

Celebrating Freedom

Robert McC. Adams
Secretary, Smithsonian Institution

The Festival, like all Smithsonian museums, is free. No tickets or turnstiles to ingather patrons and exclude the rest. The Festival has always been free—by the original vision of the event's founders—because the Festival is the Smithsonian's forum of living cultural ideas. The Festival is a celebration of traditional beauty, knowledge and wisdom. Participation in its potential for growth, delight and understanding will always be the free privilege of the citizens of the nation and the world.

It seems especially appropriate to recall the value of open public access to our national cultural dialogue this year, as we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (currently on display in the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building). Marking a period of unbounded potential, the events of 1789 were a starburst of public energy that, no matter how later aggrandized, had a profound effect on our young American republic and changed forever the light in which we view our public institutions. Indeed, our own Bill of Rights was signed within thirty days of the French Declaration. It is in commemoration of our common covenants of human rights and in recognition of our common French heritage that we celebrate the Bicentennial with Francophone musi-

cians and craftspeople from France, Quebec, New England, Louisiana, Missouri and North Dakota.

The history of freedom in the United States has involved a continuing tension between the rights and responsibilities of individuals and corporate groups and a continuing struggle between colonizers and colonized, between the settled and the newly arrived. This dynamic is evident in the history of Hawai'i as Polynesian islands, former kingdom and fiftieth state. Hawai'i provides an Eden-like environment that has drawn ancient mariners and modern immigrants to form a multiethnic, multicultural society. The Hawai'i program includes the descendents of immigrants, mainly from the Pacific rim (but also from the Atlantic), who came to the islands to work on plantations, enduring servitude and hardship in hope of a better life. Their story is one of immigration and the search for freedom, offering lessons that Americans need become aware of as the Pacific captures our national attention.

But Hawai'i is unique in our nation in that its indigenous culture suffuses its society as a whole, giving nuance to the forms of immigrant cultures that came there. This thirtieth anniversary of Hawaii's statehood invites us to reflect upon human cultural freedom—equity for and conservation of



traditional cultures. For, we celebrate as well the vitality and open spirit of an indigenous Hawaiian culture that has endured political, ideological and commercial attempts to restrict its practice and growth.

The continuity of culture depends upon access to various natural, social and cultural resources. We bridle at unfair restrictions of such access that limit our freedom to realize our visions of who we are. The American Indian program this year examines such restrictions and their impact upon contemporary tribal life. What happens when tribal rituals depend on endangered species, or traditional means of subsistence are threatened by land and water pollution? The program also illustrates attempts by various tribes to gain freedom over their cultural future through the innovative management of traditional resources.

Freedom also involves the flow of ideas, of knowledge, of scientific information

beyond the bounds of group, tribe or nation. The Caribbean program illustrates the historical flow of cultural and aesthetic ideas between diverse Native, European, and African populations in several island societies. Despite extreme social stratification of masters and slaves and attendant racism in the Caribbean, the ideas of the French Revolution had their effect there also, inspiring the independence movement in Haiti, which in 1801 became the first free African American republic. While both African and European cultural forms persist, Caribbean populations are characterized by the creative creolization of music, food, language and art. Indeed, this encounter of diverse peoples defined the New World that developed in the wake of the Columbian voyages, whose 500th anniversary we prepare to commemorate in 1992. Today, despite political antagonisms, citizens of our nation and the world must be free to converse with one another. Scientists and scholars must talk with each other if knowledge is to be served. Musicians, artists, writers and others must hear, see and read each other if their art is to live. We are therefore happy to host contingents of musicians from Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica and Puerto Rico so that Americans may be free to hear their musics and the complex historical tale they tell about the making of the New World.