

# Texas Centennial 1936: African-American Texans and the

By Kevin Moore

## NEGRO SPIRITUALS

Arranged for Solo Voice by

### H. T. BURLEIGH

- |  |   |
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| <p>Ain't Goin' no Study 'Wae No Mo' Two keys<br/>                 Bala in Gilead Two keys<br/>                 By An' By Two keys<br/>                 Can'te's Here Nobody Pray Two keys<br/>                 De Biko' Man Stood on De Road An' Crist Two keys<br/>                 De Gospel Train Two keys<br/>                 Deep River Three keys<br/>                 Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel One key<br/>                 Don't Be Weary Traveller Two keys<br/>                 Don't You Weep When You Goss One key<br/>                 Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit Two keys<br/>                 Give Me Jesus Two keys<br/>                 Go Down in the Louisiana Valley Three keys<br/>                 Go Down Moses Two keys<br/>                 Go Tall in de Mountains<br/>                 Hard Trials One key<br/>                 Hear de Larks a-Cryin' One key<br/>                 Heav'n's Home Two keys<br/>                 He's Just de Same Today Two keys<br/>                 I Don't Feel No-Ways Tired One key<br/>                 I Got a Horse in A-Dat Rock Two keys<br/>                 I Know De Lord's Laid His Hands On Me Two keys<br/>                 I Stood On de Ribbar Ob Jordan Two keys<br/>                 I've Been in de Street So Long</p> | <p>I Want To Be Ready One key<br/>                 John's Goss Down On de Island Two keys<br/>                 Joshua Fit de Battle Ob Jericho<br/>                 Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveller Two keys<br/>                 Little David Play on Your Harp Two keys<br/>                 My Lord What A Morning Two keys<br/>                 My Way's Cloudy One key<br/>                 Nobody Knows de Trouble I've Seen Two keys<br/>                 Oh Didn't It Rain Two keys<br/>                 Oh Wain't Dat a Wide Ribbar One key<br/>                 Oh Peter Go Ring Dem Bells Two keys<br/>                 O Rocks Don't Fall On Me Two keys<br/>                 Ride on King Jesus<br/>                 Sweet Home Down Let de Harvest Pass One key<br/>                 Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child Three keys<br/>                 Stea' Still Jordan Three keys<br/>                 Steal Away Two keys<br/>                 Swing Low, Sweet Chariot Two keys<br/>                 'Tis Me O Lord One key<br/>                 Weepin' Mary Two keys<br/>                 Were You There Three keys<br/>                 Walk in de Water Two keys<br/>                 You May Bury Me in de Ear Two keys</p> |
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African-American Texans expressed ethnic as well as regional pride by their efforts to participate in the 1936 celebration of the state's centennial. Business and educational leaders, primarily from the African-American community in the Dallas area, lobbied the state legislature and Centennial officials to ensure proper representation of their race. Their efforts were manifest in the erection of the Hall of Negro Life Building—an exhibit displaying the progress of African-Americans in Texas and throughout the nation<sup>1</sup>—and the unprecedented participation of African-American performers at the third National Folk Festival held from the 14th through the 21st of June 1936 at the Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas. The significance of their actions went beyond the Centennial era. Indeed, Texas Civil Rights leader A. Maceo Smith recalled that, for many African-American Texans, the Centennial “was the kickoff of the real Civil Rights thrust in Texas.”<sup>2</sup>

Joseph Tilden Rhea, in his 1997 book *Race Pride and the American Identity*, argues that “recognition of the role of minorities in American history has increased not because of a general drift toward cultural pluralism, as is often believed, but because of concrete actions which can be documented.”<sup>3</sup> In this essay, I will suggest further evidence in support of this view. Focusing on the National Folk Festival as a site for the presentation of ethnic identity, I will examine the goals, organization, and achievements of the Festival with particular emphasis on the participation of African Americans, thus documenting one minority's cultural activism as reflected in their role in this particular celebration.

A brief discussion of Sarah Gertrude Knott, founder and organizer of the National Folk Festival, her efforts to encourage Texan involvement, and the active role of African Americans in

the selection and organization of their programs presented at the Festival will serve to contextualize the dialectic between this particular ethnic minority group and the mainstream (Anglo-Texan) society.

