

Why We Do the Festival

Richard Kurin

At last year's Festival of American Folklife, Gladys Widdiss, a Wampanoag Indian from Gay Head on Martha's Vineyard, sat in a rocking chair under a white tent on the National Mall of the United States. She picked up the microphone to speak to some of the more than 1.5 million people who visit the Festival. Gladys spoke of her pottery, made from the clay of the Gay Head cliffs, and of her efforts to teach young people about the traditional Wampanoag respect for the earth and its natural environment. She spoke of her own life, and with her voice cracking from the emotion of the moment, Gladys said, "I'm a Wampanoag Indian grandmother. And that's what I want to be. I don't ever want to feel ashamed of what I know and who I am. And I want to tell my grandchildren that."

Two years ago, my daughter Danielle made a calendar for her pre-school art project. For each month she drew an accompanying illustration: Valentine hearts for February, turkeys for November. For July, she drew a picture illustrating fireworks for the Fourth, along with three large human-like statues in flames. Danielle couldn't explain that her picture evoked the 1985 Festival, when as part of the India program we burned 40 ft. high paper and bamboo statues of the evil king Ravana and his cohorts on the Mall. Instead she recalls that "the fireworks scare away bad things."

In 1987, Alexandre Nikolai Demchenko, deputy director of cultural education at the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Culture, was negotiating the terms under which Soviet folk artists and musicians would come to the Festival in

1988. "So," he said, "you do not want our best dance academy students to come to your Festival to perform peasant dances. You want the peasants themselves, the real people who do these dances."

In 1976 Ethel Mohamed from Belzoni, Mississippi made a tapestry illustrating the diversity of American and world cultures brought to the Bicentennial Festival. The colorful, memory style tapestry illustrates folk dancing, cooking demonstrations, musical performance and children's games on the Mall. According to Ethel, the tapestry is like the Festival—a celebration of all of us joined together.

Gladys, Danielle, Demchenko and Ethel are each right. We do the Festival to encourage grandmothers to teach their granddaughters, to scare away public evil, to understand living traditions and to celebrate our common, though multicultural, humanity.

This Year at the Festival

This year, we hope that our programs on Hawai'i, French and French American culture, Caribbean musics, and American Indian cultural conservation issues will have an effect back home by encouraging the preservation and transmission of traditional cultural repertoires. The knowledge and aesthetics of Hawaiian culture; the speaking of French; the joining of African, European and Native American traditions; and the cultural practices of American Indian tribes represent not only continuity with the past, but the ability to enact the future with a variety of proven approaches and sensibilities.

The Hawai'i program teaches us about a unique multicultural state, where a long-lived



Ethel Mohamed, a traditional needleworker from Belzoni, Mississippi, embroidered a tapestry for the summer-long bi-centennial Festival in 1976 depicting the range of activities at the Festival.

native culture has vitalized not only Hawaiians, but also generations of immigrants from China, Japan, Portugal, the Philippines, Samoa and other nations. The contemporary panoply of Hawaiian cultures signals to us the influence of the peoples and cultures of the Pacific rim upon our national consciousness, in the past and increasingly now and in the future. The French and French American Bicentennial program demonstrates to us how closely bound are France and North America, both in our shared covenants of freedom and in our Franco-phone populations ever seeking to preserve their cultural heritage.

The Caribbean program initiates a series of living exhibitions on the Columbus Quincentenary. As we approach 1992, we seek to commemorate and understand the encounters of populations—American Indians, Europeans, Africans and Asians—brought together in the New World. The Caribbean



At the 1988 Festival's Soviet music program, the southern Russian ensemble from Podserednee, Belgorod Province, sings in the rural tradition. The program has paved the way for a series of cultural exchanges between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. (Photo by Rick Vargas)



Hundreds of Low Country families depend on coiled basketmaking for a substantial part of their household economy. The tradition, originating in Africa, is now threatened by beachfront real estate developers. Attention from folklorists over the last 30 years helps to support the basketmakers' efforts to preserve access to needed raw materials. (Photo of Queen Ellis by John Vlach)

exemplifies this encounter and provides an illustration of the creation of New World musics, foodways, languages and rituals. The American Indian program teaches us that tribal cultures continue to offer vision, beauty and a sense of community to their bearers. But the continuity of those cultures depends upon access to natural resources, markets, legal systems and public recognition. When access is denied, cultures may be endangered: they may lose their way and die.

