides and other FWP publications that some people hailed as realistic and objective, others saw as "class-angled," "shocking," and "subversive" -- for example, frank accounts of labor conditions, particularly comparing Mexican labor in Texas and feudalism. The treatment of the Negro in Southern guides alienated many conservative Southern Democrats by emphasizing unfair treatment of minority groups, discrimination, and feelings of prejudice.²³⁹ Southern congressmen were influenced by their own reactions to the controversial FWP publications as well as the reactions of their constituents.

²³⁹ Much of the investigation by the Dies and Woodrum Committees dealt with testimony concerning the treatment of controversial issues in the guides.

Congressmen from other parts of the country who were suspicious of foreigners, organized labor, and big capital experienced similar problems of prejudice and political controversy. They too were unhappy with the guides. For example, an investigating committee of conservative Republicans and Democrats in the Wisconsin legislature found their guidebook "inaccurate, untruthful, politically biased, and badly written." It included a fifteen-page section on government which spoke admiringly of the late Senator Robert M. LaFollette, Sr., progressive political leader and reformer.²⁴⁰ However, it was Southern representatives, Martin Dies (D. Texas) and Clifton Woodrum (D. Virginia) who spearheaded the investigations which attacked the FWP and discredited its publications.

By 1938 a rising fear of Communism among American conservatives along with well-publicized accusations that Communists had infiltrated the Project precipitated the investigations of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, popularly called the Dies Committee. The Committee held hearings to investigate the allegations.

²⁴⁰Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, p. 341

Alsberg, FWP national director, and Ellen Woodward from Mississippi, a Southern lady who administered "Federal One" and other WPA professional relief projects, testified persuasively on the Project's behalf. However, the Communist leanings of some workers who by law were hired without respect to political affiliations were damaging.²⁴¹ "Evidence" read from the guides, particularly that referring to part Negro descendants of George Washington's foster son who was Robert E. Lee's father-in-law, was particularly inflammatory to prejudiced white Southerners.²⁴² Later investigations of the Woodrum Committee continued to question the politics of FWP members and discredit the guides. Furthermore, the publicity that the hearings generated greatly damaged the public's belief in the Project.

By the beginning of 1939, there was a significant increase in Republicans and conservative Democrats in Congress, and the entire relief program was in serious jeopardy. Not expected to run for the Presidency in 1940, Roosevelt could no longer command certain legislative support. Editorials enumerated the evils of centralized

²⁴¹Ibid., p. 295.

²⁴²Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, pp. 203-204.

relief, and influential spokesmen criticized the WPA. Talk of retrenchment and balanced budgets increased, and Congress drastically cut funding for all WPA projects. As a result of political friction, fear of Communism, and lack of congressional support, the very existence of the FWP was in jeopardy.

By June of 1939, the House of Representatives approved a bill that allowed the FWP units to continue their work after September 1 only by securing local sponsorship for 25% of their budgets. The Senate passed the same bill under the threat that the entire relief program would expire in a few hours' time. Roosevelt decided to sign the bill rather than jeopardize the welfare of two and one-half million other workers.

Under the Writers' Program, as the FWP in its new form was called, John Dimmick Newsom, succeeded Alsberg, who had fallen victim to the anti-Communist mudslingers of the Dies and Woodrum committees, as director of the new program.²⁴³ On August 9, the day after Newsom's appointment, Alsberg informed the press of the Project's accomplishments under his direction: 321 publications,

²⁴³Newsom had a background with the Foreign Legion and had proved his efficiency as Michigan's Project director since June, 1938.

including about 100 full-sized books, 128 on the presses, and 68 almost completed. Moreover, he noted that there was a vast amount of material gathered for planned publications. The Nation pointed out that the Writers' Project could "coast along for months to come on work already done under Alsberg's direction."²⁴⁴

Despite the many problems inherent in the new organization, the central office under Newsom's discipline and efficiency continued to exercise editorial control over state copy. Newsom placed completion of the guides as the first item on the Program's agenda and sent six editors from the central office, which the Library of Congress had sponsored, into the field to help lagging offices complete the task. There was a decreased number of qualified writers left in the Program because of the new law that required 25% state funding for FWP units to continue operating as the Writers' Program. The Louisiana office edited the Arkansas manuscript, and individuals from one state office often edited copy from another state. Although policy errors occasionally

²⁴⁴New York Times, 10 August, 1939, n. 29, cited by Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 214. The Nation is a weekly journal devoted to politics, literature, science drama, music, art, and finance that has been published since 1865.

slipped past because of publishers' deadlines, as in the case of the Mississippi guide, the Writers' Program remained steadfast in its commitment to producing worthy volumes. Despite red tape, cuts in the relief rolls, and sometimes incompetent personnel, the Washington office completed the last of the guides by the end of 1941.

While hastening to complete the state guidebooks, the Writers' Program also worked on other publications, such as city guides, special studies, folklore publications, radio scripts, and a wide range of unusual titles for which offices were able to find sponsors. The country's entry into World War II and the corresponding decrease in the number of FWP workers ended work on many volumes. "Men at Work" would have been an anthology covering such professions as cannery workers, sponge divers, cowboys, and Navaho shepherders. "Hands That Built America" promised to be a six volume regional history of the country's handicrafts. Material for "Victims of the Depression," "Men against Granite," and "Big Ivy," all based on Couch's life-history approach, were shelved.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ Except where noted, the preceding information about the ending of the FWP is from Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, pp. 181-233 passim.

Faced with war, Program officials in Washington prepared for the permanent safeguarding of all manuscripts. Newsom directed state supervisors to supply the Washington office with two copies of all notes, interviews, records, charts, and unpublished manuscripts for deposit in the Library of Congress. Of the enormous amount of material which the states sent and the library stored, workers processed only a small fraction, such as the ex-slave narratives and some folklore manuscripts. Some materials also went to the National Archives, which by 1953 had indexed a tremendous mass of records and correspondence that reflect operations of the state offices. The Library of Congress, however, did not have room for all the material from the state offices, and the Writers' Program began to look for other places to store its unused materials. In June, 1940, Newsom asked the state units to send all publications to ten centrally located state institutions, usually universities or libraries. About a month later, he sent out a circular advising offices how to set up efficient filing procedures, but only a few states took the trouble to systematize their records and papers. In February 1942

Newsom resigned as national director and joined the Navy.²⁴⁶

A month after Newsom's resignation, the Writers' Program became the Writers' Unit, which stressed a military and civilian defense series. It wrote servicemen's recreational guides, a Bomb Squad Training Manual, and other "war stuff."²⁴⁷ Lyle Saxon, who had actually quit the Program seven months earlier, took the job as national consultant for the WPA when the Writers' Unit finally closed its doors. June 30, 1943, Washington liquidated the entire WPA, and the "New Deal" for the arts was over. "The biggest literary project in history," costing a total of \$27,189,370 over a period of a little over seven years, had published enough material to fill over seven twelve-foot shelves in the library of the Department of the Interior.²⁴⁸ That project also left a legacy of unpublished material that people have continued to resurrect from its hasty burial, and the nature of what they discovered was determined by the methodology used to collect it.