Inspired in part by Bascom Lamar Lunsford's Mountain and Dance Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina, and also recognizing a need for a national organization for the encouragement and preservation of traditional folk expression, Kentucky native Sarah Gertrude Knott (1895-1984) organized the first National Folk Festival which premiered in St. Louis in 1934.<sup>4</sup> While Lunsford's festivals were primarily a celebration of Southern Appalachian music and dance, Knott produced a conceptually expanded version adding exhibits of folk arts, crafts, dramatic productions, performance workshops, and lectures.<sup>5</sup>

# The Third National Folk Festival

One of Knott's objectives was to demonstrate the diversity of American folk culture, and she believed that "[The] picture of our folk life today would not be complete without the contributions of the Negro."<sup>6</sup> In a bold, unprecedented move, Knott challenged racial segregation and the status quo by presenting African-American performers on the same stage with whites. At the Third National Folk Festival in Dallas, African-American Texan performers were on the stage with greater frequency than Anglos. But before I address the specifics of the African-American involvement in 1936, a description of the genesis and organization of the third National Folk Festival is necessary.

Sarah Gertrude Knott was an educated, energetic, and indomitable promoter, and in her proposal to the Texas Centennial Commission, she appealed to both the Commission's senses of patriotism and commercialism, two motivating forces behind all official decisions.<sup>7</sup> By New Year's Day 1936, a little more than six months before opening day, Knott had arrived in Dallas with office space and an expense account provided by the Exposition.

Knott's foremost challenge was to assemble a program of performers and presenters that together would represent both national and regional folk traditions.

In addition to the groups that had become a permanent part of her traveling troupe, Knott's method had been to organize preliminary community festivals as a means both to locate suitable participants and also to provide her National Folk Festivals with local/regional color. For the first National Folk Festival (St. Louis), eighteen "small gatherings" were held in the Arkansas and Missouri Ozarks region, and prior to the second Festival (Chattanooga), four regional festivals were held in Tennessee. In Texas, thirty preliminary festivals were ultimately held in various cities throughout the state, including Galveston, Stam-

ford, San Antonio, Waco, Austin, Midland, Paris, Port Arthur, San Angelo, Amarillo, Ft. Davis, El Paso, and Bandera.<sup>8</sup>

Lacking knowledge about the unique folklore traditions of Texas and the Southwest, Knott solicited the Texas Folklore Society for direction and assistance. On 3 January 1936 Knott sent her "very first letter" since she came to Dallas to Texan novelist and folklorist J. Frank Dobie.<sup>9</sup> "I do not particularly know the Southwest," Knott admits, "so I shall gladly appreciate your guidance and support in the work we are attempting to do in your region." It is not surprising that Knott contacted

Dobie first. Besides being the secretary and editor of the Texas Folklore Society, she had met Dobie in 1934 when he was one of several lecturers on folklore at her first National Folk Festival in St. Louis. His presentation at this Festival, however, proved to be his last significant involvement with Knott's Festivals. Although Dobie declined participation in Knott's third NFF ("for I have my hands full"), he supplied Knott with a list of officers and members of the Texas Folklore Society, offered to meet with her, and suggested that she con-



Courtesy of: University of Texas Library

tact William A. Owens, a young English teacher who harbored a growing interest in Texas folklore.<sup>10</sup>

Knott had hoped to encourage officials and members of the Texas Folklore Society to organize preliminary festivals. Like Dobie, however, most members of the Society were busy with their own work and unwilling to commit to such extensive involvement. Ultimately, the State Board of Education and various regional Departments of Recreation sponsored most of the thirty preliminary festivals held throughout the state.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, those who dominated the social order largely controlled these local festivals. Knott and others from the hegemonic class selected the performers to be included on the Festival program.



While the objective of the Festival was to give a voice to the folk and their traditions, the particular articulation of that voice and the context of the speech were highly influenced by the organizers.<sup>12</sup> The selection of African-American groups to perform

at the Festival, however, is one notable exception.

Knott received greater response from her calls for Texan involvement from the African-American community than from any other ethnic group or, as noted, from members of the Texas

Folklore Society. At Knott's request, W. H. Pace, the editor of the African-American run *Dallas Express*, and A. Maceo Smith, a Dallas high school teacher, member of the Negro Chamber of Commerce and the Texas Negro Centennial Commission, and future state president of the NAACP,<sup>13</sup> formed the Dallas Negro Folk Festival Committee made up of about fifteen African-American educators and leaders whose primary objective was to "formulate plans for the Negro participation [at the Festival]."<sup>14</sup> Other committees with similar objectives included the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce, the Texas Negro Centennial Committee, and the Executive Committee of the Texas Association of Negro Musicians.