While these programs at the Festival seem to us both logical and valuable, for some the Festival itself and the efforts of its organizers are innocuous diversions and possibly even deceitful. Consider Allan Bloom's views in the best-selling *The Closing of the American Mind*,

The 'ethnic' differences we see in the United States are but decaying reminiscences of old differences that caused our ancestors to kill one another. The animating principle, their soul, has disappeared from them. The ethnic festivals are just

superficial displays of clothes, dances and foods from the old country. One has to be quite ignorant of the splendid 'cultural' past to be impressed or charmed by these insipid folkloric manifestations...And the blessing given the whole notion of cultural diversity in the United States by the culture movement has contributed to the intensification and legitimization of group politics, along with a corresponding decay of belief that the individual rights enunciated in the Declaration of Independence are anything more than dated rhetoric. (Bloom 1987:192-3)

Accordingly, if Bloom is correct, it would make little sense to do the Festival: folklife should be relegated to a "traditional" museum of dead cultures, and the Smithsonian should reject representations of cultural diversity. How then to explain the Festival of American Folklife as part of the Smithsonian Institution, a "living museum" among the National Museums of the United States? And how then to explain the Festival's role as an advocate for human cultural rights, for cultural equity, for cultural diversity in the context of the Smithsonian—a national institution founded with democratic, enlightenment ideals for the "increase and diffusion of knowledge among men."

Museuming: A Conceptual Background to the Festival

To understand the Festival, we must first understand the museum context within which it is set and against which it is simultaneously juxtaposed. The rapid and extensive growth of museums in the 19th century was largely motivated by the desire to collect things—natural species and cultural artifacts—before they were no longer available. Curators, scholars and collectors wanted to make sure we had an accurate (or at least comprehensible) record of the life forms, cultural achievements, and historical events that had graced our planet. Bones, stones, baskets, costumes, diaries and mementos were regarded as the closest things to a living memory of our natural and cultural heritage.

The approach of museums to the preser-

vation of culture is instructive. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many of the world's cultures were disappearing or being changed beyond recognition. The Industrial Revolution, urbanization, colonialism and a growing globalism in commerce and communication changed societies the world over. The native cultures of the Americas, Asia, Africa and Oceania were being destroyed. Languages that took centuries to form no longer had enough people to speak them: some 400 American Indian languages, for example, were lost by the 20th century. Art forms developed over generations could no longer be practiced for lack of materials, knowledge, or occasions for use. Forms of subsistence, of eating, of building homes were discouraged or became economically impossible to realize. Social organizations—clans, tribes, castes, chiefdoms, kingdoms and other institutions—were superseded by newer forms, often imposed by conquering forces. Ritual practices, beliefs, and specialized systems of knowledge were largely swept aside, belittled, or rendered irrelevant. In short, cultures—deprived of their own materials, knowledge and purposes—were actively being destroyed, or were dying of disuse.

The destruction of cultures did not bother some, who saw in that process the weeding out of more "primitive," less adaptable or less advanced ways of living. For some of these "social evolutionists," the progress of mankind as a species depended upon eliminating beliefs and practices seen to be irrational and uneconomical. Museums cast in this evolutionary mode typically arranged artifacts in order, say from the most primitive form of spear to the most complex, from the simplest form of pottery to the most sophisticated. At the endpoint or pinnacle of this cultural evolution was the Victorian Englishman or European, representing the epitome of civilization. Other peoples and their cultures, both contemporary and historical, were seen as remnants of previous stages of cultural development, representing more savage and barbarous lifeways.

Anthropologists, folklorists, and historians such as John Wesley Powell at the Smithsonian, Franz Boas at the American Museum

of Natural History, and William Wells Newell lamented this rapid and extensive loss of cultures. They played key roles in the formation of the American Folklore Society (1888-89), the Bureau of American Ethnology (1880), the American Anthropological Association (1898) and other organizations that had as their purpose the study and documentation of those cultures before they disappeared entirely. Much of this work fell to museums that mounted expeditions and collection efforts so that future generations might be able to understand and appreciate what had been.