²⁴⁶Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, pp. 370-371; Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, pp. 233, 231.

²⁴⁷Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, p. 234.

²⁴⁸Penkower, The Federal Writers' Project, p. 237.

CHAPTER VI

THE LEGACY OF FWP FOLKLORE ACTIVITIES BEYOND THE GUIDES AND MATERIAL PUBLISHED AFTER THE PROGRAM ENDED

In addition to the information on folklore and folkways for the guides, FWP writers throughout the Southern coastal states also had collected material for other publications that would have used folk-related materials. The theme, contents, and scope of the planned publications varied widely from state to state according to the state director's perception of folklore, his interpretation of instructions from Washington, the ethnic and racial make-up of his state, and the type of materials his workers had collected.

Project members had usually used an interview approach as suggested by Alsberg, Lomax, Botkin, or Couch, to collect tall tales, slave narratives, life histories, folkways, religious and local customs, folklore, and any other information that the informant offered. Many factors affected the validity of the narratives they collected. Firstly, workers did not always follow Alsberg's memorandum to "take the greatest care not to influence the point of

view of the informant"249 Too, those people whom they interviewed did not always tell the truth. Moreover, the Depression may have made former days seem a time of bountifulness to some, and there were other considerations.²⁵⁰ However, the publications which later came out of the interviews certainly portray a much more accurate picture of life during the 1930s and earlier than do the guides. Furthermore the material that the FWP had collected as a result of the interview technique is the closest thing Americans have to a national folklore.

Because funding for the FWP was about to end, and publication of the guides took precedence, many of the planned works remained incomplete and unpublished. Only a few Southern state offices, including Virginia, Georgia and South Carolina, published their folklore related books while still in existence. Some Project administrators such as Lyle Saxon completed planned publications within a few years after the Project closed, and Benjamin Botkin edited These Are Our Lives at the request of the Library of Congress and later combined FWP material with his own work to create

²⁴⁹Escott, Slavery Remembered, p. 5.

²⁵⁰See introduction to Blassingame, Slave Testimony for an extensive discussion of the weaknesses of the slave narratives.

A Treasury of American Folklore. But for the most part material was simply stored in libraries, archives, and universities after the program ended. A few scholars in the 1950s used the stored materials to substantiate their own work, but most of it lay dormant until black revisionist scholars of the 1970s rediscovered the narratives, published many of them, and began to use the material to rewrite black history from the Negro's perspective. Historians interested in life during the Depression have also recently begun to publish and study the life histories. However, among the vast store of material that the FWP had collected, there is still a wealth of folklore information left for scholars to uncover and utilize.

The works listed in the succeeding pages are those that reproduce the interviews relating to folklore and folkways that FWP workers had collected. Their arrangement is in chronological order, to show the pattern in which they appeared. Although every effort was made to obtain a complete list of books published using the narratives, the search was difficult. Many of the titles are unknown, and editors published later books under their own names. Scanning subject references for mentioning of the FWP was moderately successful. It is difficult to

discover a book when the author, title, and publisher are unknown to the searcher.

American Stuff, 1937, was the FWP's first publication, national in scope, that is of a purely creative character. It is a collection of verse, short stories, essays, and excerpts from unpublished novels that resulted when the national director of the Project called for contributions of off-time work. The contributions included picture the American scene of life as it appears from the roadside ditch, the poverty stricken tenement or shack, the relief station. The style and technique reflect a solid, passionate feeling for the life of the less prosperous millions.

Authors from the Southern coastal states are well represented among the contributors, and most of their selections deal with folklore. South Carolina Project workers contributed the selection, "Twenty-one Negro Spirituals". "Old Barham on Democracy", by Edwin Bjorkman, Asheville, North Carolina, is a delightful narrative poem based on an interview with an oldtimer. Harris Dickson of Vicksburg, Mississippi contributed "Phrases of the People" which is a collection of sayings that often reflect the injustices dealt to the black man:

De Lord, he made a nigger, made 'im in de night
Made 'im in a hurry an' forgot to make him white

Naught's a naught, figger's a figger²⁵¹
 All for de white man, none for de nigger

"Lookin' Fer Three Fools," recorded by Luther Clark of Birmingham, Alabama, is a folktale about how John Spencer finally decided to marry Tildy Moore. "Notes on the Contributors" contains a brief biography on each author whose work appears in American Stuff.²⁵² The selections are interesting to read.

These Are Our Lives, 1939, is a collection of stories of real people as told to the members of the FWP in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. Although the names of the informants have been changed, the interviewers' names appear after each selection. Furthermore, W. T. Couch states in the preface that when an editor helped with revision, his name appears after the collector's. The narratives are divided into sections according to the informants' occupations, which range from "On the Farm" to "On Relief." Some individual narratives include: "You're Gonna Have Lace Curtins: White farm laborers," "I Has a Garden: Negro cash renters," "I'd Rather Die: Young overall factory worker and family," and

²⁵¹Federal Writers' Project, American Stuff, p. 150.

²⁵²Except where noted, the above information is from *ibid.* *passim*.

"Weary Willie: CCC boy." The appendix contains Couch's "Instructions to Writers."

Couch also promotes the merits of the interview method which he had developed and which was used to collect the material for the book:

The idea is to get life histories which are readable and faithful representations of living persons, and which, taken together, will give a fair picture of the structure and working of society. So far as I know, this method of portraying the quality of life of a people, of revealing the real workings of institutions, customs, habits, has never before been used for people of any region or country. It seems to me that the method here used has certain possibilities and advantages which should no longer be ignored.²⁵³

The stories reflect Couch's statement, "With all our talk about Democracy it seems not inappropriate to let the people speak for themselves."²⁵⁴ The book is a revealing source of information about those people and the times in which they lived.

The Negro in Virginia, 1940, is the first WPA State book on the Negro. It was written by the all-Negro unit of the state-wide Virginia Writers Project, and coordinated by Roscoe E. Lewis, supervisor of Negro workers. The volume was "ably and sympathetically" edited by

²⁵³Federal Writers' Project, These Are Our Lives (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939) p. ix.

²⁵⁴Ibid., p. xi.

Mrs. Eudora Ramsay Richardson, state supervisor.²⁵⁵ This chronological history of the Negro in Virginia combines the interviews collected in the style of the folklore division with a wide range of history and information concerning the Negro and those associated with him. Written from a black perspective, the twenty-nine chapters include-- "Arrival," "In the Great House," "Slave Artisans," "In the Field," "Jump the Broomstick," "Slave No More," "Forty Acres and a Mule," "Arts," and "City Life."