African-American Texans were proud of their accomplishments in the state and anticipated an opportunity to take part in the celebration. Under the front-page headline, "Invited to Participate Every Day," the *Dallas Express* reported that "Enormous interest in all phases of Negro participation . . . is being displayed by Texas Negroes."<sup>15</sup> Such publicity, in addition to school programs centering on Texas history, inspired several Dallas African-American students to write poems dedicated to the Texas Centennial. Their pride in the state is reflected in several of the poems printed in a pamphlet titled *Patriotic Moments*, edited by the state's first African-American folklorist, J. Mason Brewer.<sup>16</sup> Two poems by Booker T. Washington High School students are typical. (See Figure 1).



Courtesy of: University of Texas Library

Figure 1:

#### ***Our State***

*Our state has everything to make you swell with pride,  
The riches of its crops and mines cannot be well denied.  
I will always be loyal to Texas our state  
And be one of the first at the Centennial gate.  
During all of the summer I'll always be found  
Talking and walking on the Centennial grounds.  
I'll see the great things Texas Negroes have done  
And to go along with this I'll have me some fun.<sup>17</sup>*

#### ***The Centennial Exposition***

*The Texas Centennial is going to be  
A great Exposition for all you see  
In it the Negro will play his part  
Just look at the Negro in Farming and Art.*

*Texas is a wonderful place to live  
A place where you learn to love and to give  
But Look not at this—the Centennial see  
And just what it means to you and me.*

*There will be visitors from all around  
From countries and cities and different towns  
They will be coming in and out  
To see what the thing is all about.*

*We all can help as Texans you know  
By telling our visitors where to go  
We want them to visit our colored schools  
And see how the children observe the rules.<sup>18</sup>*

These student poems, the activities of the civic and business leaders, and newspaper reports suggest a strikingly significant degree of cultural and political activism in 1930s Texas, largely motivated by a desire to participate in the representation of their heritage in the third National Folk Festival as well as other centennial related activities.

Knott described the format for the eight-day Festival as "somewhat like a three-ring circus."<sup>19</sup> The main events began each night at the Amphitheater (Band Shell) with Knott officiating at the microphone.<sup>20</sup> The objective of the nightly programs was the presentation of "Ur-themes" of the people who have contributed to Texas history such as "Indians, Mexicans, Negroes, and Anglos."<sup>21</sup> The overwhelming majority of Texan-ethnic groups on the main stage were Anglo and African-American; both represented with fourteen different ensembles. (See Table 1.) The African-American programs scheduled for June 19, one of the three "Negro Days," were repeated on another day. With the repeated performances taken into account, the African-American groups actually took the stage more often than the Anglo groups.

*Table: 1*

*Texas Groups*

(according to ethnicity)

*Anglo*

Square Dance, "Centennial 8" (Dallas), June 14  
 Cowboy Songs and Fiddle Tunes (Lubbock and Amarillo), June 15  
 Singing Games (Houston), June 15  
 Ring Games, Ballads, Spirituals (Austin), June 16  
 Play Party Games and Square Dances (Commerce), June 16  
 Cowboy Christmas Ball (Anson, Abilene, and Stamford), June 16  
 Cowboy Band (Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene), June 16  
 Fiddle Tunes (Athens), June 17  
 Cowboy Ballads and Music (San Antonio), June 17  
 Anglo-Texas Folk Songs (; San Antonio), June 20, (Oscar J. Fox)  
 Old Trail Drivers Dances, Ballads, and Stories (San Antonio),  
 June 20, (Oscar J. Fox)  
 Cowboy Ballads (San Antonio), June 20, (Oscar J. Fox)  
 Anglo-Saxon Ballads (Quanah), June 21  
 Sacred Harp Songs (Dallas and Ft. Worth), June 21

*African-American*

El Paso Pioneer Club Singers, June 14  
 Negro Spirituals, Booker T. Washington High School (Dallas),  
 June 14  
 Square Dances (Farmers Branch, Dallas, Ft. Worth), June 15  
 Old Time Music by Dallas Group, June 16  
 Negro Singing Games (Ft. Worth), June 16  
 Lullabies (Dallas), June 18  
 Lining Hymns (Dallas), June 18, 19  
 Square Dances (Dallas) June 18 (same Dallas group of June 15)  
 Negro Work Songs (Farmer's Branch), June 18, 19  
 Cake Walk (Farmer's Branch), June 19  
 Negro Singing Games (Ft. Worth), June 19  
 Negro Spirituals (Marshall), June 19, 20  
 Negro Spirituals (Dallas), June 19, 21  
 Evolution of Negro Music (Dallas), June 20

