

# Humanities

## *Building Humanistically at Princeton*

The Eiffel Tower, built in 1889, and the Washington Monument, completed 1884, were the two tallest works of man up to the twentieth century. Each has visually dominated the capital of its nation.

The Monument began August 7, 1783 when Congress ordered "an equestrian statue of General Washington to be erected." Architect Robert Mills won the design competition in 1836 with a 500-foot-high obelisk resting on a 100-foot-high, 250-foot-radius temple. After one hundred years of misadventures during which the shaft, then 152 feet high, was stolen in 1854 (by an anti-foreign, anti-Catholic group angered because the Pope had contributed a block of marble), the obelisk-like monument was dedicated February 21, 1885.

Still the highest masonry structure built, the monument's principal social use is as a decoration to be admired from afar, as well as for the spectacular view it provides from the top. It holds only a small number of visitors at a time, however, as the top area is less than 1,000 square feet and the elevator accommodates only 30 people. As a symbol, the monument commemorates the importance of Washington, D.C. after the agonizing rift of the Civil War. The early years of the project between 1836-1855 were overshadowed by the impending war, and it was only with war behind that the monument became a politically significant national symbol.

By contrast, the Eiffel Tower took a little over two years to build (January 28, 1887 to March 30, 1889). The three-platformed tower is entirely of iron, and spreads widely at the base as a cantilever to resist wind forces. It is both light and open, and its direct use by visitors is relatively unconfined. It was designed to accommodate 10,000 persons at once, and there are restaurants, shops, and plenty of room at each level, both indoors and outdoors, to view Paris and its surroundings. The tower provides not only elegant long views, but also close-up, intimate vistas of what could be characterized as an immense park in a high structure.

Technically viewed, it is an efficient metal cantilever. Socially, it is a popular and open trip for people visiting the tower, giving the pleasure of experiencing a "park" while overlooking the city. And symbolically, it was an effort to recapture lost glory: to overcome the 1870 defeat by the Germans and to express a French

industrial supremacy lost earlier to the British.

Social and symbolic importance of structures, added to technical analysis: this is crucial to the seven-year-old Humanistic Studies in Engineering Program at Princeton University initiated by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The comparison between the Washington Monument and Eiffel Tower leads off Professor David Billington's "Structures and the Urban Environment" course (Civil Engineering 262), a course designed to integrate social, aesthetic, and historic concerns into the education of civil engineers. The course is just one part of an extensive teaching, research, publishing, public lectures, and conferences/exhibitions project that will, in Billington's words, "educate a new type of engineer who, while fully competent in engineering design, will center his career on a union of technology with the humanities—either in practice or in teaching." A second, correlative purpose is to establish a set of documents to which civil engineers can turn for "a new humanistic understanding, especially in the history of architecture and related arts."

Billington and Professor Robert Mark, both of Princeton's Civil Engineering Department and co-directors of the Program, have been striving for seven years to meet the ecological crisis that Lewis Mumford so strongly pointed out: "the engineer does not hesitate to lay waste to woods, streams, parks, and human neighborhoods" because he lacks "both historic insight and social memory." Mumford's plea for a different kind of engineering consciousness is being met, in part, when Billington illustrates the social advantages to Eiffel's design and the political delays that affected the building of the Washington Monument. Engineers such as Gustav Eiffel are part of the great humanistic tradition of engineering itself. It is this tradition that Mark and Billington are bringing to the consciousness

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *The first issue of Humanities (Winter 1969-70) featured a story on the "Humanistic Studies in Engineering" program, partially supported by a grant from NEH, at Princeton University. Now, nearly seven years later, our writer has talked with Professors David Billington and Robert Mark about their progress toward achieving more humane environments for people to live in.*

of both engineering students and the public.