It is amazing that the book was published, as it contains many complaints of the Negro's inferior position in American Society. Examples are: "A Negro was employed as a locomotive engineer on the Newport News shipyard railway but was discharged after working twelve days because the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, which would not admit him to membership, threatened to call out the white engineers on strike." "As a result of the depression, Negro laborers have learned that the industrial paternalism of flush times affords scant security in leaner years . . ."²⁵⁶ In this

²⁵⁵Writers' Program, The Negro in Virginia, (New York: Hastings House, 1940) p. v.

²⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 317, 320.

book, which made the Book-of-the Month list for June, 1940, Negro history speaks for itself.²⁵⁷

Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies among the Georgia Coastal Negroes, 1940, assembled by the Savannah Unit of the Federal Writers' Project, is a collection of interviews with the inhabitants of black communities in the Georgia and South Carolina coastal region. The book is divided into twenty communities. Each chapter begins with a description of the area named, and relates interviews with people whose names and addresses are footnoted in the text. Most of the statements made by those interviewed are quoted in the third person and interspaced with the questions of the interviewer and his remarks and comments about the informant and his surroundings. Collectors of the interviews do not receive credit for their work. Informants tell of burial customs, conjuring, ghosts, old customs, luck, African stories, baptisms, signs, dances,

²⁵⁷ Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds., Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976) pp. xxi-i, 51; Except where noted, the above material about the book is from Writers' Program, The Negro in Virginia, passim.

etc., that were associated with plantation life, but little about that life itself.²⁵⁸

South Carolina Folk Tales: Stories of Animals and Supernatural Beings, 1941, is a collection of folk tales selected from several thousand manuscripts assembled by workers of the South Carolina Writers' Project. A large part of the collection came from interviews with Negroes along the coast who speak Gullah, a strange and unique dialect, along with others from many places throughout the state. The tales are divided into "Animal Stories" and "Supernatural Stories", and are written as the actual narrator would tell them. Credit is given to the fourteen whites and three blacks who collected the manuscripts and tried to represent their sources' dialects as accurately as possible. The stories about ghosts, hags, apparitions, plat-eyes would be spooky reading on Halloween night.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸The above material about the book is from Writers' Program, Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies among the Georgia Coastal Negroes (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1940), passim.

²⁵⁹An informant claims that plat-eyes come into being when one buries a treasure and places the head of a murdered man in the hole with the valuables. If an intruder approaches the spot, the plat-eye will arise out of the ground in the guise of a six-legged calf or headless hog and frighten the trespasser away in Writers' Program, South Carolina Folk Tales: Stories of Animals and Supernatural Beings (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1941) p. 50; The above material about the book is from *ibid.* passim.

Bundle of Troubles and other Tarheel Tales, 1943, is a collection of thirty-eight tales selected from the more than two hundred collected by North Carolina Project workers. The tales came from farmers, elderly porch-whittlers, housewives, Negro men and women, merchants, and many others. Included are such titles as, "The Stranger's Last Possum," "The Whang Doodle," and "Woman Trouble." Stories provide a variety of themes and treatment and are usually told in the first person. An interesting note occurs in the introduction:

In recording the stories of ghosts and hants, the collectors noted an interesting distinction between white and Negro tellers of such tales. While the former were likely to have their tongues in their cheeks in the telling, the latter usually professed sincere belief in what they told, no matter how improbable the alleged facts might sound to white ears.²⁶⁰

Both interviewers and informants are listed under "Notes" at the back of the book along with comments about circumstances surrounding the tale. Some of the stories are delightful! The editor of the book, W. C. Hendricks, was state editor for the FWP in North Carolina.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰W. C. Hendricks, ed., Bundle of Troubles and other Tarheel Tales (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1943) p. vii.

²⁶¹Except where noted, the above information about the book is from *ibid.* passim.

Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery, 1945, contains a selection and integration of excerpts and complete narratives from the Slave Narrative Collection of the FWP. The book was prepared for publication by Botkin, who organized and prepared the FWP collection for the Library of Congress. Taken from manuscripts of interviews with former slaves whose attitude is summed up in the statement, "Everything I tells you am the truth, but they's plenty I can't tell you," the volume still gives remarkable insight into what it must have been like to be a slave, as well as the problems and joys of freedom.²⁶² Written in the first person, the collection of narratives is divided into sections with titles such as "Tall Tales and Tall Talk," "Lincoln and Others," "They Made us Sing 'Dixie'," "We've Come to Set You Free" and "The Equalization War." A "List of Informants and Interviewers", including where the narratives were collected as well as the informants' places during slavery, appears at the back of the book. While the book contains a few narratives collected in Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Arkansas, most came from the Southern coastal states. The editor, Botkin, was formerly folklore editor in the national office.²⁶³

²⁶² Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, ix.

²⁶³ Except where noted, the above material is from *ibid.*, *passim*.

A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales: Gumbo Ya-Ya, 1945, is a collection of superstition, characters, and history from the various racial groups in Louisiana, gathered either by FWP workers, who were members of the groups themselves, or by those long familiar with such groups. The book describes the under crust world of Louisiana. It is a guidebook not of a place, but to the life that goes on behind closed doors. The book includes the lore associated with various people, places, or incidents, with chapter titles such as: "The Creoles," "Riverfront Lore," and "Saint Joseph's Day." Often related in a dead serious tone and sometimes tongue-in-cheek, the descriptions, songs, tales, history, and anecdotes reflect the kaleidoscope of people who are Louisianans. The compilers were all former Louisiana Project members: Saxon--State Director, Dreyer--Asst. State Director, Tallant--Special Writer.²⁶⁴

Life Under the "Peculiar Institution", 1970, is a collection of selected interviews from the over 2,000 narratives contained in "Slave Narratives, A Folk History

²⁶⁴The above material about the book is from Lyle Saxon, Edward Dreyer, and Robert Tallant, comps., A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales: Gumbo Ya-Ya (New York: Bonanza Books, 1945) passim.

of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves," consisting of typewritten records prepared by the FWP and housed in Washington, D. C. In the interviews "folk speech, idiom, and vernacular storytelling are fused with images, symbols, and myths to convey a sense of the experimental significance and reality of life in bondage."²⁶⁵ They effectively convey the feeling of what it was like to be a slave. The interviews are arranged alphabetically according to what appears to be the real name of the informant. Also included are location of the interview, the informant's age, and the name of the interviewer. The narratives seem to have been chosen because of their tone of honest narration of what the times were like--both good and bad. The bad parts are certainly revealing.²⁶⁶

The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, 1972 comprises eighteen volumes of unedited interviews with ex-slaves conducted by workers of the WPA, originally prepared for the Library of Congress by Botkin, plus the

²⁶⁵Norman R. Yetman, Life Under the "Peculiar Institution:" Selections from the Slave Narrative Collection (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 4.