Boas and his student-colleagues—Alfred Kroeber, Elsie Clews Parsons, Ruth Benedict, Edward Sapir, Margaret Mead, Zora Neale Hurston and others—knew what was lost when a culture died. Every culture represents ways of living, ways of seeing the world, and time-proven ways of navigating in it. Every culture defines the world and characteristic ways of representing it: cognitively, through the knowledge, skills and wisdom it inculcates in its bearers; normatively, through laws and expectations of how to behave; and aesthetically, through the music, song, verbal arts and material forms it promotes and values. Every culture provides a code for being human, and for being human in a distinctive way. Unlike genetic codes, cultural codes are learned. And individuals are capable of learning and enacting several different codes. When a culture dies, distinct ways of knowing, of doing, of understanding and of expressing die. When the society bearing the culture dies, we lose the means by which the culture is enacted and practiced. And while genetic descendants may remain, they live on deprived of their own culture, often marginally associated with a new, most likely imposed one. In short, the death of a culture represents a diminution in the human cultural repertoire. A pattern that may have taken thousands or hundreds of years to form is lost: there is no one to teach it, to transmit its vision of the world, the knowledge and wisdom reposed therein, the skills of the generations of people who labored in its bounds. This loss extends beyond the present, for we never know how valuable

would have been the contribution of that culture to a larger human future.

Museums could serve to hasten the death of cultures. The quicker cultures die, the more rapidly museums could collect their remains. And if museums actually promoted and participated in the death of cultures, collecting practices could be rationalized to a great degree. Indeed, something like this occurred under the Nazis during their occupation of Czechoslovakia, resulting in the Central Jewish Museum of Prague (in a story so well told in the 1983 Smithsonian exhibit, "The Precious Legacy").

What should museums do, particularly those of national and international scope, in relation to the death and destruction of cultures? One hundred years ago, Powell wrote to the then Secretary of the Smithsonian Spencer Baird,

Rapidly the Indians are being gathered on reservations where their original habits and customs disappear, their languages are being modified or lost...I would respectfully request that you forward to Congress this statement with an estimate for fifty thousand dollars for the purpose of continuing the ethnologic researches among the North American Indians under the direction of the Smithsonian Institution. (BAE file 4677, National Anthropological Archives)

And just 20 years ago at the Smithsonian the Center for the Study of Urgent Phenomena was created to study rapidly disappearing cultural expressions as well as natural occurrences of limited duration.

The Festival and the Museum

When we consider the contemporary world, two facts seem apparent. First, cultures are still being destroyed or falling into disuse, both in the United States and throughout the world. This is occurring in major cities, as third generation yuppies reject even the vestiges of the cultures of their immigrant grandparents. But it is also occurring through acts of genocide, wholesale prejudice and discrimination, and the destruction of ecosystems that support native

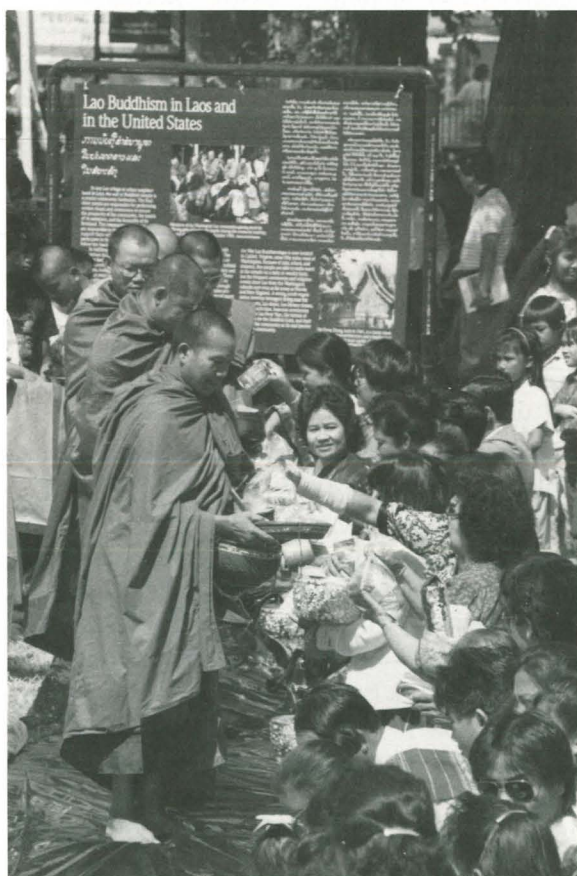
peoples in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australia. Second, despite all the pronouncements of cultural disappearance or mere vestigial survival, as Bloom suggests, a broad array of human cultures seem to be doing quite well and even flourishing. People continue to learn their own native languages; grow in extended, joint and other forms of family; recognize a variety of social, religious and occupational groups; and construe their morals and world views in ways different from post-modern secular academic Americans. The world, it seems, can admit to many cultural ways. And as anthropologists have pointed out, people can and do live multicultural lives. Indeed, it has been argued that some of the very forms that hastened the destruction of cultures years ago (for example, government policies and new technologies) now aid them. Maintenance of the Navajo language may be enabled through its radio broadcast; widely available tape recorders make it possible for Indians in the Amazon Basin to record and preserve their songs. The U.N. Charter for Human Rights, various international accords, and other covenants encourage and enjoin governments to recognize rights to practice one's culture, speak one's language and worship freely.

