

***Prejudice and Pride: Lesbian and Gay Traditions in America.***  
**A Special Issue of New York Folklore 1993, 19.1/2 ISSN**  
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*Culture or Indigena* might be out on an extended loan (i.e., you've lost it). There are, as well, both new essays (several by very new scholars), and Neil V. Rosenberg's update to "Ethnicity and Class: Black Country Musicians in the Maritimes."

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*Prejudice and Pride: Lesbian and Gay Traditions in America. A Special Issue of New York Folklore 1993, 19.1/2 ISSN 0361-204X, 244 p.*

In an appropriately inverted echo of Jane Austen's title, *New York Folklore* offers its *Prejudice and Pride* issue on lesbian and gay traditions in America. From its cover photograph of twinned tees ("My Mom's Not Gay and That's Okay", reads one, the other, "My Daughter's a Dyke and That's All Right"), through its impressively wide-ranging contents, the issue is a provocative study in looking-glass-variety contradictions and challenges for the folklorist. Kay Turner's concluding essay on "Rewriting Tradition" captures some of these complexities in describing her cheerfully liminal perspective as the "Queer Politics of a Lesbian Folklorist." Charles Bergengren's ironically titled "Untitled (Opus 7): This Is Folklore" is in part a story of not being seen as folklore and in part a refusal to be reduced to folklore. What do we make, for example, of the claim to a "Voice of Tradition", a major section title of this journal, when applied to a set of communities that did not exist in any socially similar form until this century, were largely prevented from public expression of any culture they might have had, and in our time often queer away from the essentializing impetus of any such claims to tradition?

What we have on display in *Prejudice and Pride* is evidence of the centrality of folklore to people whose communities might have been expected by outsiders to have had precious little opportunity to develop a "voice of tradition." The articles cover a range of folklore sites and, inevitably, sights, with gay and lesbian life offered up for examination in an edition clearly addressed from editorial paraphernalia onwards to a straight readership. The texts cover the territory from gay repetitions of largely straight religious rites (Primiano) and aboriginal understandings of two-spirited people as part of the creation (Harris & Lone Dog), through to the queer-Americana life-story of an early homosexual

rights activist (Legg) and vivid recounting of extreme sexual practices in the pre-AIDS era of big-city bathhouses (Avrut). Everywhere the theme of the frontiers of cultural possibility for prohibited folk is explored in one queer way or another, and, thankfully, without any sign of the self-censoring best-face strategy that can deplete the intellectual energy of gay texts written for straight consumption to the point that they become uninteresting to insiders.

In these days of prolific publication by Queer Theorists and Gay and Lesbian Studies specialists, it is not at all unusual to find robust collections of such articles as these: Routledge has channelled a major portion of its publishing efforts into the field; many other houses, large and small, have produced catalogues full of queer texts; specialized journals have emerged; academic programs and institutes have developed; the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Studies Association now holds meetings at the Learned. *Newsweek* declared lesbians chic at about the time that *Prejudice and Pride* was published. That we should find a folklore journal contributing to the excitement should by some counts not surprise. After all, Cultural Studies, Folklore's politicized cousin, is perhaps the field of greatest queer scholarship so far. Yet surprise it does, and the editorial essay makes it clear why.

Those of us inclined to pop the cork before the ship is in should read the editors' impassioned essay arguing for the dignity of lesbian and gay lives against a backdrop of such homophobic opposition to the publication of this Special Issue that one board member insisted on having his protest against obscenity printed on the inside cover of the journal. Blincoe and Forrest are clearly to be commended for efforts well beyond those normally required of journal editors in getting this issue to the printer. Many objections were to taking a political stand in an academic area, which amounts to prohibiting queer content altogether, since gay or lesbian studies in the context of a homophobic culture is always already political, whether the writer is reflecting on the crucial role of fiction in both chronicling and teaching gay folklore (Browning) or arguing that *Hothead Paisan*, a lesbian grassroots 'zine, is following an important amazon tradition of "Clearing a Space for Lesbian Feminist Folklore" in giving free imaginative rein to an (understandably) enraged dyke who is homicidally impatient with homophobes and sexists (Heller). The editors also note an explanation for folklore's poor showing in the field of lesbian and gay studies that has more to do with a tendency towards "cuteness" than with one away from politics: while the folklore of most communities, by no means only the voyeurized lesbian and gay communities, "contains copious sexual material, both allusive and explicit...American folklorists in particular have shown themselves to be reluctant to deal with it to any degree which accurately reflects its importance in traditional lore" (p. 6). Notwithstanding the editors' sensible admonishment to the straight reader that there is more to queer than sex, each of the contributors

gives credence to Joan Nestle's claim that being a sexual people is lesbians' and gays' gift to the world.

Articles range across the disciplines and from the eclectic variety of theoretical perspectives to be expected given the currently high (and heated) level of theory-building within the general area of lesbian and gay studies. Several essays covering gay English (Leap), lesbian body rhetoric (Laude), and lesbian code (Dobkin) explore the risky paths of communication that facilitate dyke-spotting and community-building in homophobic environments. A photographic essay aims to present the "lore" of lesbian lives free from the distortions of a heterosexist gaze (Phillips), and "Excerpts from an Oral History of New York City's 82 Club" gives a window into one version of the possibilities and prohibitions of post-war, pre-Stonewall life (Jeffreys).

Joseph Goodwin's introductory essay takes up the subject of heterosexism in folklore studies, surveying the few articles published under the name of folklore, and proposing a list of research possibilities that are obvious choices not only for more traditional folklore approaches, but all the more so for folklorists interested in the processes of cultural resistance at work in marginalized communities, and the processes of suppression, assimilation, and occasionally social progress by which dominant cultures co-exist with their subalterns. Goodwin does not point out, though, that work on many of the items in his list is already being done under the rubric of Cultural Studies, typically employing post-modernist analysis. This volume offers newcomers to queer folklore a glimpse of a rich terrain now beginning to be explored, and for readers like myself accustomed to the highly theorized discourse of Cultural Studies, which can take a voracious turn on the cultures it spotlights (à la the tomato that ate New York?), it is a pleasure to read the work of folklorists for whom the ethnography of cultural particulars is the sine qua non of their analytic efforts. It would be a shame if folklorists declined to bring their unique fascination with the cultural everyday into the exploration of queer frontiers.

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