Folklife Today Podcast
Season 4, Episode 5
September 2022 - Caught My Eye, Caught My Ear, Intern Edition!

Announcer: From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Stephen Winick: [00:40] Welcome to the Folklife Today podcast. I'm Stephen Winick, Folklorist at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, and the creator of the Folklife Today blog. I'm here with John Fenn, the head of Research and Programs at the Center.

John Fenn: [00:57] Hey, folks! Today we have some special guests and a fun theme. You may have noticed on the Folklife Today blog a category of posts we call "Caught my Eye" or "Caught my Ear." These are posts where a staff member talks about one or more collection items that caught their eye or ear.

Stephen Winick: Right! And for this episode of the podcast, we thought we'd get a fresh perspective by seeing what items caught the fancy of our current American Folklife Center interns. So we asked each of our two current interns to come up with a segment of the podcast, and those two segments make up this episode. I'll just note that we refer to the program informally as the Bartis internship, because it was generously funded by our late friend and colleague Peter Bartis. We certainly miss Peter and are very grateful that we can bring such great interns to the American Folklife Center.

John Fenn: So our first guest is intern Bryan M. Jenkins. Bryan is a very recent Ph.D. in the Communication, Culture and Media Studies program at Howard University. His research explores how marginalized groups utilize the digital space as a tool to educate and empower one another, and his dissertation investigates Black podcasts as a critical educational tool for Black communities while extending the traditions of Black orality.

Stephen Winick: So Bryan is a podcast expert, and we're a little embarrassed to have him on our rudimentary podcast! But welcome, Bryan!

Bryan Jenkins: [02:05] Thanks, and it's far from rudimentary!

Stephen Winick: Thanks! We appreciate that!

John Fenn: So Bryan, tell us which collection or item "caught your eye" so to speak.

Bryan Jenkins: In keeping with my interest in the digital realm, I became interested in the Library's web archives, including the Web Cultures Web Archive.

Stephen Winick: So for those not familiar, The Web Cultures Web Archive includes sites documenting the creation and sharing of emergent cultural traditions on the web. To put that in more common language, it's an archive of websites where new forms of folklore are created..So what direction did you go in for your segment, Bryan?

Bryan Jenkins: I was interested in its development and importance of the Web Cultures Web Archive. So I decided to interview an AFC staff member about it, Allina Migoni.

John Fenn: Great, let's dip into your interview!

Bryan Jenkins: Why is the Web Cultures Web Archive important?

Allina Migoni: [02:49] The web archive allows us to both paint a fuller picture of our own collections at the AFC and their use, but it also captures materials and stories that would otherwise be unavailable through other formats. For instance, web cultures can be written about, but only by actually capturing websites and their communities in real time can we do the work to represent, as accurately as possible, cultures that originate or now live online. This is also an important tool to capture otherwise ephemeral content, that may be lost for a myriad of reasons, such as a domain change, lack of institutional support, staff turnover, etc.

These web captures help preserve a moment suspended in time as it was, almost as if in amber. These aren't just screenshots or photos of a website, they are the actual website and they include embedded content such as video players or audio when available, and other metadata which helps with provenance and may be useful to researchers in the future. This technical and historical context is invaluable, and can help future users understand our society and history in innumerable ways.

Bryan Jenkins: What are some of your favorite websites that have been captured?

Allina Migoni: Well, for the AFC we have both a web cultures collection and a new AFC collection for organizations with online presence related to the AFC's archive. And so in our web cultures collection, I particularly love the sites Urban Dictionary, Know Your Meme, and Giphy. These are super helpful in real life when you're trying to figure out one in which current name or slang or GIF is most important for a group chat. But they also are some of the best insights into our current state of society like what we find how do we communicate with one another? And how do we let others know we understand them and what values that we hold? I'm all aboard absurdist humor that's followed the pandemic. And you can see this evolution of humor and interpersonal engagement online if you look at the captures from websites in such a short amount of time

Bryan Jenkins: How is this unique from our other collections? How is it similar?