The Festival of American Folklife, from its inception, has been conceived as part of a cultural conservation strategy for the National Museum. Underlying that strategy is the belief in cultural equity, cultural relativity and cultural pluralism—the belief that all cultures have something to say and a right to be heard, that questions of cultural superiority are moot, and that a world, nation and community with many cultures are enriched by that diversity. As Alan Lomax, co-founder of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress, folklorist, National Medal of the Arts holder and long-time advisor to the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife has stated,

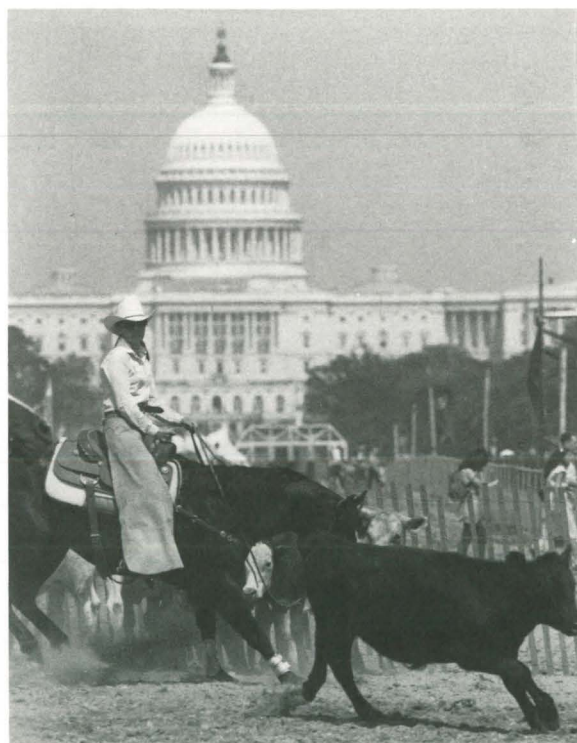
Practical men often regard these expressive systems as doomed and valueless. Yet, wherever the principle of cultural equity comes into play, these creative wellsprings begin to flow again...Even in



A shared language and traditions of social interaction make the deaf community an identifiable cultural group. This was presented at the 1981 Festival program, "To Hear a Hand: Folklore and Folklife of the Deaf." (Photo by Jeff Tinsley)



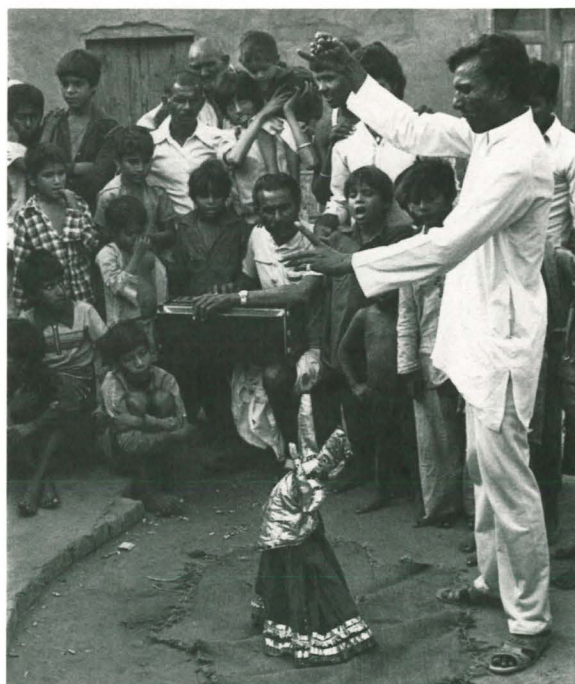
Donations of food are given to Buddhist monks by the local Laotian community during the Lao Rocket Festival, an event held at the 1987 Festival program, "Cultural Conservation and Language: America's Many Voices." (Photo by Jeff Tinsley)



The occupational folklife of horsemen was featured as part of the Oklahoma state program in 1982 through presentations of horse breeding, training and racing.



