

Cultural Heritage Development

Richard Kurin

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival, from its inception, has been conceived as a way of helping people keep their culture alive and well. Seen in relation to the Smithsonian's museums, the Festival has stressed living cultural traditions rather than artifacts. While curated and researched, the Festival has relied upon substantive partnerships with the people, communities, and institutions being represented. It has depended more upon people to sing, perform, craft, demonstrate, discuss, and reflect on their own culture than on more mediated forms of communication. The Festival has always been concerned with the consequences and impacts of cultural representation for democratic processes and economic vitality. Other projects connected with the Festival produced by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, such as Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, cultural education programs, traveling exhibitions, films, education kits, and training programs, are generally conceived of in the same way. The concern about keeping people's culture alive and well is nowadays referred to as cultural heritage development.

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Cultural heritage is a community's self-recognition of its current and historical accomplishments, products, activities, and forms of expression. Cultural heritage is construed and articulated by people as a symbol of their identity, a selection from history and social action of particular — usually valued — accomplishments, traditions, and events. Cultural heritage is often spoken

of in terms of tangible items — monuments, historic sites, artwork, books, for example — and intangible forms — songs, stories, public celebrations. Cultural heritage might be further differentiated by the sociology of its creation, use, and control. Charles Seeger, a noted ethnomusicologist, proposed the division of cultural traditions into elite, popular, and folk. "Elite" consists of those traditions often thought of as classical, requiring a great deal of for-

Values We Bring to Our Work

James Early

We bring a range of values to our work, guided by a variety of academic and technical disciplines. Each discipline, each set of values, contributes to our study and understanding of contemporary grassroots cultures.

We also hold some values in common. We share a commitment to the Smithsonian's mandate to increase and diffuse knowledge. We seek to produce sound scholarship and impart useful educational information and materials. We also share the inheritance of our predecessors at the Center, who founded, nurtured, revised, and expanded the Folklife Festival into the web of research, education, recordings, exhibitions, cultural activism, and applied policy programs it has become.

Ralph Rinzler stands out among the people inside and outside of the Smith-

sonian — formal and lay scholars, professional and community artists, and cultural activists — who shaped the vision and philosophy of the Festival. Ralph combined a keen aesthetic sensibility with a deep commitment to social justice. He saw and helped others see the need for the recognition, respect, and participation of tradition bearers in the validating institutions of public life. He expressed his knowledge and belief in writing, Festival production, and most clearly in fighting for access for diverse cultural communities, scholars, and cultural activists to speak, write, sing, and perform on their own cultural terms, thus contributing to the development of our national and global cultural life. Each succeeding generation of staff has brought new sensibilities, projects, and programs to the fur-

mal training and highly organized social institutions for their practice and continuity. Popular culture is more the domain of the mass market: culture created and distributed by companies for widespread consumption. Folk culture or folklife is oriented toward more orally transmitted, intangible living traditions produced and reproduced at a grassroots community level. As a term, *folklife* is variously known in the United States and other nations as grassroots culture, popular culture, traditional culture, folklore, or ethnographic culture. In the 1976 Folklife Preservation Act, the U.S. Congress defined folklife as “the totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group or individuals and recognized as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they reflect its cultural and social identity; its standards and values are transmitted orally, by imita-

tion, or by other means. Its forms are, among others, language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture, and other arts.” That definition was mirrored by UNESCO member states in a 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore.

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival took the term *folklife* in 1967 from Don Yoder’s use of it for the Pennsylvania Folklife Festival. Following Scandinavian usage, it signified a broader frame of reference than folklore or oral narrative, to include crafts, food, and other forms of expressive culture. *Folklife* also contrasted with *folk* as an increasingly commercialized genre of the urban revival of rural folk music familiar to Festival founder James Morris, who had organized the American Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina, and to the

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therance of these goals.