*Mexican*

Mexican Orquesta Típica (El Paso) June 14  
 Mission Hymns, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (Dallas), June 14  
 Orquesta Típica (San Antonio), June 15  
 Mexican Songs and Dances (Dallas), June 15  
 Lariat Dance (El Paso), June 17  
 Lullabies (Ft. Worth), June 18

*German*

German Folk Songs and Dances (Fredericksburg), June 18  
 Lullabies (Fredericksburg), June 18

*Indian*

Tigua Indians from El Paso, June 14

*Unknown Ethnicity*

Accordian Player (Dallas), June 16

The attention that Knott gave to the African Americans did not go unnoticed by some of the Anglo participants. According to William A. Owens, stage manager for the Festival, the contact between ethnic groups on the main stage was met more often with prejudice than with an open hand. In 1950, Owens recalled that

*The ladies of the Dallas music clubs had been invited to sing Stephen Foster songs. Some Negro choirs had been invited to sing spirituals. It so happened that the Negro choirs were assembled on stage to sing their spirituals first. The white ladies waiting down in the audience were indignant. Their remarks about the "niggers first" arrangement were loud all through the spirituals. Then, finding no place on the program for their numbers, they began singing "Old Folks at Home" from where they sat, with their director, beautifully dressed for the occasion, standing up and marking off the rhythm with exaggerated movements. They had come to sing, and sing they did!<sup>22</sup>*

Indeed, the National Folk Festival in Dallas highlighted racial boundaries as opposed to dissolving them.<sup>23</sup> It was as much a site of confrontation as a place for communication and understanding. The purpose of the event—to provide a forum for the interchange of folk expressions in order to break racial barriers—went unfulfilled.

Another forum organized by Knott for the interchange of ideas was the series of lectures on folk music and folklore. Ten of the twenty-five presentations given on three days were by Texans. (See Table 2.) Of these ten, seven presenters were members of the Texas Folklore Society.

*Table: 2*

*National Folk Festival Sessions*

(Texan participants and their lecture topics)

**June 16**

John Lee Brooks, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Vice-President, Texas Folklore Society [TFS], Presiding.\*

Mabel Major, Texas Christian University, Ft. Worth, "British Ballads in Texas," Vice-President, TFS.\*

William A. Owens, Wesley College, Greenville, "Music of the Play-Party Games in Texas," member, TFS.

Martha L. Emmons, Waco, "Negro Wisdom," President, TFS.

Grace Dupree Ridings, Sherman, "Ballads - Johnny Sands, I Love Somebody, and I Wish I Were Single Again."†

### June 17

Jovita Gonzalez, Del Rio, "Legend of the Vaqueros," member, TFS.

A. S. Jackson, Dallas, Director of Music, Booker T. Washington High School, "The Place of the Negro Spiritual in American Music."†

### June 18

Rebecca Smith, Texas Christian University, Ft. Worth, Presiding, member, TFS.

Dan Storm, Austin, "Mexican Tales," member, TFS.

Helen Hagan, "Negro Lore," Bishop College, Marshall†

Julia Estill, Fredricksburg, "Superstitions in Gillespie County," member, TFS.

Martha L. Emmons (see June 16)

### June 19

no session

\*The three vice-presidents of the TFS at the twenty-second annual meeting, held at The University of Texas at Austin, 24 and 25 April 1936 were Brooks, Major, and A. W. Eddins.

†TFS affiliation not known.

African-Americans A. S. Jackson, Jr., music director at Booker T. Washington High School, and Helen Hagan, dean of the School of Music at Bishop College in Marshall, Texas, presented two of the three papers on African-American topics. Neither presenter had any formal affiliation with the Texas Folklore Society.<sup>24</sup> I have not been able to locate their papers (if extant), so the details of their presentations await further discovery. Nevertheless, the historical significance arguably lies less in what they had to say than in their presence.