The Children's Program at the 1982 Festival gave younger visitors an opportunity to participate in performance, craft, ritual, occupational and dance traditions. (Photo by Richard Hofmeister)



Indian performers and puppeteers from Shadipur, a squatter encampment outside of Delhi, participated in the 1985 Smithsonian programs, "Mela! An Indian Fair" at the Festival of American Folklife, and the three-month long museum exhibition, "Aditi: A Celebration of Life." These programs aided their struggle to gain rights to land to build homes. (Photo by Daphne Shuttleworth)

this industrial age, folk traditions can come vigorously back to life, can raise community morale, and give birth to new forms if they have the time and room to grow in their own communities. The work in this field must be done with tender and loving concern for both the folk artists and their heritages. This concern must be knowledgeable, both about the fit of each genre to its local context and about its roots in one or more of the great stylistic traditions of humankind. We have an overarching goal—the world of manifold civilizations animated by the vision of cultural equity. (Lomax 1977)

As a strategy, cultural conservation suggests that museums conserve cultures while they live rather than waiting to collect their remnants after they die. The role of a museum can be to help empower people to practice their culture, realize their aesthetic excellences, use their knowledge, transmit their wisdom, and make their culture a vital means for dealing with contemporary circumstances.

In 1967, Ralph Rinzler and others, under then-Secretary S. Dillon Ripley, developed the Festival as a means by which the Smithsonian could help conserve culture by representing it in a national forum. The Festival was part of a compact the National Museum has with the nation, the Smithsonian has with humankind—to provide a stage from which all those peoples and cultures that have contributed to our collective cultural history could speak and be heard. The Festival would be a place where they could tell their story in their own words, in their own terms. At the Festival they could demonstrate how they built or created instruments, baskets, machines and artifacts—equivalent to the national treasures reposing in the museums. The Festival would bring to the attention of the nation exemplary practitioners of traditions, people who continually create, recreate, invent and in so doing conserve their culture. These people would illustrate alternative ways to live in the present, not just remind us of the past. And by doing this, the Festival would enrich the lives of an American and international public.



Gladys-Marie Fry (l), a presenter with the 1986 Cultural Conservation program, "Traditional Crafts in a Post-Industrial Age," holds a workshop with Alabama quilters Eloise Dickerson and Mamie McKinstry. (Photo by Dale Hrabak)

Over the past 23 years, the Festival of American Folklife has presented more than 15,000 bearers of traditional culture—musicians, craftspeople, storytellers, cooks, workers, performers and other cultural specialists—from every region of the United States, from scores of ethnic groups, from more than 100 American Indian and Alaskan Native groups, from more than 60 occupational groups and from more than 45 nations of the world.

Why We Do the Festival

We do the Festival so that people can be heard. The Festival gives voice to people and cultures not otherwise likely to be heard in a national setting. The Festival emphasizes folk, tribal, ethnic and regional traditional culture, non-elite and non-commercial forms created in communities throughout the U.S. and abroad. It is the culture of people trained by word of mouth or apprenticeship, doing what they do largely for members of their own family or church, village or social group. The Festival has also been instrumental in representing the cul-

tures of particular groups who often do not appear in the nation's cultural consciousness. The Festival has been a leader in illustrating the occupational cultures of working people—taxicab drivers, waiters, firefighters, railway workers—and the cultures of deaf people, of children and of new immigrant groups.

By letting cultures speak from the "bully pulpit" of the National Mall, the Festival also allows us to help legitimate alternative forms of aesthetics and culture. Musical performances, crafts and foodways demonstrations, and other programmatic activities meet Smithsonian standards of authenticity, cultural significance, excellence. Their placement in a National Museum setting conveys their value to artists, to home communities, to general audiences and to specialists. The Festival's role in legitimating Cajun and Creole music, Afro-American coil basketry, Italian-American stone carving and other traditional arts provides a needed counterweight to other forms of delegitimation.

