There is a benefit to sitting near the front today.
Facebook Favs: Southern Folklife Collection
Changes to the course schedule ...
Extra Credit Opportunity

Thursday, April 7, 3:30 p.m.-5:00 p.m. — Public Lecture: “Big Data | Small Data: Melville and the Humanities as Fluid Texts.”

John Bryant, Tennessee Humanities Center Visiting Scholar and Director of the Hofstra Digital Research Center

Hodges Library Auditorium
“All cultures and subcultures collect representative artifacts to hand down to group members. To an outsider, those collections may appear to be mere clutter; to an insider, they are the concrete objects of tradition - symbols of the rituals, behaviors, language, and beliefs that teach a culture about itself as it shifts and changes with time” (170).
Why do archival or historical research?

“One way people capture culture is by assembling archives - collections of documents and artifacts … an archive contains important ‘stuff’ so that family, ethnic, local, or national cultures and subcultures don’t - to paraphrase Cantwell’s words - pass secretly, silently, or untended” (169).
“A standard definition of ethnohistory work imply ‘a study of the development of cultures,’ but anthropologist James Peacock reminds us that we understand history through the perspectives of the people who lived at that time. Archival historical research allows us to do just that” (183).
How do we speak academically about these “texts”? 
How do we speak academically about these “texts”?

- Nothing was or is written or created in a vacuum; our job as researchers working with primary texts is model how to

- Discover what those texts mean in their original contexts, and then

- Trace the resonances, consequences, and new iterations of meaning as texts are reinterpreted.
Wednesday’s discussion and my pleather jacket

- Comparison
- Contextualization
- Causation
- Continuity and Change Over Time
- Interpretation
- Periodization
- Argumentation
- Synthesis
One of the key terms in Clifford Geertz's anthropological theory is that of "Thick Description." Following Ryle, Geertz holds that anthropology's task is that of explaining cultures through thick description which specifies many details, conceptual structures and meanings, and which is opposed to "thin description" which is a factual account without any interpretation. Thin description for Geertz is not only an insufficient account of an aspect of a culture; it is also a misleading one. According to Geertz an ethnographer must present a thick description which is composed not only of facts but also of commentary, interpretation and interpretations of those comments and interpretations. His task is to extract meaning structures that make up a culture, and for this Geertz believes that a factual account will not suffice for these meaning structures are complexly layered one on top and into each other so that each fact might be subjected to intercrossing interpretations which ethnography should study.
In Class Practice

- Come choose an object ("text") to practice with.
- Form a group around that object (no more than 3 people per group).
- Take the object back to the desk and form your group.
Consider:

- What are the different kinds of archives this object could come from?
- Is the object particularly southern, American, global, or mico-local? Why one and not the others?
What are the different types of collections the object could be a part of?

- As the researcher, it is your job to appreciate the cultural multiplicity of the artifact, as well as its cultural restrictions.
Your Objectives:

✱ Thickly describe the artifact as best as you can.

✱ Make claims about why it is important. What kind of knowledge can we gain from the artifact; how does appreciating this object add to our understanding of history?

✱ Envision a collection with this object.
Thinking about your projects …

- “How can skills traditionally used in the humanities be reshaped in multimedia terms? How and by whom will the contours of cultural and historical memory be defined in the digital era? How might practices such as digital storytelling coincide with or diverge from oral or print-based storytelling? What is the place of *humanitas* in a networked world?”

- *Humanitas*: A Latin word that refers to human nature, civilization, and kindness.
Homework

Reading: RI Chapter 7 pp. 188-207; McClung Museum Objects List; McClung Museum’s Digitized Collections