As cultural workers, we are people-centered. The values that measure the worth of our achievements and distinguish them from those of other scholars are located in the agency of the grassroots communities with whom we work. We value collaboration with the vibrant, lived experiences of cultural communities. We recognize their ability to draw on their historically formed and practiced antecedents to negotiate forbidding challenges. We acknowledge their need to take advantage of all-too-infrequent opportunities for improvement in their material lives, to gain access to fuller recognition, to demand wholesome representation, and to participate actively in the broader society. Like professional colleagues in related fields of cultural work, we are keenly interested in cultural processes and products. However, we try to avoid blind allegiance to ideal professional standards or the mechanical

demands of bureaucracies (ours included). Pursuit of professional standards, people-centeredness, and community agency comprise the value matrix we bring to our work. Grassroots community is our active colleague, not our passive subject of inquiry and complex intellectual description. Therefore, we value professional colleagues and cultural community collaborators as peers.

Reciprocity is another key value. We seek projects built upon the exchange of information and experiences with colleagues and communities. We value the critical skills and reformative attributes of grassroots communities that enable internal evaluation of continuity and change in cultural practices. We are conscious of the use-value of our education and skills, our institutional linkages and resources, our global networks and access to governments. We employ our positions to assist communities in raising their visibility, amplifying their voice,

and expanding their access and resources. We recognize our privileged status in the relationship; yet we do not (cannot) empower or authorize community agency.

We are mindful that ideal goals and working relationships described in our statement of values are general and elusive guidelines. They are impeded, redirected, and recast by the very agency of the partners with whom we work. We are also aware that without those guidelines and respect for community agency, we run the risk of resorting to what interests us rather than the institutional value of full community access to and participation in democratic institutions, capital-economic resources, and cultural respect by fellow citizens in national and global communities.

James Early is director of cultural heritage policy at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

Festival's first director, Ralph Rinzler, who served as head of research and programming at the Newport Folk Festival. The Smithsonian Folklife Festival has generally viewed the idea of cultural community as exceedingly broad, conducting research and produc-

ing public programs on a wide variety of communities whose traditions are defined in ethnic, racial, occupational, religious, familial, regional, national, associational, and topical terms. While the Folklife Festival has featured the traditions of numerous American eth-

nic groups, American Indian communities, and national and regional cultures, it has also examined the culture of occupations ranging from cowboys to trial lawyers, farmers to scientists; communities defined by institutions, like the White House and numerous unions

Creating Cultural Heritage through Recordings

Anthony Seeger



Research documentation is housed in the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Smithsonian. Here, head archivist Jeff Place looks for a recording. *Photo by Kenn Shrader*

Some people think recordings are just entertainment. Other people consider them a kind of scholarly publication. Yet others imagine them to be the source of vast income. At Smithsonian Folkways Recordings we have our own ideas about the significance of the recordings we put out — entertaining though they may be, scholarly though they may seem, and unprofitable as they are.

Until little more than a hundred years ago, no one could hear exactly the same sound twice. People tried to write down sounds but could only do so approximately. A vast part of human cultural heritage was transmitted personally — visually and aurally — through demonstration and instruction. With the invention of audio recording technology, and later film and other media, more resources have become available for passing on traditions from one generation to another as well as from one place to

another. Today most people in the world listen to more recorded performances than live ones, and recordings have become one of the means through which cultural heritage is demonstrated, celebrated, and passed on.

Communities everywhere are documenting their traditions on audio and video recordings. Most media, however, have a shorter life span than a person: a person may live 80 or more years; a digital audio tape (DAT) may last fewer than ten, and in humid, tropical climates, videotape may become unplayable after only a year or two. Only if they are deposited in archives and the sound transferred from medium to medium will the documents of human cultural heritage survive far into the next century.

Publishing recordings is another way to increase the chance of their survival. When we sell 2,000 copies of the sounds of performers in western Sumatra, we

spread them to countries all over the world, where some may survive, even if the master tapes are destroyed by natural disaster or war. Even in the United States — which has suffered fewer wars than other countries, has a temperate climate, and has audio archives — master discs and tapes of recordings done in the 1920s often no longer exist, but good copies can be made of the 78 rpm discs that were produced from them.