²⁶⁶Except where noted, the above material about the book is from *ibid.* passim.

first volume which is Rawick's interpretative essay, Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community. Volumes II-XVII contain the FWP interviews categorized by state according to location of interview. Volume XVIII, The Unwritten History of Slavery: Autobiographical Accounts of Negro Ex-Slaves, and Volume XIX, God Struck Me Dead: Religious Conversion Experiences and Autobiographies of Negro Ex-Slaves, consist of interviews conducted by scholars at Fisk University. The series is a tremendous collection of information about slavery told by ex-slaves themselves.²⁶⁷

Slavery Time When I was Chillun Down on Marster's Plantation: Interviews with Georgia Slaves, 1973, contains eighteen complete interviews plus selections from the reminiscences of fifty other slaves, taken from the original interviews preserved at the University of Georgia Library. The narratives describe everyday life on the Georgia plantation life in Georgia at the end of the nineteenth century. Some of the narratives in this collection reveal that, "if there was always plenty of food on a Georgia plantation it

²⁶⁷ Except where noted, the above material about the book is from Rawick, The American Slave, passim.

was seldom meat," and that the slaves often showed remarkable ingenuity in obtaining it.²⁶⁸

Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-slaves, 1976, is the result of an effort to recover all ex-slave interviews collected by members of the Virginia Writers' Project. It includes many of the three hundred narratives gathered by an all-Negro unit with Roscoe E. Lewis as director. Interviews are presented, insofar as possible, in their original form. Many of the selections taken from the Roscoe E. Lewis papers were otherwise unobtainable. The individual interviews are concerned with more serious aspects of life as a slave and after freedom than superstitions, tales, ghost stories, etc. The book includes an extensive introduction that summarizes a history of the FWP in relation to the slave narrative collection. The appendices contain considerable information about both interviewers and informants as well as rather extensive directions to interviewers found among Lewis's papers.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸Ronald Killion, and Charles Waller, eds., Slavery Time When I was Chillun Down on Marster's Plantation: Interviews with Georgia Slaves, 1973) p. xvi; The above material about the book is from *ibid.* passim.

²⁶⁹The above material about the book is from Perdue, Barden and Phillips, Weevils in the Wheat, passim.

Such As Us: Southern Voices of the Thirties, 1978, is a selection of life histories from the more than one thousand, gathered from throughout the South by FWP workers, that were left over after thirty-five appeared in These Are Our Lives. The narratives, interspaced with quotes from other life histories, provide a view of the world that people of the 1930s saw, experienced, and helped create. The life histories are grouped in four sections: "The Civil War: Victory and Defeat;" "Farms and Farmers;" "Towns, Mills, and Scattered Places;" and "White Over Black--Anxious Times . . . an Uncertain Future." Credit is given to the interviewer, and the location of the interview cited. However, the narrators remain anonymous.²⁷⁰

First-Person America, 1980, is a collection of eighty stories chosen from the more than 150,000 pages of FWP material stored in the Library of Congress. The narratives represent a cross-section of the American population throughout the United States. The book is divided into eleven topical chapters including "Old Times," "The Yards," "Tobacco People," and "Woman on Work."

²⁷⁰The above information is from Tom E. Terrill and Jerrold Hirsch, eds., Such as Us: Southern Voices of the Thirties (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978) passim.

Selections use the name of each informant as a title and include a brief description of him or her. Many of the interviews recorded took place in Southern coastal states.²⁷¹

The above publications show that not all of the material that the FWP and Writers' Program had collected was relegated to institutional libraries and simply neglected. Many of the tales, slave narratives, and life histories have emerged as fascinating, lively accounts in the publications utilizing them. Furthermore, they provide relevant insights to the times and people they portray. In addition to the legacy of the actual folk-related material published, the FWP has made another significant contribution. Scholars have found another use for both the published works that came out of the FWP and the unpublished material besides. Historians analyze the narratives and use them as source material.

The FWP interviews, published or unpublished, are factual documents that provide fascinating footnotes and primary sources for the history of the times they embrace, lend themselves to historical interpretation, and possess social, cultural, and literary value. Scholars soon began

²⁷¹Banks, First-Person America, passim.

to use them to substantiate their own work. As early as 1956 Kenneth Stamp, who "assumed that the slaves were merely ordinary human beings . . . , white men with black skins," consulted the FWP slave-narrative collection in the Library of Congress when writing The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South.²⁷²

Simply flipping through the black history books on a library shelf will reveal others who more recently have utilized the interviews as a source. Eugene D. Genovese extensively cites the Library of Congress collection compiled by Rawick as well as The Negro in Virginia and other FWP works in Roll Jordan Roll: The World The Slaves Made, 1974.²⁷³ The book is "bold reassessment of the master-slave relationship."²⁷⁴

In Slavery: Its Origin and Legacy, 1975, John B. Duff and Larry A. Greene of Seton Hall University list the Library of Congress collection and other publications that resulted from the FWP as a "useful primary source describing

²⁷²Kenneth M. Stamp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York: Random House, 1956) pp. vii, 431.

²⁷³Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974) pp. 681-799 passim.

²⁷⁴Ibid., jacket.

slave life and attitudes."²⁷⁵ However, they add that interviews were collected long after slavery ended.

John W. Blassingame includes an extensive, well substantiated discussion of the shortcomings and problems of the WPA slave narratives in his introduction to Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies. But he also claims that "on certain topics the WPA interviews represent an incomparable source," and "reveal much about the nature of slavery."²⁷⁶ The chapter, "Interviews by Scholars, 1872-1938," contains many of the WPA interviews.

The ultimate acclaim that the slave narratives have received is the publication of the Paul D. Escott's Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth Century Slave Narratives. The book is the first major attempt to analyze the slave narratives collected by FWP workers and similar materials gathered by researchers at Fisk University. It presents evidence from the slave narratives in an effective, systematic way and offers comments and reinterpretation of the major concepts and issues developed in the study of

²⁷⁵John B. Duff and Larry A. Green, Slavery: Its Origin and Legacy (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1975) pp. 137-138.

²⁷⁶John W. Blassingame, Slave Testimony, p. iv.

American slavery. Seventy-two tables give the number and percentages of historically significant evidence garnered from the narratives, such as--"Occupations in Slavery," "Ratings of Food," "Reported Experiences of Cruel Treatment," "Types of Slave Breeding," and "Occupations in Freedom". Among the chapters that describe life as a slave are: "Two Peoples and Two Worlds," "Conditions of Life," "Forms of Resistance," and "Bases of Black Culture". The text discusses general patterns in the narratives as well as specific incidents and exceptions to the pattern.²⁷⁷

Until the present, scholars have not been as interested in the life histories as in the slave narratives. However, with the recent publication of First-Person America and historians' and economists' preoccupation with the Depression, no doubt the life histories will receive more attention. As for the unpublished FWP folklore materials waiting to be rediscovered, their possibilities are intriguing and endless. Specifically there are many of the manuscripts from the Texas Project housed at the University of Texas, Austin, that contain lively Texas tales like

²⁷⁷The above information about the book is from Escott, Slavery Remembered, passim.