The Festival encourages dialogue, not didacticism. It directly reaches more than

one million people each year and thus contributes to the broad educative function of the National Museums. At the Festival, visitors may gain in-depth knowledge of historical processes or thematic issues, or become a bit more familiar with another culture or tradition. The Festival provides a neutral ground for approaching people different from oneself. And at the Festival, intimacy is possible. Visitors can participate: learn a Portuguese song or a Greek dance, ask a Japanese scholar a question, or converse with a river boat guide from Michigan. The Festival provides for encounters that might otherwise not take place, as for example with the extraordinary Soviet music program last year.

We do the Festival so that practitioners may be encouraged to pass on their skills and knowledge. Much of popular mass culture suggests to traditional practitioners that they are anachronisms, practicing forms of art that have lost their vitality and beauty. The Festival is a way of saying to such artists, "What you do is valuable, so valuable that the Smithsonian Institution would like you to show it to the nation." This recognition—of particular crafts, musical styles, verbal art, folk medical knowledge, occupational lore—provides encouragement to the practitioner and is sometimes a source of strength back home. Some artists gain an understanding or appreciation of their own cultural contribution and may promote and

U.S. Legislation to Conserve Culture

The American Folklife Preservation Act was signed into law by President Ford in 1976. It established the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, and defined a national commitment to the preservation of American folklife.

Excerpts from the Act:

The Congress hereby finds and declares—that the diversity inherent in American folklife has contributed greatly to the cultural richness of the Nation and has fostered a sense of individuality and identity among the American people;

that the history of the United States effectively demonstrates that building a strong nation does not require the sacrifice of cultural differences;

that it is in the interest of the general welfare of the Nation to preserve, support, revitalize, and disseminate American folklife traditions and arts.

The International Indigenous Peoples Protection Act, H.R. 879 is a bill introduced during the current session of Congress to help prevent the further destruction and elimination of cultures and societies around the world.

Excerpts from the bill:

The Congress makes the following findings—

The situation of indigenous and tribal peoples in developing countries is deteriorating worldwide.

Many of these populations face severe dis-

crimination, denial of human rights, loss of cultural and religious freedoms, or in the worst cases, cultural or physical destruction.

If current trends in many parts of the world continue the cultural, social, and linguistic diversity of humankind will be radically and irrevocably diminished.

In addition, immense, undocumented repositories of ecological, biological, and pharmacological knowledge will be lost, as well as an immeasurable wealth of cultural, social, religious, and artistic expression, which together constitute part of the collective patrimony of the human species.

In many cases, unsound development policy that results in destruction of natural resources seriously jeopardizes indigenous and tribal peoples' physical survival and their cultural autonomy, frequently also undermining the possibility for long-term sustainable economic development.

The loss of the cultural diversity for indigenous and tribal peoples is not an inevitable or natural process.

In light of United States concern and respect for human rights and basic human freedoms, including rights to express cultural and religious preferences, as well as the United States desire for sustainable economic development, it is incumbent on the United States to take a leadership role in addressing indigenous and tribal peoples' rights to physical and cultural survival.



In 1986 a Japanese rice paddy was recreated to provide a new context for a rice planting ritual, performed by the Hanadaue group from Mibu village in Hiroshima Prefecture, Japan. (Photo by Jeff Tinsley)

transmit the tradition with greater resolve as a result of Festival participation. Over the years, the Festival has played this role in the revitalization of Cajun culture in Louisiana, among various American Indian tribes, among Afro-American communities, and in other countries such as India where it contributed to the effort of street performers and itinerants to gain rights to practice their arts and to gain title to their land.

The Festival has also historically helped people represent their own culture. While academic and lay scholars, signs and written materials help frame the presentation, there are no scripts for Festival participants. Festival participants develop their own means of self-presentation and interpretation as they interact with Festival staff, experts and the public. This experience often helps back home, and in other exhibition contexts, as some participants become spokespeople for their cultures. In some cases culture bearers have sought professional training and advanced educational opportunities, partly as

a result of their Festival experience. They have used this training, combined with their own knowledge, to teach about their cultures in universities and to develop and run programs and exhibits at museums, including the Smithsonian.

