

Celebrating Our Cultural Heritage

Bruce Babbitt
Secretary of the Interior

Over the past three decades, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival has brought millions of people together on the National Mall in an annual celebration of the art of American life and the cultures of our worldwide heritage.

The National Mall is a public landscape that connects our institutions of democracy, our monuments, museums, and storehouses of history in a unique layout in the Nation's Capital. The Mall and its institutions are open to all — annually welcoming millions of people from every background and cultural heritage.

Each year, the Festival celebrates the cultural traditions of specific regions of the United States and other nations around the world. Among those this year, the Festival features the cultural traditions of Wisconsin, which is celebrating its 150th anniversary of statehood, and the Centennial Celebration of the Philippine declaration of independence. Also featured are the Baltic nations — Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania — whose cultural traditions have been of paramount importance in defining and sustaining them. The Festival also hosts members of communities in the Río Grande/Río Bravo Basin, from Mexico and the United States, who draw meaning and sustenance from that great and important river.

The people and traditions on the Mall are here for us to understand, appreciate, and respect. We learn from the artisans, musicians, storytellers, workers, and other cultural torchbearers at the Festival. They teach us that culture is a

dynamic process, vital in the lives of diverse people and communities, and represents their heritage, creativity, knowledge, and skill.

Our cultural heritage is the gift of our forbears which carries a responsibility for us to share this inheritance with our children for future generations to understand and enjoy. By nurturing our cultural heritage, respecting what has been created, and passing it on, we give future generations the symbolic tools to construct worlds of meaning that provide answers to many questions. This is what we do at our memorials and monuments, in our national parks, and through our varied programs.

The Festival gives voice and vision to our worldwide cultural experiences. Reflect for a moment on how events like the Festival help one generation communicate with the succeeding one. Reflect for a moment on how it tells where we have been, what type of stewards of the land we have become, and who we are. The Festival is an annual remembrance of our rich past and rededication to a promising future.

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