



The American South

The American South

The American South has been made possible by and is produced in collaboration with The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games Cultural Olympiad and in cooperation with the Southern Arts Federation. Additional support has been provided by The Recording Industries Music Performance Trust Funds.

Philippa Thompson Jackson

The American South celebrates a vibrant, traditional, regional culture, and much, much more. In a way, the program presents a glimpse of the roots of the whole of American culture itself. For much of what began as a complex regional drama involving Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans has become a part of us all. Conscious confrontations and unconscious mixtures have produced a richly distinct "Southern culture." Beneath the surface of a sometimes divided society we find common affections. Evidence of these shared experiences, beliefs, and folkways is to be found in the

food Southerners eat, the way Southerners talk, and the music they make.

This year's program not only exposes regional cultural roots but also shows how many of them have become part of traditions known to America and the world. Technology amplified the stories and songs of Southern rivers and roads, travails and struggles — as documenters recorded, disk jockeys broadcast, and performers toured these cultural expressions, helping them bridge race, gender, class, and ethnicity and producing forms of music — blues, bluegrass, country, gospel, jazz, rock 'n' roll — now identified with American culture.

The American South has always been both crossroads and borderland, accommodating and assimilating peoples and cultures of the world. The rural environment still nourishes the culture, but so do urban and global influences. Today's South has a Vietnamese accent in Louisiana, a Cuban beat in the south of Florida, a Yoruba cadence in North Carolina, and an Hispanic flavor from Texas to the Carolinas.

The world of Southern culture we celebrate in this year's Festival is one of family, home, and community. Our program explores new points of juncture and the evolution of new identities. In these we may discover in today's South the roots of a new, evolving American culture.

Kinn Kranh of Bayou La Batre, Alabama, makes a fish trap. He learned this skill as a youth in Cambodia.

Photo by Anne Kimzey, © Alabama Center for Traditional Culture



Philippa Thompson Jackson, curator of The American South, coordinated the 1992 New Mexico Festival program, America's Reunion on the Mall in 1993, and heads Miller-Thompson Group Decisions, a cultural projects firm.

A cigar factory, left, in Miami's Little Havana.

Photo by Sarah J. Glover