

THE FOLKLIFE
FESTIVAL PROGRAM
by S. Dillon Ripley



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

Welcome to the Smithsonian Institution's third Festival of American Folklife. We are gratified that public response to this yearly presentation of our traditional culture has been so extensive and enthusiastic. I believe this response is indicative of a deep interest shared by all Americans in their separate and collective cultural heritage. In the final concert of last year's Festival, Alan Lomax commented that this was the Festival of the Common Man where people brought the art that they had made up out of their own experience. It is our hope that this Festival will continue in this vein, thus providing participants and visitors alike with increased understanding of our national character.

In 1968 the Smithsonian asked several outstanding scholars to contribute their definitions of folklore to our program book. These definitions emphasized that folklore was a highly diversified accumulation of lore, wisdom, and art which has been passed on from one generation to another, often without formal instruction. Folklore was also described as the hidden submerged culture lying in the shadow of the official civilization about which historians write.

For many years, the main force of government, science and scholarship has been rightly directed toward the development of ethnic, social and political institutions designed to inter-relate all of its people regardless of their individual cultural

traditions. This direction of our national life led to the referral in popular terms of the United States as "the great melting pot".

Today we are more than ever aware that there are many submerged cultures which lie in the shadow of our official civilization and that these cultures represent a rich diversity which provide this nation with an extraordinary heritage. We are coming to understand that while we as a people commonly share a national culture, each American also enjoys the distinctive ways of his family, ethnic group, region and occupation which comprise his traditional or folk culture and that this more personal culture is of vital importance to the social, moral and aesthetic fabric of our national life.

If this 1969 Festival of American Folklife is able to give our visitors a small glimpse of our cultural diversity and increase their awareness of the vigor of our aesthetic traditions, we will have accomplished our goal in some small degree.