Transformation of the American Concept of Folklore

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In 1888, diverse interests in folklore existed before then were brought together and the America Folklore Society was founded. Most of the theories and methods of folklore studies in America have borrowed from those of the European folklore studies in 19th century. However, the presence of American Indians greatly changed the course of folklore studies in America. It was not possible to interpret the stories of Indians by the theory of "survival" and disputes arose between the anthropologic folklorists and literary folklorists whether the study of Indian stories should be included or not. As a result, the concept of lore was expanded and a definition of folklore being the "oral tradition" was proposed. Further, a new definition of folklore as "verbal art", namely the aesthetic use of spokenwords, was also proposed. From the end of 1960s to the beginning of 1970s, the performance approach has gained ground. The researchers having this standpoint insisted that folklore should be grasped not as an object but as a process. In this new theory to view folklore as a performance, attempts have been made to be freed from the traditional attitude in which too much emphasis was put on the text, and to try to describe and analyze folklore synchronically and as a whole, laying stress on the context including the invention of the story teller, roles of audience and situations of the place of narration. This new theory has greatly influenced folklore studies in America up until today.