



*Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution,
S. Dillon Ripley. Photo: Arnold Newman*

THE FOLK FESTIVAL PROGRAM

by
S. Dillon Ripley

The Festival of American Folklife offers the Smithsonian Institution an opportunity to show through demonstration and performance some aspects of the cultural roots of the people of the United States. The Festival is a living exhibition of the creativity of the many ethnic groups that make up the culture of this country.

The Smithsonian's interest in American culture is not new. The first Secretary, Joseph Henry told the Minnesota Historical Society in 1856 "The everyday occurrences of the present which are considered of little importance at the time become the materials of history in the future. It is therefore highly desirable that they be

gathered up and that records be faithfully preserved of everything which tends to shape the character of our rapidly advancing territory."

In 1879, the Bureau of American Ethnology was founded under the direction of John Wesley Powell. The Bureau was placed under the Smithsonian Institution by Congress, and its purpose was the study of the Indian cultures that made up the civilization of these United States before the coming of the European. The work of the Bureau of Ethnology forms the background for much of the work of the Office of Anthropology of the Museum of Natural History and its imperative nature has been retained in the studies of Urgent Anthropology which are being conducted around the world by our anthropologists of societies which are disappearing or becoming acculturated for one reason or another.

Folk culture is the base on which the society of a country rests. The urgency for its study in our own country has only recently been realized.

Folk culture, transmitted orally or by imitation, supplies the raw material and energy from which fine arts culture takes its nourishment; yet, we in America know relatively little about this culture. Programs of study and research exist in three graduate schools, and a few museums conduct activities which are an aid to Americans' understanding of themselves, but much more must be done.

As late as the 1930s, there was a common belief that America had no aesthetic tradition of its own and that this country had never produced a culture in which the arts could flourish. We know today that such a culture has been our heritage but we have too frequently failed to recognize and learn from this heritage. We hope that this Festival will serve to bring American people more fully into touch with their own creative roots, and that from this acquaintance the way may be pointed towards a richer life for some and a more meaningful understanding of the roots of our society.