Many of our recordings are produced through collaboration with specific communities that seek us out and want us to publish their music. They see a recording as conferring prestige on their traditions. Taking the recording back to their communities, they can both demonstrate its significance to others and preserve the sounds of some of their best practitioners. Some communities, like the Old Regular Baptists of the Indian Bottom Association, approve of our publishing their beautiful singing because the Smithsonian is a non-profit institution; for them music is not something performed for money, but for faith. They also wrote many of the notes accompanying the recording and determined its cover art. They felt very much that the recording represented their intentions, and their experience has been shared by many other individuals and communities.

In some cases, Folkways keeps in print recordings of the last known performers of a genre — like the sacred chants of the Selk'nam in Tierra del Fuego, who no longer perform them. The survival of the genre is now entirely through media, at least for now. In other cases, recordings

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and guilds; cultural communities, like those of the deaf, who have built intricate systems of communication and expression; and communities of interest, like those of the Civil Rights movement, the Farm Workers movement, ham radio operators, and the like.

Due to its very nature, the Festival recognizes the real people who practice their culture, not just the abstract forms of traditions. The Festival develops an ethical relationship with those people; to invest in them is to invest in what they do, even when what they do may extend

far beyond the bounds of traditional practice. It is impossible to find in the world the operation of singular cultural systems, untouched by others. Indeed, the social world is now characterized by the intersection and interpenetration of various cultural systems. Local musical traditions developed in a South African township may reach around the world through the electronic media. A local tale based on the historical Dracula may be radically transformed as it meets the imaginations of others. Conversely, popular traditions with broad geographic and cultural spread may take on particular form and meaning in a localized context. Yankee and French fiddling, meeting in New Hampshire, have developed their own distinctive characteristics and community practices, as have traditions of popular democracy in the state's distinctive American primary electioneering.

Scholars writing about cultural heritage tend to approach the topic as objectivists or processualists. For the former, cultural heritage is an objective set of cultural items and practices, a catalog or inventory of cultural features associated with a particular people or community. This inventory is handed down from one generation to the next, with some items dropping out from disuse and others being added. For the processualists, cultural heritage is something invented and continually reinvented, a way of defining the cultural practices and preferences of a group in the present by referencing the past. Objectivists tend to stress tradition, researching the origins of a particular custom or cultural creation, its history, social and geographical dispersion, and variations in form. Processualists, on the other hand, tend to be more concerned with traditionalization — how various cultural practices, whether old or new, are created, adapted, used, and symbolically manipulated in a community and larger social contexts.

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we make revive interest in musical forms. In Nias, an island off Sumatra, a recording in the *Music of Indonesia* series (volume 4) stimulated an enthusiastic revival. In Wisconsin, our recording of polka music as part of the 1998 Smithsonian Folklife Festival received somewhat embarrassed local newspaper reviews acknowledging that polka is part of the heritage of the state — albeit a part of the heritage that some people try hard to forget. What our recording also did, however, was bring polka into the hands of a much larger public.

We make recordings to increase and diffuse knowledge about and through music and the spoken word. In so doing we also contribute to the preservation of part of the cultural heritage of communities around the world. Moses Asch, the founder of Folkways, once said that he was the pen with which his artists created their art. To a certain extent Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the vehicle through which individual artists and communities contribute to the celebration and preservation of their cultural heritage.

You all can participate in this celebration and preservation by buying Smithsonian Folkways recordings, asking your libraries to buy them, enjoying them, and keeping them safely. Or you can go out and learn a tradition that you can pass on yourself.

Anthony Seeger is curator and director of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

The Festival is not about theatricalized folklore or idiosyncratic representations of cultural heritage. In privileging the cultural community, it seeks connections between artistic and cultural expressions and the economic and civic life of its members. Less an exercise in academic definition, the task is to understand, present, and encourage ongoing cultural creativity — the exten-

sion of those cultural traditions in a dynamic sense by the people who make, hold, and nourish that culture. That is, one of the aims of the Festival is to enable people to develop and continue to develop their own cultural heritage.