The Festival contributes to the development of scholarship and museology. Each Festival program is based on a considerable amount of research. This research is usually multidisciplinary, involving folklore, ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, history, cultural geography, various ethnosciences, and area and ethnic studies. In its methodology, our research veers away from the monographic, tending toward group efforts involving academic, museum and community scholars. For example, the Hawai'i program this year involved 32 different researchers and analysts, most from Hawaiian academic institutions and community groups, some from the Smithsonian, most with Ph.D.s, many with years of intimate experience as part of the community researched. Analytic



Dewey Balfa (l), Cajun fiddler from Basile, Louisiana, received his National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts at a Festival program in 1982. At the Festival the Fellows were joined by craftspeople and musicians, such as Cajun fiddler Michael Doucet, who were influenced by them. (Photo by Kim Nielsen)

efforts focused on particular traditions are balanced by synthetic attempts to understand and present larger wholes. A considerable amount of field work and archival research is accomplished in the course of Festival program development. Research documentation is archived, both at the Smithsonian and in the home country or state, for use by future scholars. Through the course of Festival research, linkages are opened for scholars, community people, and institutions that have resulted in other products beyond the Festival. These include books, dissertations, radio programs, and documentary films such as "The Stone Carvers" which, linked to a 1979 Festival program, won an Academy Award for best documentary in 1984. At a curatorial level, just as the writing of an ethnography can sharpen the understanding of a culture, so too does curating a Festival program aid the process of synthesizing knowledge. Festival programs, such as those on the African dias-

pora, help generate new and important scholarly understandings of cultural relationships.

The Festival reminds museum professionals that living culture is a national treasure. All of the artifacts in the art, history and technology museums—from projectile points to space craft—were made by human beings. Sometimes we fetishize the object, overvaluing it to the detriment of its maker. The Festival helps us to celebrate the makers of our national treasures. The Festival also makes clear that unlike objects, people—the makers—have ideas, recognize complexities, feel ambivalent and talk back. Many of the people who make our national treasures would feel uncomfortable visiting a museum. This is a sad commentary on what museums have become. At the Festival we have the opportunity to fill in the gaps, to ask—not speculate—about how and why something was made or a song was sung or a ritual enacted in a certain way. The Festival offers museums the opportunity to illustrate culture history with the sentient participating creators of that history.

The Festival contributes to the development of methods for the representation of culture. Folklorists, art historians, semioticians, exhibition designers and others are continually involved with exploring the variegated means by which cultures may be represented in museum contexts. Mannequins and objects in glass cases provide one of the older means of museum exhibitry, now enhanced by interactive computer terminals and screens, talking robots and multimedia presentations. The Festival has long served as a model for museum-based living cultural exhibitions and as a laboratory for experimenting with new presentational formats and theories of presentation. This has ranged from the elaborate re-creation of physical contexts—Oklahoma horse ranch and race course, Indian fair grounds with bazaar, Japanese rice paddy—to forms of framing performance and creating structures of appropriation.

The Festival encourages other forms of cultural research, presentation and conservation. The Festival provided the setting for public hearings on what was later enacted as

the Folklife Preservation Act of 1976, and helped in the formation of the Library of Congress American Folklife Center and the National Endowment of the Arts Folk Arts Program and its Heritage Awards. State programs at the Festival, most recently Michigan and Massachusetts, have served as the impetus for state folklife festivals on the same research-based model. The Festival has also provided a model internationally, provoking examination from Canada, Australia, the Soviet Union, India, Pakistan and Japan, among many others. A generation of academic and public sector folklorists and some 600 U.S. and international scholars have worked in various capacities on the Festival—as researchers, presenters, authors, consultants. The Festival continues to offer a context for dissertation research, internships, teacher workshops and, beginning this year, a summer folklore institute bringing together academic and community scholars.

The Festival symbolizes aspects of our own nation and sense of community. It is through the Festival that a community of scholars, workers, community people, volunteers and artists is created. The Festival is actually built and technically served by theater people, musicians, teachers, architects, government bureaucrats and other amateurs, some of whom take time off every year to work on the Festival. The temporary Festival staff and the hundreds of local area volunteers include a diversity of old and young, female and male from a variety of cultural and ethnic groups. People support the Festival and work on it as a labor of love and pride. This commitment to helping the nation represent itself is illustrated by volunteers returning year after year for five, ten, even fifteen years. It is also illustrated in the incorporation of populations previously outside the orbit of the national museums. For example, in 1985 some 100 Indian-American volunteers worked on the India exhibition. In 1986, many returned to work on the Japan exhibition; some even became Smithsonian employees.