"Dictionary Pete," "How Snakey Joe Got His Name," and "A Joint Venture."²⁷⁸

The fate of the FWP folklore materials, their subsequent resurrection, and their use as historical documents certainly justified one Project member's belief in the value of folklore. Benjamin Botkin, who so aptly called what the FWP collected "living lore," wrote the following to conclude the chapter "Folk and Folklore" for the proposed FWP publication "Culture in the South":

In a final consideration of the values of folklore it remains to be seen that . . . beyond its artistic and utilitarian [sic] basis, its ultimate cultural value and sanction is that of essential humanity. This is [a] precious residue that must be preserved by an integration of folk wisdom with literary and scientific education. For the life of the folk, being rooted in nature, like the wild plant that is [sic] is, would seem to be hardier and more fit to endure than any form of the cultivated life; which springs out of it²⁷⁹

The folklore that Botkin felt was so important continues to live and is being preserved as both history and lore in books and in the minds of the people who read them.

²⁷⁸ Austin, Texas, Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, Works Progress Administration Records, Box 4J 223.

²⁷⁹ Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, Works Progress Administration Records, Box 36/2.

Because of the nature of the FWP folklore material, its value has increased since the time of its collection and continues to grow in significance. The Library of Congress recently moved its FWP manuscripts to newer, larger facilities and is in the process of cataloguing FWP material that was simply stacked in a large room and left virtually untouched. Scholars continue to rediscover and interpret material gathered by members of the FWP.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The idea of writing about the folklore and folkways of the American people was present from the very beginning of the inception of the FWP, and when planners decided to write an American guide, folklore became an important aspect of that undertaking. Scholars still do not agree on the definitions of the words "folklore" and "folkways," and people during the 1930s had various ideas of just what the subject encompasses. It was these very differences of definitions and opinions that enabled Project workers to collect such a wide range of materials as "folklore."

Through the perceptions and efforts of administrators like Henry Alsberg, John Alan Lomax, Sterling Brown, and Lyle Saxon, folklore and folkways in the writers' Project came to mean more than two words with definitions. The topic became a means to collect information about Americans in a way and upon a scale that had never been attempted before. Administrators on both the national and state levels sent out workers to collect material, and as they sent them out, the FWP developed a method of collecting information on folklore and folkways by interviewing people.

Because of the very nature of the FWP as a government relief organization, national and state directors sent many different people from a wide range of previous occupations to collect "living lore." Some wrote down life histories; others, slave narratives; and still others, superstitions, tales, and anecdotes. Each interviewer and informant contributed a part to that body of writing that the FWP called "folklore."

Editors and writers on the state level took the vast amount of folklore material collected and culled, condensed, and rewrote it to create sections on folklore and folkways in the guidebooks. Special editors on the national level then screened and passed judgment on the copy. Often there was a conflict of opinions between the state and national offices over the material. Those differences and how administrators resolved them are evident upon analyses of the essays on folklore and folkways in the guides--particularly when the work concerns the treatment of the Negro as a folk group.

While work on the guides took precedence, directors also encouraged other publications. It was what directors on both the state and national level as well as what project workers themselves decided should be collected that determined the "folklore" a state produced in addition

to the guide book material. Some states planned folklore publications to use surplus materials left over after writing the guides. Others would use material collected for publications planned by the national office. Still others proposed publications such as Louisiana's Gumbo Ya-Ya that reflected a pet interest of the state director.

Because the FWP ended rather abruptly, and completion of the guides took precedence, most plans for folklore-related publications did not reach fruition. Some were published under the revised Writers' Program, and others were printed shortly after the Program's demise. But, for the most part, folklore material which the FWP collected was left sitting in national and state institutions to wait for other editors and scholars to study and publish it.

Much of the material gathered under the heading of folklore, whether published or unpublished, has been used as source material by black revisionist scholars. The first black revisionist scholarship to emerge from the FWP material was The Negro in Virginia which combines ex-slave interviews with historical research to portray a revised picture of the history of the Negro. It is the beginning of a picture that challenges that of white historians which was prevalent in the South of the 1930s simply

because a mostly illiterate society could not speak for itself in a segregated South. Other black revisionist scholars from the 1950s to the present continue to use Project material as a basis for their work.

The guides do not portray an accurate picture of people in the South as planners said they would because for the most part the guidebooks ignored the depression then in progress and showed only the South that Southerners wanted to see and be seen. Folklore in the guides, however, did reflect the conflicting attitudes toward the Negro in the segregated South of the times as well as prejudice toward other minority groups. Material gathered for other folklore publications does tell a story that reflects the times. The life histories collected in the Southern coastal states reveal life as it was during the 1930s, and the slave narratives have become material used to write history.

Paradoxically, what FWP planners said would portray an accurate picture of America did not do so in the South. And what Project workers collected as folklore has become history. The guides which were of primary importance under both the FWP and the Writers' Program have, until now, been ignored by scholars who preferred to work with

the other legacies of the FWP. Planners originally considered folklore and folkways as something beyond history that was necessary to complete the picture of a civilization. Through the FWP folklore became the very essence of history itself.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL OFFICE FOR COL-
LECTING FOLKLORE AS REPRODUCED IN FEDERAL
RELIEF ADMINISTRATION AND THE ARTS

1. Are there any Indian legends which tell stories of your community? What are they? Give the exact location of the scene of the story.
2. Are there any geographic features, canyons, mountains, peaks, headlands, etc., named for Indian legends? What are they?
3. Are there recognized such things as wishing seats, wishing wells, swamps or quicksands with sinister properties, localities with beneficent qualities, proposal rocks or lands, etc?
4. Are there any stories concerned with animals or animal life, or the relation between human beings and animals, which are native to your community?
5. Are there any special festivals celebrated at special times of the year designed to insure good luck, good crops, good weather, etc.? Describe them.
6. Can you discover any local songs or ballads, sung or commonly used by any group of people or passed down in any particular family? Copy them or get them by word of mouth.
7. Are there special fairs or market days, particularly if they are significant as related to local products or local life or industry? Describe them.
8. Is there a particular kind of costume common to a sect or group worn in your district? Describe it. How did it originate?
9. Are there special customs relating to particular days in the year, such as Fourth of July, Hallowe'en, Christmas, etc.? Describe them.
10. Are there special customs observed at the birth of a child, upon the death of a person, at marriages?
11. Are there community gatherings such as quilting, singing schools, etc.? Describe them.

12. Are there any peculiarities of table service or dining routine, such as serving the husband first, serving of bread by the father, etc.?

13. Are there religious customs, such as public denunciation of wrong-doing, Easter services, blessing of crops or of rivers, camp meetings? Describe them.

14. Are there rodeos, joustings, log-rolling contests? Are there localized ghost stories, witch stories, etc.?

The addenda, as prepared by Lomax, follow:

1. Are there any words, phrases, or expressions peculiar to your section, such as dialect, slang, unusual "graces" at table, drinking toasts, short rhymes, dance calls, "play party" songs, etc.?