At the first "Civil Engineering: History, Heritage, and the Humanities" Conference held by the Program in 1970, Robert F. Goheen, then Princeton University president, introduced the proceedings: "Today we probably all are ready to admit that appalling results have come out of the parallel failures of engineers to recognize non-material human values and those of humanists to understand the concepts and consequences of technology. These failures are documented by cities which consist, in part, of decaying buildings and, in part, of sterile structures designed to serve economic function but ignore the whole man. . . . I did not choose to emphasize the humanistic responsibilities of engineering because I have grave misgivings that engineers will fail to discharge them; *it was because I fear what could happen to all of us, if you and your profession fall too short.*" (emphasis supplied)

At the same Conference, Senator Claiborne Pell asked, "What is the use of building marvelous free-ways to get into and out of cities with the greatest of ease, if we destroy the city in the process?", while Newark, N.J. Mayor Kenneth Gibson provided a concrete example of offensive action in telling how he exposed his predecessor's plan to sell off 38,000 acres of publicly-owned Newark Watershed land.

That Goheen, a classicist by training, called the Program "an urgent necessity," and that Princeton's Council of the Humanities supports it, is significant to an interdisciplinary effort such as this. It also helps that Princeton University is a relatively small, private

institution (4,347 undergraduate and 1,410 graduate students) located in the small city of Princeton, N.J. (pop. 12,311). The School of Engineering and Applied Science description in Princeton's Undergraduate Announcement emphasizes developing the whole engineer through "generous involvement in the social sciences, life sciences, and the humanities." More importantly, it further states that "students are prepared for creative, well-rounded careers."

But what of traditional interdisciplinary tensions, and particularly the pervasive tension between humanists and scientists and technologists? Seven years have proven that the Program can be extremely fruitful, though in slightly different ways than originally envisioned. Billington admits that often "our colleagues in engineering feel we're losing our touch if we're involved in other things." Initially, both Billington and Mark planned interdepartmental exchange, but decided to concentrate instead on creating new courses, documents, and publications. "Through content," Billington says, "communication—which is all-important—has been built through students and faculty." His course, "Structures and the Urban Environment," is a cornerstone of the Program and demonstrates how communication is established by new documentation. Architecture and art history majors regularly enroll, as well as civil engineers.

Professor Mark, also, emphasizes the communication between departments built over seven years. Mark, an expert in the use of stress analysis for architectural structures, is professor in both the Civil Engineering

Washington Monument, 1884 . . . Eiffel Tower, 1889: symbols with a difference





Department and the Architecture School (he is Director of Graduate Studies in the School of Architecture). He feels his combining of the two disciplines came out of NEH-sponsored research. Because his specialized expertise is useful in a variety of disciplines (civil engineering, architecture, art history), members of other departments have sought his aid in their research pertaining to technical aspects of history.

David Billington's and Robert Mark's roles in developing the Humanistic Studies in Engineering Program owe much to their individual backgrounds. Mark grew up on City Island near the end of Long Island, N.Y., raced sailboats, had a machine shop, but also loved art and music. While Mark attended the Bronx High School of Science, many of his close friends went to the High School of Music and Art. This dichotomy of interests continued into his professional life.

## Humanistic Influences on Engineering

Billington, too, has always combined interests. He was a practicing structural engineer until called back to Princeton in 1958 because the Dean of the School of Engineering felt him to be "a born teacher." While getting his B.S.E. at Princeton in 1950, he also studied art and music. His brother, historian James Billington, is an acknowledged influence in stimulating Billington's concern for a more humanistic engineering. David Billington's background in literature and art history reveals itself when he compares the "structure of a poem—rhyme, meter, form, etc." to engineer James Eads' detailed mathematical analysis of the Eads Bridge, St. Louis. Or when Billington analyzes engineer Robert Maillart bridges in terms of sculpture: "Maillart had a passion for thinness, passion is not rational, and it is in the end his passion that we came to sense in those sculpture-like, architectonic forms of structural art."