Allina Migoni: These web archive collections are unique in that they are slightly more nimble and flexible from an acquisitions perspective. When a major event occurs-- a social, historic, political, or cultural event – we can begin collecting almost immediately. The Library does have to ask a website owner's permission to both crawl the site and then make those crawls accessible, but permissions notwithstanding, this format of acquisition is essentially immediate. If the website belongs to another government organization or non-profit we may not even need to wait for permissions like we do for creative works or private individual or institutional pages. There are other layers to permissions requests, but that's a simple explanation.

As a note, we use the term "crawl" when our web harvester, or web crawler, actually systematically goes through the site, downloading and indexing the website, its code, and its linked content. The resultant item is what we call a "capture."

So if we would like to capture the work of a non-profit on the ground during a major event, we can begin as soon as the web crawler is scheduled to, and we can have those captures in our own archive almost immediately.

This work is similar to other collections in that our web archive collections need to be part of a collection development policy, and individual websites are nominated to specific collections. This helps staff to think critically about which communities we are representing and what stories they are telling, so that we can decide how best to preserve and present our history for future generations. This is much like

our decision-making process for our other analog and digital content, where we take into account user needs, both in the present and for years to come..

Bryan Jenkins: This archive is not an AFC exclusive, so can you speak to the collaboration across The Library of Congress to create and maintain this archive?

Allina Migoni: [6:47] I've had the pleasure working with departments across the Library on quite a few web archive collections. The two that stand out the most were the Coronavirus Web Archive and the Protests Against Racism Web Archive, both started in 2020. When Covid-19 was first gaining traction and spreading across the globe, and before the gravity of our new normal set in, people across the world were looking to the web for answers. Some people found it in humor, dancing on social media mimicking hand washing or sampling celebrities into soundbites and memes-- if any of you remember a certain rapper yelling "coronavirus" which became its own chart climbing song – while others began blogging and documenting their thoughts on the virus and how to prevent it informally. We had issues capturing social media at that time for technical reasons, but as part of an international consortium, we were still able to ensure our nominations were captured by partner institutions who work more with social media. We captured government websites domestically and internationally, and it really felt like racing against the clock to accurately and adequately nominate websites to tell this global story.

During the summer of 2020, after the protests across the nation began in response to George Floyd's murder, a small team across the Library began immediately meeting for a special archive collection. This was a momentous cultural shift, and much of the organizing and documentation was online. We at the Library decided to capture many organizational websites that responded to the protests, ensuring that we were careful not to impede on individual rights to privacy—as we would not want to host images of individuals in perpetuity who did not agree to have their images captured and hosted by a federal institution. However, we did want to represent the grassroots organizing and community engagement surrounding the protests, so we chose organizations we thought were emblematic of the movement such as Black Lives Matter, Mapping Police Violence, and WeCantBreathe.Org.

Bryan Jenkins: What are some of the benefits of collaborating with other divisions?

Allina Migoni: While the AFC does capture global cultures and Folklife, we also are also somewhat apart from other Library divisions, as we collect ethnographic

materials. So working with other subject matter experts across the Library, we can really tap into the wealth of staff knowledge.

Bryan Jenkins: How would you like to see people engaging with these web archives?

Allina Migoni: Well, I think it's really important to know that the web is very closely linked to how we interact in the real world. So I hope that they realize that documentation of websites can help further discovery and collaboration and social justice and change and movement. What we're seeing with our collections is really how important online presence can be and how maybe simple social media posts can become something bigger a movement and that that can actually be part of the library's collection or nation. So I hope that they just engage with it everywhere from looking at Giphy to really trying to understand how it is to be the society we are today.

Bryan Jenkins: [10:20] Allina, thank you so much for agreeing to this interview.

Allina Migoni: You're welcome, and congratulations on a successful internship!

Stephen Winick: So once again, that was Bryan Jenkins interviewing Allina Migoni. So Bryan, do you feel like you have a better understanding of the Web Cultures Web Archive?

Bryan Jenkins [Bryan's answer]

John Fenn: What ideas does it stir up for you in terms of archiving digital folklore?

Bryan Jenkins [Bryan's answer]

Stephen Winick: Amazing work on this segment, Bryan! And again, congratulations on earning your PhD and your internship at the American Folklife Center!

John Fenn: Yes, Bryan…thanks for your work on all the projects, including this podcast!

Bryan Jenkins: [12:40] Thanks so much, thanks for having me!

