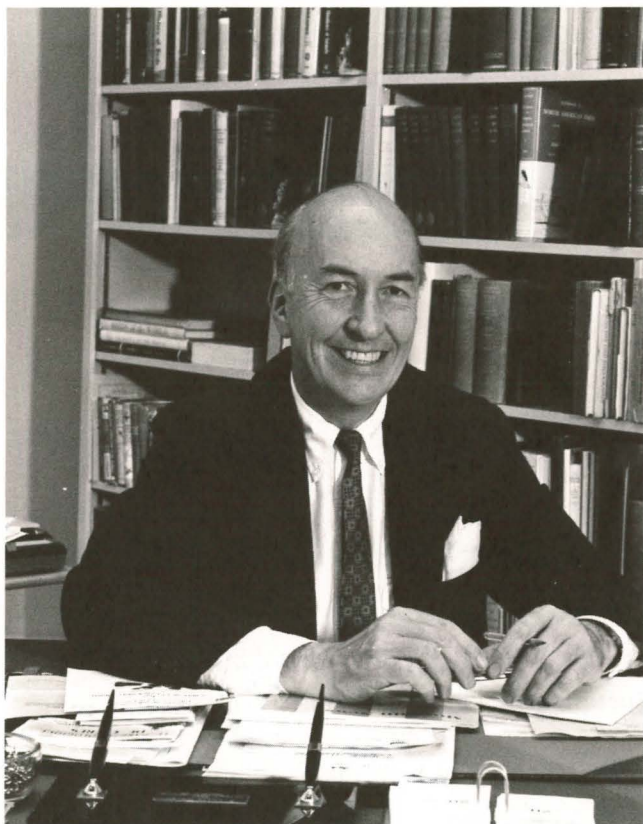


THE FESTIVAL — A LIVING MUSEUM

S. Dillon Ripley

Secretary, Smithsonian Institution



As we present the Seventh Annual Festival of American Folklife, it seems fitting that we explain again why a museum such as the Smithsonian Institution is concerned with living performers.

We are a conservation organization, and it seems to us that conservation extends to human cultural practices. The possibility of using a museum that is essentially a historical documentary museum as a theater of live performance where people actually show that the objects in cases were made by human hands, and are still being made, practiced on, worked with, is a very valuable asset for our role as a preserver and conservator of living cultural forms, and it should be understood in those terms. It is not a kind of razzle-dazzle, a vaudeville show that we put on. It is, rather, a demonstration of the vitality of those cultural roots which surround us and are so

often overlooked. The fact that we celebrate ethnic diversity in our culture is, I think, extremely important. We have too often thought of the Bertrand Lindsay-like concept of the United States being "The Great Melting Pot," the great homogenizing element in Western Civilization. But, as we've discovered, this is by no means true. It is worthwhile being proud, not fiercely proud, but gently and happily proud of the continuance of these cultural roots and their observances and practices which we celebrate.

In one of the articles in this program, Andy Wallace of the National Park Service writes: "What came across to me was a people rooted in the land, a resourceful, hard-working people, living in the present, but with a respect for and awareness of the past, and the other ways." The comments about his field trip near Mammoth Cave in this year's featured Commonwealth, Kentucky, describe what we know to be true about folklife and ethnicity.

This is a Festival that celebrates people who celebrate themselves—people who know who they are and where they came from.

This year we are buoyed in our celebration by the enthusiasms and excitement of our co-sponsor, the National Park Service. Our joint efforts over the next three years will culminate in our Bicentennial. Themes and presentations for this Festival are a trial run for the themes around which our own celebration of America's 200th birthday will be organized. Presentations are focused on Regional America, Working Americans, Native Americans, and Old Ways in the New World.

We cordially invite you to share in the discoveries presented here and in the corresponding exhibits inside our museum buildings. We welcome your comments.