BUT WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

Development also has a history of definition. In the 19th century, development

meant moral and material progress, measured along a single, unilineal, racialistic scale of cultural evolution. The accomplishments of Victorian Englishmen were at the top of the scale, with various peoples and races accorded lesser positions in descending order from civilization to barbarism to savagery. The cultural heritage of most people was generally thought to be inimical

Leona Watson engages
Miss Etta in an
impromptu interview
at the 1991 Virgin
Islands Folklife
Festival restaging on
St. Croix.

Photo by Joan Wolbier



Conserving and Creating Cultural Heritage: The Smithsonian Folklife Festival

Diana Parker

The Festival has been called many things — an exercise in cultural democracy, a living exhibition, a radio that tunes in the whole wide world. It is, at different times, all of these things. But first and foremost, it is a calculated strategy to preserve cultural heritage.

The Festival encourages cultural conservation directly. By bringing stellar artists to the National Mall and presenting them to appreciative audiences of over a million people, the Festival hopes to convey to the tradition bearers, and those who follow in their footsteps, how important their skills and

knowledge are to a broad public, and how much loved. At a time when “cultural grey-out” is a worldwide phenomenon, it is critical to remind our cultural exemplars and their children how important they are to us all. In the words of cultural activist and folklorist Alan Lomax, “The aim of this Festival is not to make America proud of its folklore or to put on an affair that will please Washington and the Smithsonian, but to provide support for the big river of oral tradition which is now being dissipated and corrupted all over the planet. We cannot foresee what we would do if we did not have this river

of pure creativity always revivifying our culture, but life would be a very sorry thing if it dried up.”

The Festival also encourages grassroots cultural heritage by the method of its production. Each year we work closely with our counterparts in the communities represented on the Mall. Unlike other exhibitions in which a curator may select the objects to be presented, a Festival program is a joint negotiation between senior Festival staff and cultural specialists from featured communities. That is, people involved in the Festival have to figure out how to represent their culture, to imagine and present their culture as heritage. While this is not the easiest way to produce an event for either group, it is certainly the most educational. Many

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to development. Development or cultural evolution occurred over time, through the survival of better social and economic need-meeting practices, through borrowing of inventions and innovations from more evolved societies, and forced imitation through colonialism. This idea of development continued with 20th-century modernization theory, with cultural heritage used as a residual category

to explain irrationalities in society — values and practices that hampered populations from embracing the work ethic, consumerism, and efficient, utilitarian institutions. World War II demonstrated quite clearly that economic development did not necessarily mean moral superiority. And in the post-war world, various global accords have established standards of development comprising nutri-

tion, health, and other quality-of-life measures, including political, civil, and cultural rights — the rights to speak one's own language, believe in and practice one's own religion, and so on. At this point, the end of the 20th century, we have witnessed enough alternative modes of being developed. Capitalism has prospered in the cultural context of Japanese values and the social system of Hong Kong and southern China. Modern art, science, and computer work nowadays come from India. Musical culture the world over has grown from the infusion of African and Latin styles. There is no cultural monopoly on development.

WHY NOW?

Cultural heritage has assumed major importance in the world today for several reasons.

Politically, issues of cultural identity and the cultural affiliations of transnational, national, and subnational populations are crucial in the definition and continuity of national and regional identity. The United States experienced the so-called culture wars in the early 1990s and faces future challenges with regard to an increasingly diverse population, the growth of Latino populations, multilingual school-age populations, and the need to accommodate the differences in lifestyles and values among a wide variety of groups within a common civic framework. The Soviet Union, a former superpower, was undermined in part because of its failure to deal adequately with its diversity of peoples, its varied linguistic and ethno-national groups. Similar concerns about the relationships between mainstream culture and that of various marginalized communities constituted on the basis of regionality, religion, race, language, origin, have become political issues in Canada, China, Nigeria, Germany, Brazil, Turkey, Israel, Mexico, Australia, California, and New York City. Policies have varied from integrationist to segregationist, from en-

groups, having put together the necessary infrastructure to help us produce the Festival, have kept the team together to reproduce the event “back home.” Often, the team then lives beyond the “restaging” to continue to work on research and presentation. Both Iowa from '96 and Wisconsin from '98 have staff originally hired for the Festival still employed and actively doing critical cultural conservation work.