Still, it was fortuitous that Mark and Billington came together, and subsequently sparked the Humanistic Studies in Engineering concept. Mark was a designer of thermonuclear research components at the Princeton University Plasma Physics Laboratory. His specialty was the use of plastic models for detecting structural flaws in machine parts, and he was among the first to apply this method to buildings. A student came to Mark for help with an architectural problem, Mark was then asked to lecture on the use of photo-elastic models in analyzing architectural problems, and Billington became interested in the problem-solving advantages of Mark's pioneering studies.

Introducing humanistic concerns into teaching engineering to Princeton architectural students began around 1962. It was about this time Mark and Billington met, gave a two-week seminar on the workings of structural models, and summed up their findings in a small book, *Structures, Models and Architects* (Princeton University, School of Architecture, January 1963).

Then, in 1965, the students themselves asked for technical assistance in solving certain architectural problems. Several wanted to use engineering stress



Stress patterns demonstrate load-carrying behavior of structure in a model of the nave of Chartres Cathedral

analysis methods in Gothic cathedral problems. Experiments with plastic models helped solve certain puzzling questions about these cathedrals, namely whether the spinelike projections atop the buttresses were structural necessities or decorations. Mark, assisted by his students, made small plastic models of major churches such as Chartres, Bourges, Amiens, and subjected them to simulated wind and weight stresses. Stress shows up as colored patterns when viewed through special polarizing filters (a polariscope), and these tests demonstrated how the pinnacles add necessary weight in stabilizing structures. The crucial controversy of structural necessity versus aesthetic enhancement was, therefore, resolved—a controversy that had plagued art historians, architects, and engineers for centuries. Owing to significant research such as this, Princeton engineering students are now made welcome in other fields such as history, history of art, and architecture, and there is increasing engineering-humanities faculty collaboration. In addition, Mark's articles on cathedral buttressing systems have appeared in both humanities and scientific journals, such as *Scientific American* and *The Art Bulletin*.

Yet, despite continuing student-faculty enthusiasm and support, problems remain. First, Mark and Billington found they needed to create—themselves—basic research and texts for the humanities/engineering Program, as none existed. Over 36 articles have been published and Billington's major study, *Robert Maillart and the Shift of Vision*, is scheduled for publication shortly. Secondly, in "arousing the public consciousness" they wanted to achieve beyond Princeton, they

have found the public wants "instant, dramatic, 'medicine man' solutions." Billington contrasts what he describes as "Bucky Fuller solutions" to the slower, more scholarly approach of working with students and creating documents as the Program emphasizes. Thirdly, still another problem arises when engineering students find it difficult to secure the kind of jobs for which the Program prepares them. Therefore, much of their work has been with architects.

The Program's aim since its inception has been to reshape Princeton's civil engineering program from within by introducing students to their own humanistic tradition—the tradition of men such as Pier Nervi, Antonio Gaudí, John Roebling, James Eads, Robert Maillart. Originally the program concentrated on research and documentation: 1) a series of research projects leading to dissertations by Ph.D. candidates; 2) a series of scholarly documents publishing results of technical experiments, such as Professor Mark's with French Gothic cathedrals; 3) a series of new textbooks that would combine technological rigor with cultural perspective; 4) a series of critical essays on contemporary structures that would introduce a new tradition of criticism into civil engineering.

### Conferences on Civil Engineering

The Program still emphasizes documentation, but seven years have introduced new concerns, challenges, and priorities. The two conferences, also sponsored by NEH and titled "Civil Engineering: History, Heritage and the Humanities," I (1970) and II (1972), have created documents, affected future engineers, influenced other engineering departments (programs have been implemented at Bucknell University, Newark College of Engineering, the University of Delaware, Stevens Institute of Technology, West Virginia University, Mercer County Community College), and created fruitful interchanges between prominent scholars in a variety of disciplines. A program of cooperation on exhibitions with the Princeton University Art Museum was begun with the first conference, and has continued with exhibitions of Maillart's and Eads' work.