Despite an emphasis on "Negro" folklore reflected in the presentations and publications of the Texas Folklore Society prior to 1936, the majority of these studies were by white folklorists. The first active African-American in the society was J. Mason Brewer, who presented for the first time at the nineteenth annual meeting in Waco, April 1933.<sup>25</sup> Martha Emmons, a white folklorist whose interests included African-American folklore, organized the meeting and later recalled that while she had hoped to sit next to him at the banquet following the presentations, Brewer left the meeting directly after giving his paper "probably

as he thought he should, considering racial attitudes in 1933."<sup>26</sup> Ralph Yarborough, then assistant Texas Attorney General, later U.S. Senator, and an important figure in the Texas Progressive tradition, recalled that Brewer need not have felt that way. According to Texas folklorist and historian of the Texas Folklore Society Francis Abernethy, Yarborough believed that "the Texas Folklore Society and the Texas State Historical Association were the only Southern academic associations that had welcomed Brewer and other blacks during that time."<sup>27</sup>

Would Brewer and other African Americans have felt welcome hearing members of their race referred to as "old time darky"<sup>28</sup> or the "lusty, phallic, Adamic Negroes of South Texas, shiftless and shifting day laborers and small croppers who follow Lady Luck, Aphrodite, and John Barleycorn?"<sup>29</sup> With few exceptions, stereotype and prejudice influenced the attitudes of white folklorists toward African Americans. Abernethy admits that the attitudes toward African Americans represented by the Society's first thirty years of presentations on the subject would be unacceptable today and warns that we should not succumb to "generational chauvinism, the belief that only the values of one's own generation are valid."<sup>30</sup>

I agree. What I question is his view that these prejudiced presentations were "instrumental in preparing the way for racial desegregation."<sup>31</sup> It is my contention that such writings as the first publication of the Society, "Some Current Folk-Songs of the Negro," by Will H. Thomas (1880-1935)<sup>32</sup> did more to perpetuate stereotypes and racial divisiveness than to represent what Abernethy considers "the first steps toward racial understanding and eventual integration."<sup>33</sup> Consider the excerpt below from Thomas's essay, reprinted and thus endorsed by the Society in 1936. In order to contextualize his collection of songs, Thomas contrasts the "colored semi-rural proletariat" with the white man.<sup>34</sup>

*The white man rises early and eats his breakfast. My proletariat doesn't rise at all for the chances are that he has never gone to bed. At noon they "knock off." While the white man is preparing to eat his lunch, the "nigger" has already done so and is up in the bed of a wagon or on a plank underneath a tree fast asleep, usually with his head in the sun. At nightfall, the white man eats supper and spends the evening reading or with his family. Not so my proletariat. He generally borrows thirty-five cents from the white man, steps out the back gate, gives a shrill whistle or two, and allows how he believes he'll "step off a piece to-night."<sup>35</sup>*

Attempting to find value in Thomas's words beyond their reflection of bigotry and prejudice against African Americans, Abernethy considers Thomas's views "one person's sincere interest in the culture of a group from which (at that time, only



fifty years after the Civil War) he was culturally separated.”<sup>36</sup> But not all Anglo-Texans shared Thomas’s views.

The Anglo-Texan folklorist and writer Harold Preece (b. 1906; d.?) was not as forgiving in 1936 as Abernethy is today. In an essay published in *The Crisis*, the journal of the NAACP, Preece criticized white folklorists who in his opinion exploited and distorted the traditional culture of the “Negroes” they studied. “The folklore school has never outgrown [its] snobbish origin,” writes Preece. “I have attended meetings of professional folklorists where all the ancient jokes about the Negro’s supposed incompetence and unthinking amiability were told with the usual gusto of the educated illiterate.”<sup>37</sup> Preece did not name the particular association of “professional folklorists,” but based on his biography, it is likely that he was referring to the Texas Folklore Society.

Preece was born in 1906 near Austin, Texas. He began his career as a cub reporter for the *Austin Statesman* in 1922, started selling articles to magazines in 1925, and became a free-lance writer and specialist in American and Texas folklore. He was a theology student at Texas Christian University (1926-1927) and studied writing at the University of Texas (1932-33). In 1936 he assisted Knott in her unsuccessful efforts to organize a festival in Austin in conjunction with the Texas Folklore Society meeting scheduled for April.<sup>38</sup> He became a member of the Society in 1937 and, according to membership lists in the Texas Folklore Society Records, did not renew his membership thereafter. Preece worked with John and Alan Lomax collecting archives of American folk music for the Library of Congress in 1936 and 1937. Concurrently, he was the folklore editor of the Federal Writers’ Project in Texas. Between 1936 and 1947 he published several essays on southern culture and racial attitudes as reflected in contemporary literature and folklore studies.<sup>39</sup> In the early 1940s Preece moved from Austin to Monteagle, Tennessee, where he was associated with the Highlander Folk School. In 1946 the Ku Klux Klan chased him and his family out of the state, and they moved on to New York, where he wrote books and essays on various subjects in-

cluding religious cults, pioneer life, the Texas Rangers, and the American West.