2. Are there any of the so-called "Tall Tales," where the story teller gets the effect either through exaggeration or understatement, stories that are not in print but that are passed around by "word of mouth"?

3. Are there any jokes, anecdotes, about some local character or unusual person of the present or past that are passed around by the campfire or where two or three good fellows meet together?

4. Are there any unusual epitaphs in old graveyards, or signs about abandoned mines or starved-out towns, or painted on way-side stones?

5. Are there any persons in your community who are believed to possess power to see into the future? Tell some of the current stories about such persons.

APPENDIX B

"INSTRUCTIONS TO WRITERS" AS ISSUED BY
WILLIAM COUCH AND PRINTED IN
THESE ARE OUR LIVES

1. Materials are to be collected on tenant farmers and their families, farm owners and their families, cotton mill villagers and their families, persons and their families in service occupations in towns and cities, and persons and their families in miscellaneous occupations such as lumbering, mining, fishing, turpentineing. Samples showing the nature of the materials to be collected are attached hereto.

2. The life histories may range from approximately two thousand words to ten or fifteen thousand words, depending upon the interest of the material.

3. An outline is attached hereto. This outline shows the nature of the subject matter which should be covered in the life history. However, it is not desired that each life history or story follow this outline in a rigid manner. The stories will not be useable if they are constructed on a rigid pattern. For instance, the writer may reverse the order of the outline, he may begin with any item which he considers of special importance in the case under consideration, he may follow the whole outline or limit himself to a part of it in any particular story. It is immaterial whether the stories are written in the first, second, or third person. Insofar as possible, the stories should be told in the words of the persons who are consulted. The effort should be made to get definite information. Avoid generalities such as "those who are industrious and ambitious can do well," "had not made good use of opportunities"-- wherever possible expand such wording to give detail, that is, exactly what industry and ambition might have done or what the opportunities were that could have been used. In general avoid the expression of judgment. The writer will, of course, have to exercise judgment in determining the course of a conversation through which he gains information, but aside from this, he should keep his own opinions and feelings in the background as much as possible. For instance, if he sees people living under conditions which he thinks are terrible, he should be most careful not to express his opinion in any way and thus possibly affect the opinion of the person to whom he is talking. He must try to discover the real feeling of the person consulted and must record this feeling regardless of his own attitude toward it. Any story in which this principle is violated will be worthless.

4. Writers should not limit themselves to the types of stories shown in the samples. It is hoped that original modes of presenting the material will be developed. The criteria to be observed are those of accuracy, human interest, social importance, literary excellence. It may not be possible to combine all these in any one story. However, accuracy and literary excellence should be present in all. A story of some very exceptional family may be of great human interest but of minor social importance. The best stories will be those which combine all these elements. (By accuracy, it was explained in conferences, is meant simply write what you smell, see, hear. Writers cannot check on the accuracy of what is said. Get in the subject's own words what he has done, felt, and thought. If the subject's head is filled with wrong notions, foolish thoughts, and misinformation, if this kind of material comes out in conversation, record it. Let the subject's mind speak for itself.)

5. While the majority of stories should be about families and should attempt to include information on all the points listed in the attached outline, it may be best in some instances to write about a section of a village or a community; or a story may be written about any one of the items in the outline, such as, for instance, the size of the family, the coming of children and the effect their coming has on the fortunes of the family. Any town, community, village, or open country from which a number of stories are secured should itself be described in a separate story.

6. Some topics of importance may come up which are not covered in the outline. It will be best to go ahead and treat such topics and not wait to ask for permission to deal with them. However, no state director should allow writers to abandon the outline and sample stories to such an extent as to change the nature of the work.

7. All the stories do not have to be solemn and packed with information. If an amusing incident reveals the attitude of a family towards some important problem then this incident should be related.

8. The purpose of this work is to secure material which will give an accurate, honest, interesting, and fairly comprehensive view of the kind of life that is lived by the majority of the people in the South. It is extremely important that families be fairly selected, that

those which get along well or fairly well be selected for stories as well as those that make a less favorable impression. The sub-normal, the normal, the above normal, all should have stories written about them. As the work gets along, it will be necessary to expand it in order to include other important groups, but insofar as possible, a beginning should be made with the groups indicated above. In those parts of the South where cotton textile manufacturing is unimportant, and other industries dominate the scene, these other industries should be selected for treatment. For instance, in and around Birmingham, Alabama, both families in textile manufacturing and families working in coal and iron industries should be treated.

9. Each story should carry on the first page the date when the first version is written, the name of the writer and the name and address of the family written about. This information needs to be given for purposes of verification. Names will be changed in any material that is published.

10. It is hoped that out of this material four or five volumes will be secured which can be published under a series name such as LIFE IN THE SOUTH with individual names for each volume.

OUTLINE FOR LIFE HISTORIES*

I. Family

1. Size of family.
2. Effect of family-size upon financial status of family.
3. Attitude toward large families.
4. Attitude toward limitation of family.
5. Occupational background of family.
6. Pride in family, including ancestry.

II. Education

1. Number of years of school attendance.
2. Causes of limited education.
3. Attitudes toward education.
 - a. Educational advantages desired for children.

- b. Whether worker believes school training is economic advantage.
- c. Evaluation of school system.
- d. Ambition, ideals. Idea of good life. Which comes first owning home or owning car. Does family own car?

III. Income

1. Comparison of present income with first weekly or annual income.
2. Actual needs to be covered by income.
3. Extent to which income covers actual needs.
4. Sense of relative values in expenditure of income.
5. What person consulted considers an adequate income.

IV. Attitudes Toward Occupation and Kind of Life

1. Pride or shame in work.
2. Influence of attitudes of others.
3. Basis of objections to or satisfaction with life.
4. Attitudes toward owners.
5. Advantages or disadvantages of present life in comparison with other types of life, e.g., working in mill compared with working on farm, life in town with life in country.

V. Politics

1. Extent of voting.
2. Degree of independence in casting ballot.
3. Preferences in choice of candidates.
4. Party consciousness.
5. Consciousness of changing trends in thought.

VI. Religion and Morals

1. Influence of religion on morals.
2. Attitudes toward various forms of amusements.
3. Relations to churches.
 - a. Contributions.
 - b. Attitude toward aid from churches.
 - c. Attendance.

VII. Medical Needs

1. Money expended for hospital and doctor bills.
2. To what extent health has been protected through adequate medical care.
3. What effect work has had upon health.

VIII. Diet

1. Knowledge of balanced diet.
2. To what extent knowledge is applied.
3. To what extent it is possible to have balanced diet on wage earned.

IX. Miscellaneous Observations

1. Cleanliness and order of house; number of rooms.
2. Cleanliness of person.
3. Furnishings in house.
4. Sleeping accommodations.
5. Bathroom facilities.
6. Pride in possessions.