Integral to the Program is Billington's "Structures and the Urban Environment" course which presents engineering structures in terms of social, historic, aesthetic, and symbolic significance, as well as technical analysis.

Mark's research has focused on detailed structural studies of cathedrals at Amiens, Beauvais, Bourges, Chartres, Cologne, Palma, and St. Ouen, while Billington's has concentrated on the work of Robert Maillart. Faculty and students have joined in many technical articles appearing in national publications; others are in progress. Public lectures, as far afield as California, Vermont, and Montana, number over 86, attesting to nationwide interest in the Program.

A major Program change has been in the creation of textbooks. Although Billington prepared part of a text on concrete structures, he changed his subject to Robert Maillart as his publishers felt the book too far ahead of its time and perhaps too much for the stu-

dents. Instead, Billington's research was incorporated in his "Structures and the Urban Environment" course. Another delay has been in the creation of a critical literature on contemporary structures. Billington cites just three articles on what he calls "the accountability of the engineer," but says "we have a future in this area, in the tradition of Montgomery Schuyler and Lewis Mumford, and we are just getting to it."

That the Program is still growing and moving in new directions is one measure of its success. Not only has interdisciplinary communication been firmly established at Princeton, but inter-institutional cooperation has also begun with Stevens Institute of Technology on architecture of the seventeenth century and its relation to the Scientific Revolution.

Another measure of success, in addition to the documentation, research, public lectures already cited, is the new breed of student the Program produces. Mark points out that the students will first go through industrial "internships." But when these internships are over, the Program's humanistic concerns will help them meet the grave responsibilities of building for a modern age. It is then—and probably only then—that Lewis Mumford's plea for socially and historically conscious engineers will be met, and that Robert Goheen's plea for improving environmental quality be answered.

—Joanna Shaw-Eagle

## NEH Notes

### Fifth Jefferson Lecture

The Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities was distinguished this year by the presence of Professor John Hope Franklin, elected by the National Council on the Humanities to serve as Fifth Annual Lecturer, and by the fact that his lecture was presented in three parts under the overall title, "Racial Equality in America."

The first lecture, "The Dream Deferred," was given on April 28 in Washington, D.C.; the second, "The Old Order Changeth Not," in Chicago on May 5; the third in San Francisco on May 26, "Equality Indivisible."

The lecture series given by Dr. Franklin, who is the John Matthews Manly Distinguished Service Professor of History at the University of Chicago, is being published by the University of Chicago Press and is expected to be available in October 1976. Requests should be made to:

Mr. John Ryden, Editor-in-Chief  
The University of Chicago Press  
5801 Ellis Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60637

### NEH Appropriation

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate, acting on the President's budget request for FY 1977, voted \$77.5 million for the Humanities Endowment's regular funds plus \$7 million to match private gifts.





## *Urbane Tool for Urban Study*

Like Promethean fire, Nobel's dynamite and atomic energy, the computer has been seen by some contemporaries as the key to human salvation and by others as the hairy Samson of civilization's temple. The truth emerges somewhere between the poles as investigators in many fields adapt the new tool to their specialties and find valid ways to open new doors.

At Brown University two historians pondered the disparity between traditional teaching methods and an important new computer-based approach to the study of history. By necessity much past scholarship (and hence most curricula) focused on exceptional individuals and events. The typical, which eluded precise study, was left to historical speculation. Then research historians with a footing in computer science opened new vistas through computer analysis of parish registers, censuses, and other records, which began to reveal the changing patterns of ordinary people's lives. They learned to describe historical norms that were previously impossible. But as the state of the art of Quantitative History advanced, undergraduates were left increasingly far behind because they lacked the vehicles and skills to explore these new, fertile fields.