The inclusion of Jackson and Hagan provided the neglected African-American perspective on their traditions. Of course, Jackson and Hagan’s presentations for the National Folk Festival would have to be studied in order to compare and contrast their perspectives to those of the Anglo’s. Their participation, however, challenged boundaries of segregation and white hegemony in the area of African-American folklore studies.

Despite the apparent significance of the unprecedented African-American involvement on the main stage and as part of the lectures associated with the National Folk Festival, African-American newspapers such as the *Dallas Express* and the *Houston Informer* did not publish reviews of the event. Surprisingly, besides the announcement of the formation of the

Dallas Negro Folk Festival Committee, no mention was made of the National Folk Festival. With such a lack of primary evidence, African-American attitudes toward their participation in the Festival are difficult, if not impossible, to determine. There are several factors that contributed to African-Americans’ failure to recognize the significance of their involvement with the Festival. First, it is likely that they did not view the National Folk Festival as an event separate from the Exposition. Knott herself recalled that “Though much interest had been aroused in communities throughout the state, most of those on the Centennial grounds had never heard of the National Folk Festival and to them was just another show—a free one at that. Since there was no admission fee, those who made up the audiences came and went at will.”<sup>40</sup> Second, perhaps the segregated and prejudicial treatment at the Exposition as well as negative images of their race printed in Anglo-run newspapers overshadowed the significance of their involvement with the Festival. The Anglo-run newspaper coverage of the African-American Texan participation at the Exposition in Dallas presented demeaning, contemptible reports that incited a response from the *Chicago Defender*, at the time perhaps the most widely circulat-



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Courtesy of: University of Texas Library

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ing African-American newspaper. In an open letter to the editors of the *Dallas Morning News*, *Dallas Journal*, and *Dispatch*, A. N. Fields wrote:

*Was it necessary to refer to the intelligent colored citizenry of your state as "Mandy," "Rastus," and to the intelligent colored women as "dusky country merrymakers, who had deserted catfish streams and left fiddle-faced mules, idle farm work, etc.?" . . . If we are to judge by what is reflected in your newspapers and in the conduct of those who managed and handled your centennial, instead of advancing in culture and refinement, Texas is receding into barbarism.*<sup>41</sup>

Knott believed that her Festivals served to eliminate prejudice. Tensions among racial groups stemmed from ignorance, and festivals, Knott assumed, could educate participants and spectators about the differences as well as similarities among the diversity of races that contribute to the fabric of the American nation. It was her contention that "Better acquaintance with folk traditions and what they mean to those who possess them inevitably improves the capacity to deal with people. . . [and provides] a basis for understanding."<sup>42</sup> Segregation and racial prejudices, however, challenged her integrated displays of ethnicity.

Besides the Hall of Negro Life building, the eight-day National Folk Festival was the site for African-American Texans' most extensive involvement with the Exposition. The participation of Jackson and Hagan at the series of workshops and lectures associated with the Festival provided the typically ne-

glected African-American perspective and at the same time challenged boundaries of segregation and white hegemony in the area of folklore studies. Likewise, African-American performances at the Amphitheater allowed displays of ethnicity to exist within the larger umbrella of segregation prevalent in mainstream society. Despite this opportunity, the lack of newspaper coverage of the Festival suggests that African-American Texan identity was affirmed more at the pre-festival, organizational stage of the event than on the performance stage. Inspired by ethnic and state pride as well as a desire for assimilation, African-American Texan business and educational leaders mobilized other members of their community in the organization of several committees in order to ensure proper representation at the Exposition and, more specifically, at the Festival. Although the challenges of segregation and racial prejudice ultimately overshadowed any success at social assimilation and racial understanding, their political and cultural activism, in this case motivated by a desire to participate in the representation of their heritage in the third National Folk Festival, documents African American Texans' efforts for cultural recognition and also underscores the significance of festivals and celebrations as sites for the construction and negotiation of identity. Indeed, commemorations serve both unifying and divisive forces. They provide opportunities to exhibit shared cultural expressions while at the same time highlighting tensions and debates between groups aligned with the organizing elite and those peripheral to the hegemonic center.



