

Reaffirmation of Traditions — A Countercurrent For Survival

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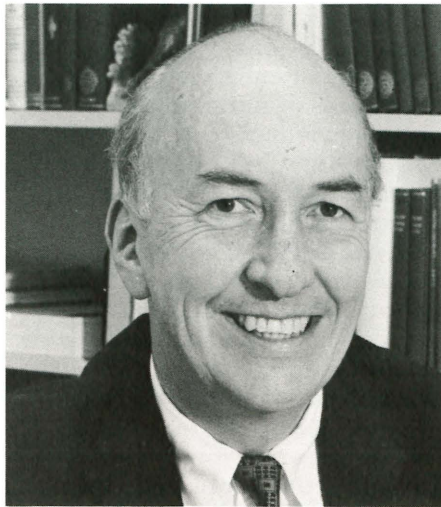
President Carter's remarks delivered at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in February, 1977, struck a deep responsive chord across the Nation and internationally:

I look on our country as a beautiful mosaic, with different kinds of people involved in freedom, individuality, pride, cooperation, understanding, searching for answers to difficult questions in their own way, each contributing, hopefully, the strongest single characteristic of their background and heritage and special sensitivity to a common purpose.

To us at the Smithsonian these remarks symbolize the essence of our Folklife Festival and our historical collections. In our Festivals we have demonstrated the evolutionary product of customs and cultures derived from all the continents. In our historical collections we show the end products of adaptations to living, inventions as "answers to difficult questions" for modes of life from poles to equator. We celebrate folkways and the persistence of traditions among all minorities.

The point of our festivals and our displays of Man's diversity strikes home to the people who come to our museums and reach out for reaffirmation of identity. We fear the loss of it in the sense of anomie that comes with being a cipher, a numeral, a set of digits. We fear big government, big business, megastates that might rule the world. Coupled with the fear of homogenization is the fear of the loss of our own souls.

Those of us who follow peoples across the world — families, clans, tribes, especially in the less



developed areas of our planet — are desperately aware of the tensions created by the suppression of roots, of traditions that nurture the sense of identity. Much of the persistent unrest in countries today stems from striving for identity.

One way to strengthen our sense of identity and to demonstrate our essential humanity, a way that may elude the technicians busy at the helm of our vast bureaus of government, is the reaffirmation of the differences among us, the persistence of our traditions at the ground roots of life, a countercurrent for survival.

Our 13th Folklife Festival takes *community* as its theme. Here we celebrate the creative genius of many cultural groups — some have been on this soil for months, others for millenia. We take particular pleasure in the knowledge that those most recently arrived — from Vietnam and the Caribbean — come bearing venerable traditions which are welcome gifts, peerless in their beauty.