The Festival—and the sense of community it has engendered—has generated its own folklore traditions, from our annual Father's day crepe breakfast to linguistic terms such



John McCauley, like other volunteers at the Festival, learns about the craftsperson and the work and skills that go into a craft, and helps convey this to visitors during a break for the participant. (Photo by Dale Hrabak)

as “mushroom” (tool truck) and “fudgie” (tourist), from a rich lore of Festival stories to a material culture including the costuming of forklifts and electric carts. As Bauman and Sawin have suggested (forthcoming), the Festival is truly so for those who organize and work on it.

Through the Festival, new culture is sometimes created. This happens at special moments, either on the Mall or back at the hotel out of public view. New experiences and ways of thinking arise from the juxtaposition of cultures at the Festival. On a large scale, such may occur when communities are brought together. Last year, for example, a Saints' Day procession was recreated on the Mall by Italian and Portuguese Americans from Massachusetts. As the procession reached the Metropolitan Washington program, Salvadorans awaited with traditional sawdust drawings, which in Latin America are to be trod upon by processions. The Italian and Portuguese Americans took their cues from the Salvadorans and participated in the ritual. Similarly, Russian singers greeted the procession with songs to saints, and the people from Massachusetts hugged the singers, crying and dancing. More commonly, musical juxtapositions take place back at the hotel where musicians from India have jammed with Cajuns, Eskimos have sung with Koreans, Azerbaijanis have played



1988 Festival participants and visitors join members of three Boston-area Italian and Portuguese-American societies in a procession of Saints' statues around the National Mall. (Photo by Dane Penland)

with Greeks. Like the Festival, these types of meetings of cultures are ephemeral. But the Festival holds open the possibility of emergent, non-predictable cultural creation. Sometimes this has been sustained among individuals. During the 1986 Festival a Tennessee cooper observed and started sharing his knowledge with a *sake* cask maker from Japan. He wanted to learn more about cask making from a Japanese perspective and eventually received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to study in Japan with his fellow craftsman. The influence of Japanese techniques and aesthetics may in the future emerge back in Tennessee.

The Festival is a visible symbol of the larger structure that enables us to mount such an event. Our own public culture is shaped by traditions of governance, the observance of various freedoms, and common understandings of how we express ourselves. The Festival simply could not be mounted under certain circumstances. There are many countries of the world in

which the Festival could not occur.

The Festival is a symbol of our own national culture. Our formal political and legal history—as exemplified in such documents as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and cognate documents, such as the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen that we currently celebrate—establishes a context for the intensely public display of our cultural diversity and aspirations at the Festival. Yet there are times in our own history when the Festival would be untenable. The principles enunciated in our political structures and laws may be subverted when tides of popular fear of other cultures, intolerance of minorities, the narrowing of accepted values, racism, anti-Semitism and other forms of cultural discrimination and hatred are encouraged. Witness the injustice done in the name of the law to African Americans under slavery and continuing to the Civil Rights era (and its consequences as depicted in the National Museum of American History “Field to Factory” exhibit). And witness as well the

incarceration of Japanese Americans in detention camps in the name of freedom during World War II (as presented in the National Museum of American History exhibit, "A More Perfect Union").

The Festival is tied to our freedom. It is both a vehicle as well as an indicator of an open national cultural conversation. The Festival makes us proud: not chauvinistically proud, but, as Secretary Ripley used to say, quietly proud of who we are. And it is through that understanding and appreciation of who we are that we appreciate others. The Festival is a symbol of our ability as a nation to find unity in our diversity rather than insist on a homogeneous, singular national, or yet worse, human culture. It is no accident that the Festival was birthed during a time of national struggle, the drive for freedom and civil rights. It is no accident that the Festival occurs on the National Mall in the shadow of our national monuments as a platform for the nation. And it is no accident that the Festival is tied in time and place to a dream, an American dream, a human dream enunciated so clearly and powerfully by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and echoed yearly by grandmothers like Gladys Widdiss.

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Citations and further readings

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