

# On the Banks of the River Together

**Bruce Babbitt**  
*Secretary of the Interior*

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The Department of the Interior has as part of its mission the protection of a magnificent and bountiful heritage. This includes the natural environment, like America's rivers and other waterways. But it also includes our cultural heritage, that which defines our sense of place and unites us as a people, as a nation, and as a world community.

This year at the Festival we are proud to join with the Smithsonian Institution in celebrating the traditions of the Mississippi Delta, a culturally rich region where Native, Spanish, African, French, and American people all merged, just as many tributaries flow into one river. Beginning even before the arrival of Europeans, the Mississippi has been a source of food and irrigation, a highway for commerce, a strategic center for political power, a source of inspiration for song and spirit.

We also celebrate the enterprise and vitality of recent immigrants to the United States from Africa, who have brought their cultures across the Atlantic Ocean. At the Festival, we will also hear in *Sacred Sounds* some of the ways in which music flows from the spirit of a diverse humanity to express its highest aspirations.

It is most fitting that we gather on the lovely National Mall, here among the national monuments and museums. Here we are part of the confluence of two historic and living watersheds, the Anacostia River and the Potomac River; where their waters and traditions join together, we celebrate our American and human cultural heritage.