



The Value of Continuity by S. Dillon Ripley Secretary, Smithsonian Institution

The 1984 Festival of American Folklife is especially significant for the Smithsonian and, I might add, pleasing to me, because it brings vibrant representatives of cultures with which the Institution has a special affinity.

From Alaska come native peoples whose rich traditions have been our concern even before the founding of the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1879. For more than a century, the Institution has devoted a large part of its scholarly effort to the documentation and preservation of the deep and varied cultures of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. To the keepers of these important traditions I bid welcome and extend our gratitude for sharing with us your skills and knowledge.

Also from Alaska come representatives of occupations whose labor and cultural expression have shaped that State in a profound way. Smithsonian involvement with occupational culture goes back to the marvelous accomplishments of industry exhibited in our museums, built by workers whose minds, hands and eyes inherited a cultural legacy from their fellow craftsmen. More direct involvement with the history and culture of work came with the Institution's Festival of American Folklife, which since 1967 has presented folklife demonstrations and performances from over 60 occupational groups. The National Museum of American History has also recently taken direct steps to include the history of working people among its steely monuments of their industry.

That Museum is also home for a research unit which documents another American cultural group represented at this year's Festival. The Festival presentation of Black American expressive culture from Philadelphia is reflected in the Program in Black American Culture in the National Museum of American History. The evanescent Festival presentations, which have featured Black American folklife since 1967, together with the permanent Museum program, attest to the importance the Smithsonian attaches to this aspect of American culture.

The abiding Institutional commitment to participants of the Festival program "The Grand Generation: Folklore and Aging" is, in a sense, philosophical in nature. We honor these elder craftsmen, performers, cooks and storytellers for maintaining the traditions that keep us in touch with our cultural foundations. This core of aesthetic and moral values helps to order and give meaning to our lives. We feel the conservation role of these elders—the preserving and passing down of our heritage—is much the same as that of the Smithsonian.

We welcome and offer our respect to these elder keepers of tradition, and also to Alaskans and Philadelphians, as one conservation organization to another.