Finally, the Festival also attempts to aid in cultural conservation by supporting our participants' attempts at economic viability. At this year's Festival, through Smithsonian Folkways recordings, sales of artists' creations at the Festival Marketplace, and attempts to connect traditional craftspeople with larger markets, we work to provide tradition bearers with the livelihood necessary to allow them to continue their art. This is new territory for us, and we are learning how complex and challenging it is, but unless people can retain aesthetic, economic, and legal control over their artistic forms and receive some reward for it, these forms will surely die out as people face the necessity of supporting their families. Indeed, such a strategy, like the Festival itself, confirms that cultural traditions are vital and adaptable, and develop as real, living people connect their artistry with life.

Diana Parker is director of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

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couraging complementarity to autonomy, from broadening to restricting civil rights. How to hold civil society together and successfully negotiate varied types of cultural difference and similarity are the key political questions of the new millennium.

On the economic front, culture has become big business. Tourism is the world's largest industry, according to the World Bank, now surpassing oil. Couple the cultural component of tourism with the entertainment industry, parts of the communications, handicrafts, and other industries, and the economic value of cultural consumption becomes obvious. The cultural economy exists on both a local and global scale. The global mass-culture industry produces products and services for worldwide distribution, often competing with and, as Alan Lomax long ago warned about, squeezing out local forms of culture. Inspiring both economic envy and intellectual approbation, companies like Disney, Time Warner, and Discover create and distribute cultural products, many of which purport to be authentic, educational, and socially useful while making billions of dollars in profit. On the other hand, local cultural products, at least not at first controlled by the mass-culture industry, have not only succeeded within their communities of origins but have gone far beyond them toward worldwide distribution. Witness South African choral music, Thai food, Dominican *merengue*, Bombay films. With this new hyper-global/local economy, issues of economic benefits, rights, and opportunities are becoming increasingly important. The World Bank has initiated a cultural heritage and development program, giving loans and grants to governments to utilize cultural resources in ways that will generate income and alleviate poverty. Others can be expected to follow suit, challenging industry giants or finding niche markets as cultural products assume value in an infor-

mation-age service economy. The challenge: how to be true to one's culture while at the same time making money in order to sustain it.

CONTEMPORARY STRATEGIES FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT

Nation-states may undertake activities that do encourage cultural heritage development at a local, regional, or national level. They may also discourage such development, regarding the cultural heritage of certain of their citizens as problematic or against the interests of the state. Nation-states including the United States use a variety of methods to affect cultural heritage development, from direct subsidies and support to artists, scholars, and institutions such as university departments, archives, and museums, to tax credits for donors for preserving historical property and other cultural resources; copyright protection; the development of cultural tourism; and other programs. While state policy and programs may help or hinder development, they are becoming less influential. Decreasing public expenditures for culture worldwide, the expansion of the multinational corporate culture industry, privatization initiatives, and new global technologies indicate that, if people are to have some control over the fate of their own culture, they are going to have to take responsibility for their own cultural development. The following are integral elements of a community-based cultural heritage development strategy.

Cultural Enterprise. Not all aspects of a community's culture are commercially exploitable, nor should they be. Many religious and sacred expressions, intimate familial practices, and aspects of interpersonal cultural conduct and communication are not likely to have market value. But many other forms of culture — handicrafts, decorative arts, musical performances, buildings and cultural

sites, for example — have long been subject to commercial activity, traditionally and within the community. Think, for example, of pilgrimage sites that, while encapsulating deep spirituality and religious practice, are, in many cases, centers of commerce in sacred arts, food, performance, and festivity. The list of commercially exploitable cultural products is expanding in the information age. Stories can be turned into novels, poetry, cartoons, and feature films. Indigenous knowledge can fuel research in the development of nature-based pharmaceuticals. Musical performances can become hit recordings in the entertainment industry. Historic sites can become destinations for millions of tourists from around the globe. Local communities and culture producers need to obtain the means of cultural production and distribute, market, and benefit from their own production. Makers of crafts, who typically earn ten cents on the consumer dollar, need to be closer to those consumers in order to realize more profit. Musicians need to establish their copyrights and receive royalties. Local people have to control their own cultural tourism industries. Cultural projects will require capitalization, loans, and income-generating revenue streams to support activities.