Stephen Winick: Now we are joined by our other current intern, Elisa Alfonso. Outside of her internship, Elisa is a doctoral candidate in Ethnomusicology at the University of Texas at Austin and an incoming Teaching Fellow for musicology at East Carolina University. Welcome, Elisa!

Elisa Alfonso: [12:58] Thank you!

Stephen Winick: So, keeping to the idea of things that caught your eye or ear, what was it in our collections that jumped out at you?

Elisa Alfonso: It's a Spanish-derived Latin American children's song called "Señora Santana," which is in the "Stetson Kennedy and Robert Cook WPA Florida Recordings" collection, recorded in Ybor, Florida (just outside Tampa) by Cuban-American Adelpha Pollato in 1939.

John Fenn: OK, let's hear it and then you can tell us more about it!

[13:30 Adelpha Pollato sings Señora Santana]

Stephen Winick: So again, "Señora Santana," a children's song which caught the ear of our intern Elisa Alfonso. Elisa, what was it that piqued your interest about that song?

Elisa Alfonso: Well, about 23 years after Pollato's recording this song was used again in a 1962 documentary called "The Lost Apple" or "La manzana perdida" in Spanish. This was the first film made about the Cuban children's exodus that later became known as Operación Pedro Pan or Operation Peter Pan. This children's exodus, the largest-scale exodus of unaccompanied minors in the history of the Western hemisphere, airlifted an estimated 14,048 children out of Cuba between 1960-1962, following Fidel Castro's rise to power. With the use of the song in that documentary, "Señora Santana" was solidified as the anthem for a generation of "lost" children who never came home.

John Fenn: Interesting. So what is the story behind the song? Why would they choose that song in particular?

Elisa Alfonso: The song itself has a longer history tracing back to Spain and the colonial era, but the story told in the lyrics translates to this: "Mrs. Santana, why is the boy crying? He's crying for an apple that he has lost. I will give you one, I will

give you two, one for him and one for you." The little boy responds: "I don't want one, I don't want two- I want the one that I lost."

The apple in the song became symbolic for a lot of things lost for the *Panes*: a homeland, a way of life, a community, family, relationships, and sometimes even language. Upon arrival to the U.S., many *Panes* received replacements for these things- new foster families or group homes, English as a new language, etc., but most of them yearned for what they had lost in Cuba. Many understandably still do, some 60 years later.

Stephen Winick: Wow. But wait, this song comes up in other parts of Latin America too, right? Are there differences between Cuban versions of the song and versions from elsewhere?

Elisa Alfonso: Yes! Actually, there are not only different words and melodies associated with this song, but some of its lyrics actually end up in other Latin American children's songs! So Pollato's version we listened to earlier represents the most well-known Cuban version. But in other versions in Central America, the boy never responds in the song- the listener might assume that the boy is happy with his replacement apple and the story ends there.

There's actually another song in our collections that is under a different name, but has the same story within it. A Spanish-Californian woman named Lottie Espinosa sang a song telling the story of the boy and his lost apple called "Lo, lo, lo, lo, tata," which in another recording she calls "Dormi niño" or "Duerme niño." What's fascinating about this recording is it was done the same year as Pollato's- but on the other side of the country in California!

John Fenn: Let's take a listen.

[17:46 Lottie Espinosa sings "Lo lo lo lo ta ta"]

Elisa Alfonso: Now, those of you who might be listening and were expecting the popular Spanish-language lullaby 'Duérmete mi niño' or something similar to "Señora Santana" were probably confused. Despite the name, the song does not sound like the tune 'Duérmete mi niño,' though it does have traces of that lullaby as well. No, according to the folklorist who recorded Ms. Espinosa, the song was "sung by Indian mothers in the servants' quarters of California ranchos, as they pulled rhythmically at the rope which swung their babies to sleep in hammocks slung over the parents' bed." (source).

While I have never heard of a similar tactic being employed while singing "Señora Santana," you'll notice in this lullaby the same story of a boy crying for a lost apple resurfaces. "Señora Santana, Señor San José, por que llora el niño, por una manzana que se le ha perdido, vais hasta la huerta y córtese dos una para el niño, y otra para vos. Duérmete niñito […]" But, as we said before, in this version, we don't really know how the boy reacted to getting a new apple.

