

NATIONAL PARKS: A HOME FOR CULTURAL EXPRESSION

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Most people think of museums as storehouses of objects and the Smithsonian, especially, as the steward of our nation's material treasures — the Hope diamond, the Wright brothers' airplane, the original Star Spangled Banner. In a like manner, most think of the National Park Service as the steward of our nation's natural and cultural treasures — Yellowstone National Park, Grand Canyon National Park, the Statue of Liberty, the Lincoln Memorial. But the Smithsonian Institution and the National Park Service are this and more. Their missions are not only to preserve physical objects and environments but also the values embodied in the natural, cultural and historical heritage that gives meaning to our life as a nation and as a people.

In the Festival of American Folklife we form a partnership in which we present living cultural treasures — exemplary musicians, craftspeople, storytellers, cooks, and other cultural specialists — to the nation. Through living exhibitions of their skills, knowledge and artistry we expect that a broad public will learn about the different traditions, cultures and people that comprise our nation and the world. We expect that the Festival will bring people closer together, helping us understand one another. We also expect that the Festival will have an effect "back home" — encouraging feelings of community self-worth and pride.

The National Park Service also works "back home" in all parts of the country. We collaborate with many local and regional agencies throughout the United States to present programs that testify to the richness, vitality and diversity of America's many people and traditions. I can cite as but a few examples, the National Folk Festival held for the past three years at Lowell National Historical Park and this year at America's Industrial Heritage

Park in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and the many presentations of traditional culture at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park in Louisiana, Golden Gate National Recreation Area in California, Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, Chamizal National Memorial Park, Texas, Blue Ridge National Parkway in Virginia and North Carolina, and Cuyahoga National Recreation Area in Ohio.

We are particularly happy to have joined in producing the programs at this year's Festival. We share an interest in the land and peoples of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Virgin Islands National Park on St. John is a beautiful, ecologically and historically important park. Research conducted there has taught us much about Caribbean ecology and marine biology. A number of historical sites and sugar mills have been restored so as to make the history of the Virgin Islands accessible to both residents and visitors. And some of our National Park Service scholars have made contributions to the cultural and historical research that supports this Festival program.

We also see the significance of National Parks, particularly monuments, reflected in the Musics of Struggle program. Often, in American public life, our monuments and the significance they embody become focal points for the mobilization of public expression. The U.S. Capitol building became a center for Gallaudet students to announce and advance their pressing need for a deaf president. The Lincoln Memorial has been a focal point for the Civil Rights Movement. Unlike many nations, we take pride in this form of public discourse. It is a celebration of our political freedom. And while we may not always agree with one another, we do agree that our freedom of expression, through access to these monuments and nationally symbolic public places, must be preserved — and treasured.