Self-Study and Representation.

Good research is indispensable for cultural heritage development projects. Assessments of needs, resources, previous and comparative work, feasibility studies, and evaluations can help assure successful work. Stakeholders are likely to be more involved, committed, and interested in undertaking purposeful, community-oriented research projects than those more removed. The participatory research of those involved, and the research of lay and academic community scholars, is an important resource that increasingly can be relied upon to gather, analyze, and evaluate information. Such research can form the

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basis for local researchers and others in the community to develop high-quality cultural heritage productions — educational materials for schools, radio programs, books, exhibits, cultural tourism sites, performance programs, World Wide Web pages — that will represent them both within the community and well beyond.

a network.

Upgrading of Techniques and Technology. New, innovative techniques may be used to help keep a culture alive. Computerized databases help preserve and teach ancient, endangered languages. Inexpensive tape recorders and video cameras can help document cultural traditions. Electronic bulletin

cal action, economic activity, impacts upon the environment, and so on.

Strategic planning with institutions of these other sectors is necessary for systemic, sustainable, and significant cultural heritage development.

My sense is that various types of communities will increase their attempts to articulate, buttress, and expand their cultural heritage as a vehicle for making their way in the world — at the national level but also at the sub-national and transnational levels, and among the widest variety of cultural communities. As this occurs, human cultural products — like artistry, knowledge, symbolic elaboration, and meaning — will be ever more crucial in defining value. Recognizing these intangibles as resources of and for the community and its broader reaches will in itself be an interesting task and a worthy objective of cultural workers and institutions. It is sometimes hard to recognize what is so near as so valuable, but it is an important first step in keeping a variety of cultures a vital force in human affairs.

How to hold civil society together and successfully negotiate varied types of cultural difference and similarity are the key political questions of the new millennium.

Community Institution-Building. Community organizing and institutionalization above and beyond formal government agencies are critical in sustaining cultural heritage efforts. Citizens committees, non-governmental organizations, cooperatives, and other forms are entirely appropriate. Indeed, increased access to technology and information allows all sorts of communities to establish cultural centers — virtual and real — to publish and disseminate information, and engage in all sorts of activities. Community institution-building provides continuity and mechanisms of local control over cultural heritage development.

Networking. Community efforts need not and should not stop at the boundaries of that community or reside solely in its own organizations. Connections to transnational, national, and regional organizations can be a conduit to monetary, advisory, technical, and in-kind resources. Common cause may be made with other similarly situated or interested communities. Funding, political support, and audiences may be mobilized through the use of interpersonal and electronic communications along such

boards can help geographically dispersed community members keep in touch. Web pages allowing for encrypted fiscal transactions can allow craftspeople and musicians to bring their products to very broad markets. Cultural organizations may adapt techniques of business management and marketing, not so much to increase profits but to rationalize operations to achieve sustainability. The adaptation of such techniques and technologies does not necessarily change the culture for the worse — and may enhance the dissemination of traditions, as was the case with radio and recordings for much traditional music in various nations.

Articulation across Sectors. Cultural heritage does not exist in isolation from other aspects of life. Indeed, it develops in concert with, in juxtaposition to, in opposition against, as the expressive forerunner of civic life, political events, economic systems, ecological relationships, psychological patterning, and socialization. Cultural heritage plans need to be articulated with the non-cultural sectors of society in order to be effective. Cultural work implicates politi-

Richard Kurin is director of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. A Fulbright scholar and cultural anthropologist with a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, he has taught Social Change and Development at the Johns Hopkins University Nitze School of Advanced International Studies and Public Cultural Work at the George Washington University. He is the author of Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian and Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Culture Of, By, and For the People. He first worked on the Festival in 1976, and was awarded the Smithsonian Secretary's Gold Medal for Exceptional Service in 1996.