Stephen Winick: Interesting! Do you know of other versions?

Elisa Alfonso: Yes, in fact the more you look for them, the more they turn up! I've seen references to versions from Argentina, Chile, Puerto Rico, several Central American countries, and of course Mexico. In AFC collections, I know that John A. Lomax recorded several versions in Texas, also in 1939! In his fieldnotes, he called the song a "Lullaby widely sung by Mexicans in South Texas." And like the version from Lottie Espinosa, in Lomax's versions we don't find out how the boy reacted to the offer of a different apple.

Stephen Winick: OK, let's hear one of those too!

[21:47 Ramona Ramirez and unidentified children sing Señora Santana]

John Fenn So, what do these other versions tell us about the song?

Elisa Alfonso: One interesting thing that I noticed was that some of the versions in AFC collections combine verses from what we usually think of as different songs, like "Señora Santana" and "Dormite mi nino" and several other lullabyes. Lottie Espinosa does that, and so does one of Lomax's versions.

Stephen Winick: That's a great observation, and as one of our resident song nerds, I can attest that it's a common feature of lyric folksongs. By lyric songs we mean songs intended to express or affect emotions rather than to tell a linear story, and many work songs like sea shanties and lullabies fit into this category. In most lyric song traditions, including the English-language and Spanish-language traditions, there are just a few preferred verse forms, so many many songs are expressed in the same meter. And since songs don't tell a linear story, but rather convey a feeling, most any verse can fit into any singer's version of a song, as long as it conveys a similar feeling and is expressed in the same meter as the other verses. Since all lullabies are meant to convey feelings of calm and sleepiness, singers can put together their versions of lullabies out of a large store of possible verses, so for

scholars it's sometimes difficult to decide which song to say it's a "version" of. We saw this with the Lottie Espinosa version, which Cowell just called Dormi Nino, but which has verses conventionally identified with at least three songs. Scholars often refer to this phenomenon as "floating verses." So you've noticed something going on there that's much more widespread than this song, and more widespread than the Spanish-language tradition. So it's very cool!

John Fenn: Yeah, so that was a fun discovery, by careful listening. What else does comparing these versions tell you about them?

Elisa Alfonso: Well, to my knowledge, the earlier recordings of the version where the little boy rejects the apple or apples actually comes up more in Cuban exile communities. The Pollato recording of "Señora Santana" being the only one of AFC's 5 versions to have this detail certainly would suggest as much, as would the recording done for the 1962 documentary about Cuba's exiled children (which was also recorded in Florida).

Stephen Winick: So, are you saying that this part of the song might have been added by Cuban exiles living in Florida?

Elisa Alfonso: It's hard to say, because there are many published versions I haven't seen yet. But given what I know right now, that's certainly a possibility. There was actually a good amount of Cuban migrants in the U.S. before Castro assumed power in 1959. Many of them left Cuba to pursue economic and political stability during the years leading up to, during, and after the Spanish-American War, so it would not be surprising that this children's song, like so many other songs for children, was reflecting the sentiments and worries of adults at the time.

But regardless of how the verse about the boy's reaction got added, the symbolism of the 'lost apple' has continued to be associated with the Pedro Pan children specifically, with the aforementioned documentary, histories, and academic articles on the exodus all invoking the lost apple from the song "Señora Santana."

John Fenn: That's great, Elisa! All that's left is for us to thank both you and Bryan for your wonderful work during your internship, and especially on this podcast.

Stephen Winick: Yes, it's been a pleasure working with you! Thanks!

Elisa Alfonso: [26:28] Thank you for having me on the podcast!

John Fenn: It was our pleasure—you've been a great guest.

Stephen Winick: So thanks to our great interns, to our guest Allina Migoni, and also thanks to our engineer Jon Gold, and to Mike Turpin for the use of the studio. And of course thanks to you John!

John Fenn: Thank you, Steve, and thanks to the collectors and singers we've featured in this episode, and all our colleagues around the Library who help us create and distribute this podcast.

Stephen Winick: And as a special thanks to our listeners, let's allow Olga Acevedo to sing us out with her 1939 Texas version of Señora Santa Anna. See you next time!

[26:59 Olga Acevedo sings Señora Santana]