With a grant from the Education Programs Division of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Associate Professors R. Burr Litchfield and Howard P. Chudacoff bridged the gap between the frontiers of investigative history and undergraduate experience. Furthermore, they laid foundations for cooperative new connections between their department and colleagues working in sociology, demography, and anthropology.

Their 18-month Experimental Undergraduate Program in Quantitative History was built around what the catalogue has called Comparative Cities Seminars. These focused on five cities at early stages of industrialization: Pisa, Italy (1841); Amiens, France (1851 and 1861); Stockport and Ashton, England (1841 and 1851); Providence, R.I. (1850, 1865 and 1880). The cities were chosen because good, comparable census records existed. These provided a wealth of basic data that could be coded and electronically analyzed.

In the first year, 20 students studied the cities bibliographically and were introduced to basic computer techniques. Some of them helped to create the initial data file sample of 40,000 individuals from the censuses designating such specifics as age, place within

household, occupation and place of birth. From then on the project involved using the electronic tool to select, correlate, and compare demographic, family, and social patterns among the five cities. The students individually performed original research into such subjects as class structure, household composition, patterns of work, women's occupations, and the like. Various students have published papers and entered graduate work with a leg up.

Through the program, says Professor Chudacoff, these humanities undergraduates found a way of "gradually overcoming their fear of 'the machine.'" Furthermore, it offered "a window into the lives of people living 100 years ago: That Irish family [in Providence] has a lot of mouths to feed and the children have to go to work illiterate." Through the computer, daily conditions and choices could be perceived as human situations that 40,000 living individuals faced.

This window, for example, showed the family to be a far more resilient institution than the students tended to anticipate. Indeed, kinship traditions affected industry's behavior and the family was not just a passive victim of industrialization, as Professor Tamara K. Hareven has demonstrated at Clark University. (A leader in the new study of Family History, Professor Hareven has received a major NEH grant to develop her technique and introduce it to others.)

A smaller version of the Comparative Cities File for teaching purposes is being created for distribution. Professor Litchfield plans to develop the system further next year at Princeton's Shelby Cullom Davis Center and to prepare a manual for student use.

—Philip Kopper

## *Furnishing the Colonies*

The assumption that anything made in America is exclusively American simply by virtue of its place of creation is no more valid than an insistence that knickknacks manufactured in Hong Kong for the American Bicentennial are Chinese.

As we often remind ourselves during those moments we set aside to reflect upon such things, not even we are exclusively American. For to be American, whether human or crafted or manufactured, is to have a history that is a unique blend of multiple influences.

With that understood, it is clear why John T. Kirk, much-praised craftsman and student of furniture his-

tory, had to go to England to find American furniture. That is, he had to see 17th and 18th century English furniture so he could determine what it was about 17th and 18th century American furniture that made it American. With a younger humanist grant from NEH in 1974, the Boston University professor did just that. He returned with many slides and with British bursts of humor that would seem to be of great help to anyone facing the task of determining the influences that went into the design and construction of something American.

The question that naturally comes to mind at this point is why, if colonial Americans started out as colonizing Britons, there were any changes at all in furniture design.

The answer, Kirk will tell you, lies primarily in improvements in the quality of workmanship and "eye" that came about, as it were, during the course of the voyage across the sea. For, while first-rate British cabinet-makers were busy filling palaces and manor houses with elaborate creations, the second-raters in England were left to make furniture for the common folk. In America there were no palaces, and so first-rate designer-craftsmen could devote themselves to furnishing private homes. "Furniture was the sculpture of 18th century America," says Kirk. Of course, much of the furniture in less-than-affluent homes was of lower quality and inferior design, but most of it was well made.

Kirk thinks there was a growing consciousness of American-ness even before the Revolution. He tells of one Thomas Affleck, cabinetmaker, who arrived in Philadelphia in 1763 and proceeded to stock Governor John Penn's mansion with the latest London-style furniture. Yet, two years later he could be found filling a demand for Philadelphia-taste design, a taste that would have been 20 years out-of-date in London. London itself, it seems, was out of fashion in Phila-

delphia.