X. Use of Time

1. Annual routine.
E.g., preparation of soils for planting--planting--cultivation--laying by--occupations and amusements during interval between laying by and harvesting--harvesting--settlement--moving.
2. Daily routine during the different periods indicated above.
3. Amusements, visiting, courting. Where do courting couples go?
Where do men spend their leisure hours?

*Prepared by Ida Moore.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EX-SLAVES ISSUED BY
THE NATIONAL OFFICE

The following questionnaire, sent to state offices of the FWP from the national office, was used with very little success in Virginia. (See Roscoe Lewis's comments under "Interviewing Techniques" in the Introduction.) This document is from the Roscoe Lewis Papers, Collis P. Huntington Library, Hampton Institute, Hampton, Va.

These topics are designed as a guide for interviewing ex-slaves. It should be admitted that no ex-slave has yet furnished information on all of the items, nor is it expected that an informant do so. Some will have information on certain questions, others on certain other questions. Generally the interviewer will soon learn what particular aspects of slavery are recalled by the old person. Of the greatest importance are facts concerning:

1. Full names—their parents, brothers, and sisters, their owner's and his family.
2. Places—location of their owner's plantation by county, state, census tract, or deed number.
3. Their exact location in the census years 1850 and 1860.

1. Name
2. Age?—(How does he know his age?)
3. Weight?
4. Height?
5. Color or complexion?
6. Evidence of age?
7. Dress?
8. Teeth?
9. Voice?
10. Eyes?
11. Hearing?
12. Sex?
13. Hair?
14. Health?

15. Birthplace of parents?
16. Nationality parents?
17. Birthplace—county, state, name of plantation?
18. Brothers and sisters—names, and ages, living and dead?
19. Length of time in present residence?
20. Master and mistress—names, number children, their names and ages?
21. Relationship to owners?
22. Treatment by owners?
23. Discipline as a slave?
24. How administered?
25. Why disciplined?
26. Differences between treatment [for] men and women?
27. Discipline of children?
28. Who administered punishment?
29. Manumission?
30. Maiming slaves?
31. Resisting owners or overseers?
32. Sex relations of slaves?
33. Sex relations [between] slaves and whites?
34. Runaways?
35. Why slaves ran away?
36. Where runaways went?
37. How slaves escaped?
38. Did whites help them escape?
39. Treatment when captured?
40. Did slaves help runaways?
41. Examples of free Negroes sold as slaves?
42. Examples of free Negroes?
43. Free Negroes owning slaves?
44. Any members of family run away?
45. Ever run away or help others run away?
46. Size of plantation?
47. Number of slaves?
48. Attitude of master toward slaves?
49. To whom were slaves directly responsible?
50. Attitude of overseer?
51. Work done by father?
52. Work done by mother?

53. Work done by other slaves?
54. Work in the plantation house?
55. Difference in treatment of field hands and house servants?
56. Jealousy between house servants and field hands?
57. Jealousy between dark and light slaves?
58. Which was easier—house or field work?
59. Difference in working hours in the field and the house?
60. What was the easiest and hardest work for slaves?
61. Hiring of slaves?
62. Meals of slaves?
63. Where were slaves bought?
64. What was usually paid for slaves?
65. Where were the slaves sold?
66. When were slaves usually sold?
67. Description of slave sales?
68. Location of slave blocks, etc.?
69. Attitude of slaves toward being sold?
70. Did slaves after sale ever get back to their home?
71. How often were slaves furnished clothing?
72. Types of summer clothing?
73. Types of winter clothing?
74. What did slaves do when it rained?
75. Treatment of lazy or rebellious slaves?
76. Were slave families ever broken up?
77. How close were slave family ties?
78. How did slaves get to be house servants?
79. Where did house servants sleep?
80. What kind of quarters?
81. Floors?
82. Rooms?
83. Cold or warm?
84. Beds?
85. Beds for children?
86. Pictures?
87. Curtains?
88. Windows?
89. Fireplaces, fuel?
90. Furniture, bought or handmade?

91. Eating?
92. How far were quarters from the mansion house?
93. Size of the mansion house?
94. Was it pretty?
95. Furniture?
96. Is it still standing? Where?
97. Fireplaces?
98. Did house servants sleep in?
99. Who cooked in the quarters?
100. Who cooked in the big house?
101. Food for slaves?
102. Was there enough food?
103. How was it apportioned?
104. Anything to drink?
105. Any liquor? When?
106. What time was bedtime?
107. What was rising time?
108. Time off during the day?
109. At what age did children start working?
110. What crops were grown?
111. Could slaves marry a slave on another plantation?
112. Who delivered babies?
113. Child birth procedures?
114. Pre and post-delivery care?
115. Who named slave babies?
116. Were slave babies christened?
117. Medical and dental care of slaves?
118. Special treatment of very ill slaves?
119. How were slaves married?
120. Describe a slave marriage?
121. At what age were they permitted to marry?
122. Permission to marry?
123. Did they have a ring or broomstick marriage?
124. Time off to marry?
125. Time off for a honeymoon?
126. Where was the marriage held?
127. All slaves in attendance?
128. Marriage costumes?

129. Were slaves ever divorced?
130. Describe a slave funeral?
131. All slaves in attendance?
132. Funeral wake?
133. Funeral sermon?
134. Casket or coffin?
135. Where was the slave graveyard?
136. Mourning costumes?
137. Did slaves mourn for dead master or mistress?
138. Did slave attend funerals of whites?
139. Mulatto or near-white babies?
140. Babies commonly thought to be the master's?
141. Slaves taught to read or write? By whom?
142. Restrictions on handling books?
143. What did master and mistress call slaves?
144. What did slaves call one another?
145. Did slaves mind being called nigger?
146. What did slaves call master or mistress?
147. What did whites call one another in the presence of slaves?
148. What did slaves call poor whites?
149. Did slaves speak when they met white persons?
150. Were slaves supposed to tip their hats to whites?
151. Did slaves use the mansion house front door?
152. Did slaves walk along side their master when together?
153. Did slaves ever sit down in the presence of whites?
154. Were certain slaves favored?
155. Was there a "manny" [*sic*] for the big house?
156. Were white and slave babies cared for together?
157. Did Mannies [*sic*] do any other work?
158. How were mannies chosen?
159. How were aged mannies treated?
160. Were there head slaves in the big house?
161. Were slaves allowed to have firearms?
162. Were slave passes issued to leave the place?
163. Describe a slave pass?
164. Paterollers?
165. What happened if a pateroller caught a slave with no pass?
166. Were paterollers slaveowners or poor whites?

