



## AFS Statement on Ethics: Principles of Professional Responsibility

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### AFS Statement on Ethics: Principles of Professional Responsibility

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At its October 1987 meeting, the Executive Board of the Society approved a final draft of a Statement of Ethics for AFS. Though the Statement printed below has gained the approval of the Board, this should not be considered the final word on the subject. The Board expects and in fact urges members to explore the abstract and practical implications of this statement, and most important, to communicate their descriptions and opinions on matters of ethical concern in the Newsletter and the Journal of American Folklore.

The Board would like to extend its thanks to all members of the State of the Profession Committee and the membership at large, whose thought, effort, comments and criticism have gone into the making of this Statement. Particular thanks are due to Frank de Caro, Lynwood Montell and William Nicolaisen, who were active in early discussions of the Statement; to Rayna Green, who prepared early drafts for Committee and Board discussion; to Jack Santino, who drafted the version of the Statement distributed to the membership for comment in AFSNL 15:5; and to Yvonne Milspaw, who prepared a text based on Santino's draft for Board consideration in October 1987.

#### Preamble

This statement of principles is intended to clarify the professional responsibilities of professional folklorists. Folklorists, more than most other professionals, work with peoples from many different communities and socioeconomic backgrounds. Their professional situation is therefore particularly varied and complex. They are involved in different ways with their discipline, their colleagues, their students, their sponsors, their own and host governments, the particular individuals and groups with whom they conduct their fieldwork, and other populations and interest groups in the nations where they work. Because folklorists study issues and processes that affect general human welfare, they are faced with unusual complexities and ethical dilemmas. It is a major responsibility of folklorists to anticipate these and to plan to resolve them in such a way as to do least damage to those with whom they work and to their scholarly community.

#### Relations with those studied:

In research, folklorists' primary responsibility is to those they study. When there is a conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. Folklorists must do everything in their power to protect the physical, social, and psychological welfare of their informants and to honor the dignity and privacy of those studied.

- Where research involves the acquisition of materials and information transferred on the assumption of trust between persons, the rights, interests, and sensitivities of those studied must be safeguarded.
- The aims of the investigation should be communicated as is possible to the informant.
- Informants have the right to remain anonymous. The right should be respected both where it has been promised explicitly and, as much as possible, where no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. These strictures apply to the collection of data by means of cameras, tape recorders, and other data-collecting devices, as well as to data collected in interviews.
- There shall be no exploitation of individual informants for personal gain. Fair return should be given them for all services.
- There is an obligation to reflect on the foreseeable repercussions of research and publication on the general population being studied.
- The anticipated consequences of the research should be communicated as fully as possible to the individuals and groups likely to be affected.

#### Responsibility to the public:

Folklorists are responsible to all presumed consumers of their professional efforts. To them they owe a commitment to candor and truth in the dissemination of their research results and in statements of their opinions as students of human behavior.

#### Responsibility to the discipline:

Folklorists bear responsibility for the good reputation of the discipline and its practitioners.

#### Responsibility to students:

In relations with students, folklorists should be candid, fair, nonexploitative, and committed to the students' welfare and progress. Folklorists as teachers have responsibility of instruction in the professional ethics of academe in general and of folklore in particular in addition to their duties of instruction in the field, career counseling, academic supervision, evaluation, compensation, and placement.

- Folklorists must alert students to the ethical problems of research and discourage them from participating in projects that employ questionable ethical standards.
- Folklorists should acknowledge in print the student assistance used in their own publications; give appropriate credit (including coauthorship) when student research is used in publication; encourage and assist students in publication of worthy student papers; and compensate students justly for the use of their time, energy, and intelligence in research and writing.

#### Responsibilities to sponsors, including one's own and host governments:

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In relations with sponsors of research, folklorists should be honest about their qualifications, capabilities, and aims. Thus, they face the obligation, prior to entering into any commitment for research to reflect upon the purposes of their sponsors in terms of those sponsors' past behavior and what the likely uses of their research data will be. Folklorists should be especially careful not to promise or imply acceptance either of conditions contrary to their professional ethics or of competing commitments, and they should demand assurance that they will not be required to compromise their professional responsibilities and ethics as a condition of the sponsors' permission to pursue research.

#### **Epilogue**

Folklore research is a human undertaking for which the individual bears ethical as well as scientific responsibility. This statement provided guidelines to the accepted professional standards of research and the presentation of that research. When folklorists by their actions jeopardize peoples studied, professional colleagues, students or others, or if they otherwise betray their professional commitments, the American Folklore Society, through its State of the Profession Committee, may legitimately inquire into the propriety of those actions and take such measures as lie within its legitimate powers.

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