Kirk will also tell you that Quaker and Puritan plainness is a myth and that the Puritans painted their furniture with bright colors and both groups wore lively clothing. In fact, Thomas Affleck, who, says Kirk, "made the most elaborate and most expensive furniture—and also the most money of any Philadelphia cabinetmaker" was a Quaker and he sold his furniture to Quakers as well as to others.

Unfortunately, almost all of the Puritan furniture was "skinned" or stripped of its outer layers by 19th century American collectors, and with it went our memory of Puritan cheerfulness. This sad experience was paralleled in 19th century England with its practice of removing a worn or dirty surface to expose the beauty of the natural wood. Although Kirk found a series of English painted pieces from 1500 to 1900, few pieces of painted furniture remain on either side of the Atlantic. Much of Kirk's evidence of the popularity of this furniture, therefore, comes from an examination of early painting for which the sitters posed in their homes among favorite possessions.

Today we are victims of layer upon layer of history portrayed wrongly in books, on television, in the theater, and in films. Kirk speaks of his dilemma as a consultant to Boston public television's production of *The Scarlet Letter*: "To what degree was Hawthorne right? He was writing in 1850 about people in 1650 and he dressed most of his characters in gray and brown. Yet, I've seen a painted chest from Puritan New England of the 1680s and that chest stands as a document. Therefore, do we produce *The Scarlet Letter* in grays and browns as Hawthorne wrote it—thus perpetuating the myth—or do we do it in red, white, and blue as it really was—and violate Hawthorne?"

Being an expert in colonial furniture does have its problems.

—Jeanne Paul

Oak chest with carved and painted decoration, 1680-1700. Essex County, Massachusetts

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston





## Mississippi Folk

With sweat and muscle the sunbaked soil of Mississippi can be forced to yield an abundance of cotton and for several hundred years the land echoed with rhythmic work songs and field hollers as black men and women struggled with the cotton crop. The singers had been denied their own languages, religions, and drums for fear of revolt. But the call and response of their songs remained characteristic of African music.

At night, in crowded plantation shacks, inventive musicians made simple instruments from scrap materials and expanded on field music as they strummed away their weariness. Musical styles begun in slavery can be seen in current Afro-American blues, gospel, and jazz. Mississippi is still rich in many traditions that we now call folklore and folk performers are helping scholars piece together the survival and reshaping of African culture in America. With the assistance of an NEH Education Projects Grant, Bill Ferris, a folklorist and filmmaker, is recording these traditions on film.

In the dusky light of a Mississippi evening, Louis Dotson sits by himself making music from a single piece of broom wire nailed to his house. His small home is isolated in a back pasture reached by a narrow dirt road and a passerby, if there ever were a passerby, might wonder at the loving skill with which he plucks the wire and slides a bottle along it to change the tone.

To Dotson, his "one-strand on the wall" is an inexpensive way to make music. To folklorists, his broom wire is an important link between the West African instruments it resembles and the sophisticated "bottle-neck" style of guitar made famous by Fred McDowell, Elmore James, and other Afro-American bluesmen who first learned to play on one-stands. The similarity between Dotson's stretched wire and West African instruments is reinforced when he blows into a glass bottle and fills the night with an eerie, haunting sound reminiscent of Ba-Benzélé Pygmy yodels in the Congo.

When Dotson goes into town for supplies, he often sits on the front steps of the country store exchanging humorous stories with his friend, James "Strawberry" Robinson. Robinson earned his nickname from his taste for cutting beer with strawberry soda pop and he earned his reputation as a raconteur from his skill at cutting traditional tales with sly, earthy embellishments of his own. The pervasive theme of African folktales is the victory of cunning over force and this same theme appears in many of "Strawberry's" stories.