## Notes

- 1 John Boswell, *The Negro Participation in the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition* (unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1969) and Jesse O. Thomas, *The Negro Participation in the Texas Centennial Exposition* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1938).
- 2 A. Maceo Smith. Interview with Kenneth B. Ragsdale, 3 November 1977.
- 3 Joseph Tilden Rhea, *Race Pride and the American Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 7.
- 4 For a review of the first National Folk Festival, see Lillian Freeman Wright, "Notes and Queries," *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 47 (1934): 262-263.
- 5 A general comparison between Lunsford's and Knott's festivals is included in Joe Wilson's and Lee Udall's Folk Festivals, 6-7.
- 6 Sarah Gertrude Knott, "The National Folk Festival—Its Problems and Reasons," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 3/2 (June 1939), 117; quoted in Whisnant, *All that is Native & Fine*, 245.
- 7 For a general history of the Texas Centennial celebration with particular emphasis on the dual themes of patriotism and commercialism, see Kenneth B. Ragsdale, *Texas Centennial '36: The Year America Discovered Texas* (College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 1986).
- 8 Knott, "The National Folk Festival after Twelve Years," *Western Folklore* 5 (1946): 87. A list of community festivals to be held in Texas is located in the Texas Centennial Collection, Box 151, folder: Folk Festival, Dallas Historical Society, Dallas, Texas.
- 9 Knott to Dobie, 3 January 1936, Dobie Papers, Knott Correspondence 1936-1942, Harry R.ansom Humanities Center (HRC). This letter also confirms that Knott solicited the Centennial and not the other way around as some public statements indicate. Knott informs Dobie that "A good many of our people in the Southwest were interested in us having our third Festival in this region. We considered several places in the Southeast, but our Executive Committee decided that the Exposition to be held in Dallas gives us our best opportunities this year." In contradiction to this statement on 14 June 1936, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that "Suggestions by Charles E. Turner, head of the special events department, and Frank N. Watson, director of promotion, led to the third festival being scheduled at the centennial."
- 10 Knott continued to write to Dobie to seek his advice and input with regard to the National Folk Festival. See Dobie Papers, Knott Correspondence 1936-1942, HRC.
- 11 Knott, "The National Folk Festival after Twelve Years," *Western Folklore* 5 (1946): 87.
- 12 For more on the power relations in festivals and celebrations, see Manning, *Cosmos and Chaos*; G. S. Metraux, "Of Feasts and Carnivals," *Cultures* 3/1 (1976): 7; and Abner Cohen, "A Polyethnic London Carnival as a Contested Cultural Performance," *Racial and Ethnic Studies* 5/1 (1982), 23-41.
- 13 For more on Smith's contributions to the Civil Rights movement in Texas, see Michael L. Gillette, "The Rise of the NAACP in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 81 (April, 1979): 393. Cited in Ragsdale, *Centennial '36*, 65.
- 14 Inter-Office Communication, 8 January 1936.
- 15 *Dallas Express*, 11 April 1936.
- 16 J. Mason Brewer, editor, *Patriotic Moments* (Dallas, Texas: Booker T. Washington High School, 1936). For information regarding Brewer's biographical information, see James W. Byrd, *J. Mason Brewer: Negro Folklorist* (Austin, Texas: Steck-Vaughn Co., 1967).
- 17 Maoma Caxson, "Our State," in *Patriotic Moments*, 14.
- 18 Hazel Martin, "The Centennial Exposition," in *Patriotic Moments*, 22. Note the anticipation of inclusion, particularly in stanzas one and four.
- 19 Knott, "Texas—The Happy Hunting Ground," Unpublished manuscript, n.d. (Sarah Gertrude Knott Collection, Department of Library, Special Collections, Folklife Archives, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY), 5.