167. Did slaves and paterollers ever fight?
168. Was the slave code ever read to slaves?
169. Were slaves ever carried to court?
170. Did slaves fight with one another?
171. Did slaves ever fight with poor whites?
172. What did whites call free Negroes?
173. How did poor whites and free Negroes get along?
174. Did poor whites ever beg from slaves?
175. Did free Negroes ever beg from slaves?
176. Did you know any free Negroes?
177. What did free Negroes call themselves?
178. How did free Negroes earn a living?
179. Did they get along better than slaves?
180. Did you long to be free during slavery?
181. How did Negroes get free?
182. Did slaves and free Negroes ever marry?
183. Could free Negroes go anywhere they wanted?
184. Did slaves ever get the "catching sickness"?
185. Was there ever any "bad disease" in the quarters?
186. Did doctors or midwives ever "take" slave babies?
187. Did slave women ever have miscarriages?
188. Did slaves ever perform abortions?
189. Did slaves ever practice contraception?
190. Could slaves stay unmarried if they desired?
191. Were new-born slave babies good-looking?
192. Were new-born white babies good-looking?
193. Were slave babies as healthy as white babies?
194. Were babies as healthy then as now?
195. Are times as good now or better compared with slave days?
196. Have you been happier in slavery or free?
197. Do you think being a slave hurt the Negro?
198. Can you read and write?
199. Did you ever go to school?
200. How did slaves learn to read and write?
201. Did whites ever help them?
202. Did free Negroes ever help them?
203. Did free Negroes ever go to school?
204. Did poor whites ever go to school?

205. Did master's children go to school?
206. Did slaves ever learn from master's children or his books?
207. Were slaves allowed to handle books?
208. Were slaves allowed to have pencils?
209. Did slaves ever have secret "learning" lessons?
210. Were they ever caught?
211. Did you hear about Negroes being free in the North?
212. Did you ever hear about the Underground Railroad?
213. Were slaves allowed to own a Bible?
214. Who preached to slaves?
215. Where did slaves sit in church?
216. Could slaves sing or preach in church?
217. What did the preacher take as his text for slaves?
218. Did whites attend special slave services?
219. What did slaves do on Sunday?
220. What were the regular slave vacations?
221. What did slaves do during Christmas holidays?
222. Special rations and gifts at Christmas?
223. Were there ever slave dances?
224. Describe the way slaves danced?
225. Could slaves have dances whenever they wanted?
226. How did slave children amuse themselves?
227. What other slave celebrations were there?
228. What were the names of slave dances?
229. What music was there at slave dances?
230. What songs do you recall that were sung during slavery?
231. Shout songs?
232. Field or work songs?
233. Hymns sung in church?
234. Did whites and Negroes sing the same songs in church?
235. Freedom songs?
236. Did slaves assemble at times just to sing?
237. Did slaves ever have "bush-habor" [*sic*] services?
238. Did slaves believe in "hants"?
239. Did slaves practice Voodoo?
240. Did any slaves cast or break "spells"?
241. Did you ever see any ghosts or spirits?
242. Did you see the stars fall?

243. Do you remember Cox's snow?
244. Were slaves allowed to court one another?
245. Did slaves have relations with one another without "marriage"?
246. Was there a cabin for each couple?
247. Where did slaves go to the toilet?
248. Did men and women have separate toilets?
249. Did whites and slaves use the same toilet?
250. Did slaves comb and brush their hair?
251. Did slaves use grease or lard on their hair?
252. Did slaves clean their teeth? With what?
253. Did slaves clean their shoes on Sunday?
254. Did slaves bathe regular?
255. Where and how often did slaves bathe?
256. Did slaves wash their clothes?
257. Did slaves press their clothes?
258. Did slaves ever own watches, rings, false teeth?
259. Did slaves ever wear eyeglasses?
260. Were slaves furnished hats?
261. Did slaves carry walking sticks?
262. Did slaves wear socks and stockings?
263. Did slaves ever wear neckties?
264. Did slaves carry handkerchiefs?
265. Did the usual slave clothing have pockets?
266. Did you know any slave born in Africa?
267. Did you know any slaves born in the West Indies?
268. Did the old folks ever talk about Africa?
269. Did you know any slaves born in the West Indies? [*repeat of 267*]
270. Did you ever hear of the colonization society?
271. Did you ever hear of any Creole slaves?
272. Did you ever hear of any Indian slaves?
273. Did you ever hear of any white slaves?
274. Did you know any Indians?
275. Did any slaves ever run away to the Indian[s]?
276. Did slaves ever marry Indians?
277. Did free Negroes ever marry Indians?
278. Have you a picture of your father, mother, yourself?
279. Have you any old papers—passes, free papers, etc.?
280. Have you any old furniture or articles used during slavery?

281. Did you ever hear of Nat Turner? Gabriel Vesey? [*Writer seems to have confused Gabriel Prosser and Denmark Vesey.*]
282. Did you ever hear of John Brown?
283. Where were you when the war came?
284. Where was your master during the war?
285. Did an overseer stay on the place during the war?
286. Did any slaves rebel during the war?
287. Did any slaves run away during the war?
288. Did slaves work on fortifications for the southern armies?
289. What troops and what fighting did you see?
290. Did you see any Negro troops?
291. How did the Yankees treat the slaves?
292. Did any slaves accompany their master to war?
293. How did Confederate soldiers treat the slaves?
294. Did the Yankees steal anything from your plantation?
295. Did the Yankees burn anything on your place?
296. How did you first learn you were free?
297. How old were you when you learned you were free?
298. What did you do when you learned you were free?
299. Were you paid wages after freedom?
300. Were the slaves glad to be free?
301. How did whites and Negroes get along after freedom?
302. Did former slaveowners and Negroes fight after freedom?
303. Did free Negroes help former slaves after freedom?
304. Did slaves celebrate their emancipation?
305. Where did you go after freedom?
306. Did any Negroes desert their families after freedom?
307. Did Negroes change their names after freedom?
308. Did Negroes want to go North after freedom?
309. What did slaves think about Abraham Lincoln?
310. Was the Ku [Klux] Klan in your neighborhood?
311. Was your former master in the Klan?
312. Did the Ku Klux Klan ever bother you or your people?
313. Did Negroes organize to defend themselves from the Klan?
314. Did Negroes ever fight the Klan?
315. What organizations did you join after freedom?
316. Did you or any Negroes you know vote after freedom?
317. Have you ever voted?

318. Did you go to school after freedom? How far?
319. Where and what was the name of the school you attended?
320. Who taught the first school you know of after freedom?
321. Did whites object to schools for Negroes after freedom?
322. Did you or your people build a home after freedom?
323. How did Negroes address whites after freedom?
324. Did you belong to a building and loan society after freedom?
325. Did you belong to a burial society after freedom?
326. Did you join a church after freedom? White or Negro?
327. Did Negroes in your section build a church after freedom?
328. Did Negroes tend to save or waste the first wages they [were] paid?
329. Were Negroes allowed to carry guns after freedom?
330. Did Negroes pay taxes after freedom?
331. Give the name of the person you married?
332. Give the names of all your children?
333. Give the names of all who live in the same house with you?

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