In another part of Mississippi, people are sitting together in an open field fanning themselves against the summer flies and heat. The tension builds as more and more people join them and a small band begins tuning its instruments. Something exciting is about to happen. A commanding figure in a long, flowing white robe arrives and from the crowd's response you know that it is she they've been waiting for.

In a few moments Fannie Bell Chapman, a gospel singer and faith healer, will begin a service of ritual dance, speaking in tongues, and possession by the



Louis Dotson playing his broom wire instrument

Holy Spirit. Whether she's chanting, singing, dancing, or cutting sickness "as fine as cat's hair," she is electrifying and the passionate fervor of her belief is contagious. She says of her music, "My songs come to me as an inspiration. I didn't go and try to ask someone to learn me a song."

People clap their hands and sway their bodies to the persuasive rhythm of Mrs. Chapman's delivery with no thought of the connection between their service and the ritual dances of spirit possession in many West African religions.

About a hundred miles north of this outdoor service, Leon Clark sits at the Canton Farmer's Market in a stiff, upright chair in marked contrast with his own relaxed lankiness. Dressed in overalls and a plaid shirt, he's surrounded by a variety of handmade baskets and he greets customers with the easygoing confidence of a man who knows he makes the best baskets in town. Following the traditions of African ancestors, Clark cuts a small white oak tree in the woods, strips the tree, and weaves a basket before the camera.

Clark weaves baskets that will ease the load of household chores. Dotson weaves scrap materials and sound into music that lets you hum away your troubles. "Strawberry" weaves words and gestures into colorful tales that catch you by surprise and make you laugh. Mrs. Chapman weaves emotion and song into insistent rhythms that explode in a climax of

*(Continued on back page)*

spiritual joy. And all of them have performed for the cameras of Bill Ferris, a filmmaker and folklorist.

When Ferris was a Mississippi teenager the word folklore had no meaning to him. The music and stories were too much a part of his life for him to puzzle over their origins in academic terms, but he did know that as individuals died their highly personal styles often died with them. He began filming and recording his rural neighbors to preserve what he could.

As Dr. Ferris, an associate professor of American and Afro-American Studies at Yale, he knows that books alone can never transmit the excitement of rural black folklore in performance. To strengthen university folklore programs, Ferris took his cameras back home and the result is a film on Dotson and "Strawberry," another on Fannie Bell Chapman, and a third on Leon Clark. All three films are 16mm color and will be distributed, along with an illustrated book, a tape-slide program, and a documentary record for use in university classrooms throughout the country, by the Center For Southern Folklore in Memphis, Tennessee, which Ferris co-directs with Judy Peiser.

Growing out of this Mississippi experience in creating materials for the study of folklore is a much larger program supported by NEH and now underway at the Center to develop and distribute multi-media educational materials—films, records, and books—which document the total spectrum of Southern folklore.

Ferris speculates that folklore survives in Mississippi because of strong family traditions and because in many ways the state maintains the isolation that was characteristic of much of the South prior to 1950. Without commercial entertainments, people in small towns amuse themselves by interacting with each other and they take pride in personal skills that provide pleasure for the entire community.

When asked if cameras disrupt the traditions he seeks to preserve, Ferris replied that film has proved to be a natural addition prompting performers to do their best. The people filmed are master artists in their own communities where success depends on sensitivity to audiences and the ability to shape material during performance. Timing, gesture, language, inflection, all are responsive to the mood of the audience. Ferris says, "I don't think film spoils folklore any more than recording a musician affects his style of singing."

Part of Ferris's success in filming folklore in performance is Ferris himself. He mixes without intruding and his sensitivity to the traditions and emotions of proud people elicits performances that might otherwise go unseen by outsiders.

Through film, Ferris shows us what is left of the rural South described by Faulkner as "that slow trickle of molasses and meal and meat, of shoes and straw hats and overalls, of plowlines and collars and heelbolts and clevises, which returned each fall as cotton."

—Pamela Brooke

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