- 20 *Dallas Morning News*, 31 May 1936.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 William A. Owens, *Texas Folk Songs* (Austin, Texas: The Texas Folklore Society, 1950), 18. Owens witnessed racial tension between other ethnic groups. He described an incident between Texas-Mexican musicians and Native-American dancers from Oklahoma as follows. "Having discovered that a Mexican *típica* orchestra was followed on the program by Kiowa Indian dancers from Oklahoma, I decided to save time by having the orchestra members take their chairs and move to the back of the stage for the dancing numbers, at the end of which both groups could exit at once. I should have known there was no way to avoid trouble or save time. The Mexicans played their numbers and moved back all right. Then the Indians, dressed in feathers and carrying tomahawks, came out dancing a wild chase. First the Mexicans laughed. Then they put their hands over their [c] mouths and 'oo-oo-oo-aw-aw-awed' until the Indians were fighting mad and ready to use their tomahawks on every sombreroed Mexican in sight. At first I tried to calm the disorders from the wings. Finding that neither group paid any attention to me, I dashed out on stage and ran up and down, shaking my fist at the Mexicans while the Indians finished their dances. No doubt some members of the audience tried to figure out the folk symbolism involved" (Owens, 19).
- 23 For more on the articulation of racial boundaries during this festival, see James McNutt, "Mapping the Terrain with Folk Songs," in *Texas Humanist* 7 (July/August 1985): 19-20.
- 24 Martha Emmons, "Negro Wisdom," is the only person to present twice, June 16 and 18. Her paper was also part of her "President's Address" for the Texas Folklore Society, April 1936 meeting in Austin. Francis E. Abernethy, in *The Texas Folklore Society 1909-1943, Vol. 1* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas P, 1992) includes Emmons with A. W. Eddins and J. Mason Brewer as "the best known collectors and tellers of Negro tales in the Society" (130). Of these three, Brewer was the only African-American. See also Texas Folklore Society Records, Minutes of Meetings, Box 3F150, folder: 1936-1937, CAH.
- 25 Abernethy, 158, 171-172. Brewer's biographer, James W. Byrd, considers him to be the first African-American "member" of the Society. See Byrd, (1967), 5. Based on Texas Folklore Society membership lists for the years 1935-1970, Brewer's name first appears on the 1970 list. These lists are part of the Texas Folklore Society Records, Box 3F151, CAH.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 Abernethy, 158. Yarborough was one of the few Southern U.S. Senators to press for legislative action in the field of civil rights. See "Yarborough, Ralph Webster (1903-1996)," *The New Handbook of Texas, Vol. 6* (Austin, Texas: Texas State Historical Association Press, 1997), 1110-1111.
- 28 Natalie Taylor Carlisle, "Old Time Darcy Plantation Melodies," cited in Abernethy (1992), 132.
- 29 Gates Thomas, "South Texas Negro Work Songs," cited in Abernethy, *The Texas Folklore Society*, 133.
- 30 Abernethy, *The Texas Folklore Society*, 131.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 129.
- 32 Will Thomas, "Some Current Folk-Songs of the Negro" (Austin, Texas: Texas Folklore Society, 1936). This essay was initially read before the Folk-Lore Society of Texas and published by the Society in 1912.
- 33 Abernethy, *The Texas Folklore Society*, 129.
- 34 Thomas limits his discussion to "the semi-rural proletariat" because, according to him, "the property-holding negro never sings. You see, property lends respectability, and respectability is too great a burden for any literature to bear, even our own" (Thomas, 3).
- 35 Thomas, 6.
- 36 Abernethy, *The Texas Folklore Society*, 37.
- 37 Harold Preece, "The Negro Folk Cult," *The Crisis* 43/12 (1936): 374.
- 38 Preece mentions Dobie's involvement in "The Living South: Dobie of Texas," *The Houston Informer*, 14 January 1947.
- 39 "Some Aspects of Southern Culture," *Southwest Review* (1936): 217-222; "The South Today: The Southern Folk Culture" (syndicated column, unidentified clipping) 28 February 1937, "Preece, Harold," vertical file, CAH, and "The South Stirs," *The Crisis* 48 (1941): 318; "The Living South: Dixie Saw the Wheel" (for release 16 April 1945); "The Living South: Dobie of Texas," *The Houston Informer* (14 January 1947), 15. Preece sent the latter two essays to Dobie (J. Frank Dobie Collection, Recipient, HRC). Preece expressed his indebtedness to Dobie for his encouragement and interest in at least two letters. On 29 December 1946 Preece notes Dobie's influence: "You were the very first Austinite to take an interest in my writing and to seek me out to encourage me to continue it at a time when the local snobs were making it pretty tough for me, economically, and otherwise." And on 18 November 1962 he writes: "Of all my colleagues who have helped shape my style and thinking, I value highest Mari Sandoz and yourself. Thank you for that influence you have been upon me." Both letters are in the Dobie Collection, Recipient, HRC.
- 40 Knott, "Texas—The Happy Hunting Ground," 6.
- 41 *Chicago Defender*, 27 June 1936. The headline for the 20 June 1936 *Dallas Morning News* article read: "Dallas eats cold supper and cotton patches neglected."
- 42 *Ibid.*, 90.