

We Are Very Much Still Here!

Richard Kurin

This summer we mark the 40th Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Decades of thought and work have gone into making the Festival the longest-lived, largest, and preeminent educational event on the National Mall of the United States. We relish that presence, but more so, are proud to have helped to enable people and communities to declare for themselves in the most public way to their fellow human beings that “We are very much still here!”

The Festival

As might be imagined, the arrangements for the Festival—legal, logistical, fiscal, and bureaucratic—are formidable. Each Festival must be created and produced anew. Given the contingencies, the Festival has had a remarkable staying power. This was perhaps not so obvious when the Festival was first invented by James R. Morris and Ralph Rinzler back in 1967. The Festival began as a somewhat counter-cultural experiment during tumultuous times. Though located organizationally in the Smithsonian and conceptually within the museum world, it featured performances and demonstrations of cultural traditions by living, active practitioners and exemplars. It challenged the authoritative curatorial voice, foregrounding instead the authentic voices of its participants.

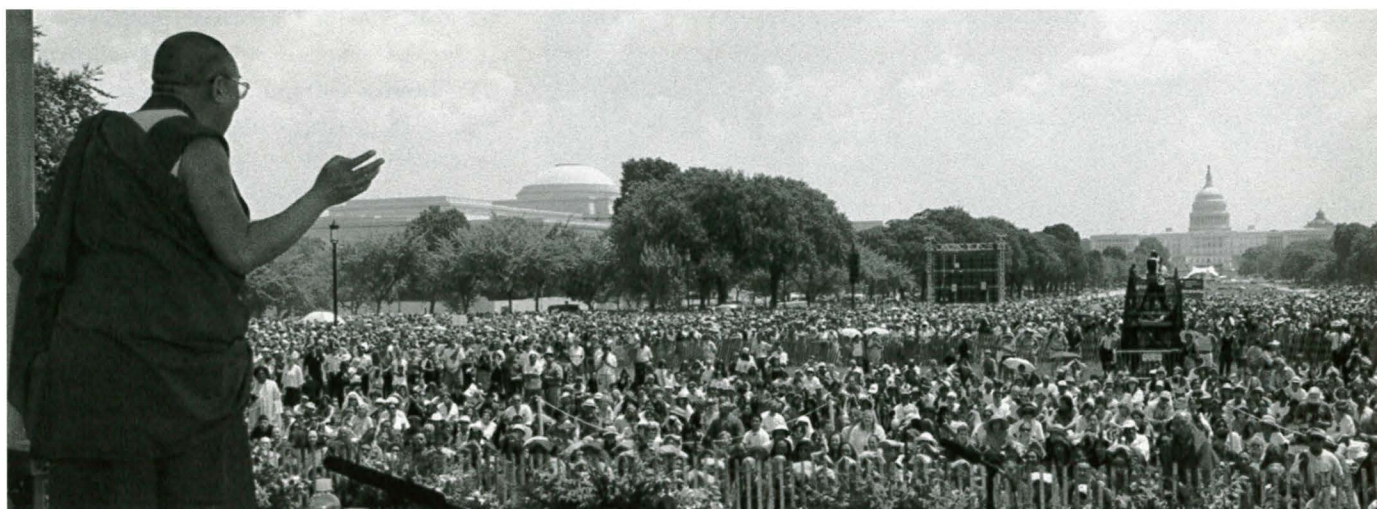
In the years to come, sound disciplinary knowledge applied to preparatory research and Festival presentations by folklorists, ethnomusicologists, cultural anthropologists, and historians coupled with strong collaboration with the represented cultural practitioners and communities became its methodology. Its mission of encouraging the understanding and vitality of diverse cultural traditions across the nation and around the world emerged clearly and resonated strongly in Congress and numerous communities back home. Year after year, the public has flocked to the Festival, engaging and enjoying the presentations. Visitors have learned from these thousands of culture bearers, and purchased their crafts, recordings, books, and other products. Media coverage has been nearly universally positive. And its impact upon cultural workers and the tens of thousands of participants has proved helpful in actually preserving and revitalizing numerous cultural traditions, encouraging cultural enterprise, and bridging cultural differences.

The Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, spawned by the Festival, has flourished. It has grown over the years in size, scope, and stature, producing not only the Festival but its restagings in communities both domestic and abroad. The Festival became the model for producing other national celebration events—cultural programs for Olympics in Mexico City, Montreal, and Atlanta; festivals for presidential inaugurations; and major events on the National Mall including the Smithsonian’s own 150th anniversary; America’s Millennium on the Mall; and most

recently, the National World War II Reunion and the grand opening events for the National Museum of the American Indian. Film, video, recordings, and materials generated from the Festivals and other events constitute an archival collection, formally named the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections. Over the years, those collections have been mined to produce a number of publications, exhibitions, recordings, and films. Additionally, in 1987, the Center established Smithsonian Folkways Recordings—based upon the acquisition of the historic Folkways label and collection from the family of Moses and Frances Asch. This provided a whole new way to join the Festival's mission with that of research, documentation, and publication of the "voices of the people." In ensuing years, Smithsonian Folkways has distributed millions of recordings, paid millions of dollars of royalties to musicians—thus encouraging their artistry, won numerous Grammy awards and nominations, and educated millions about the world's varied music and verbal arts traditions. In 2000, the Center's collections were recognized by a Save America's Treasures grant and designated a National Treasure.

Having become a well-regarded, even iconic program within the Smithsonian, the Festival is a mainstay of the Capital's cultural life and is widely known around the nation and the world. The Center's approach and achievements are well regarded among cultural workers, museum professionals, and cultural scholars. The Festival has been the subject of several monographs, numerous studies, and scores of scholarly articles; it has also been the subject of various healthy debates about the wisdom, strategy, and tactics of public cultural representation. Much credit for the Festival's success goes to a talented and experienced staff—with more than a dozen of us having careers at the Center and with the Festival and Folkways that now span four decades. Fiscal support—a mixture of Federal appropriations, Smithsonian trust funds, revenue generated through sales of food and crafts at the Festival and of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, gifts, grants, and contracts—has sustained our operations through thick and thin. And over the years, the Festival's methodology has permeated the Smithsonian, adopted and adapted by various museums, many of which have partnered with us on particular programs.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave a talk to nearly 50,000 people on the National Mall during the Tibetan Culture Beyond the Land of Snows program at the 2000 Festival. Photo by Jeff Tinsley, Smithsonian Institution



Native American Programs as Paradigm

The approach, impact, and future of the Festival and Center are exemplified in many ways, and perhaps most vividly with regard to their four decades of involvement with Native American communities.

In his February 1967 memorandum to the Smithsonian's Board of Regents to establish the Festival, then-Secretary S. Dillon Ripley wrote:

A program sponsored by the Smithsonian should reflect the Institution's founding philosophy and current role. Although it has the world's largest collection of American folk artifacts, the Smithsonian, like all museums in our nation, fails to present folk culture fully and accurately. Through the Bureau of American Ethnology, it has pioneered the collection, archiving, analysis and publication of American Indian cultural data, [but] neither the Smithsonian nor any other research institution has employed the methods of cultural anthropology in an extensive fieldwork program in American folk cultures.

The lack of museum expertise and the absence of adequate field programs in

American folklife studies has resulted from a general ignorance of the abundance of our traditional cultures. Related to the collections and based on the philosophy of the Smithsonian, an exposition of the folk aesthetic on the Mall accompanied by a seminar would be provocative.

A program presenting traditional craftsmen and dancers as well as musicians would convincingly demonstrate the vigor of our folk traditions.

The Smithsonian, through the Bureau of American Ethnology founded in 1880 and led by legendary explorer, geologist, and linguist John Wesley Powell, had been at the institutional forefront of documenting American Indian lifeways. Powell made the case for federal funds to support ethnological research on American Indians, arguing that their "original habits and customs" were disappearing and their languages were being modified and lost. Powell's efforts, and those of his colleagues, produced numerous studies and, coupled with the collections of artifacts and human remains coming to the Smithsonian, resulted in the largest body of data on American Indian cultures in existence. Included were early field recordings made of American Indian song, story, and dance on wax cylinders invented by Thomas Edison and utilized by the Smithsonian's Alice Cunningham Fletcher and Francis La Flesche.

While most of the Smithsonian's ethnographic efforts were directed toward the study of American Indians, and while many of its scholars were sympathetic with Indian peoples, their cultures, and histories, there was relatively little use of this knowledge for the benefit of Native communities. Smithsonian scholars saw other scholars and specialists, not American Indians, as their primary constituency.

The Smithsonian's Frances Densmore plays back a recording to Mountain Chief, a Blackfoot, in front of the Smithsonian Castle in 1916.
Photo by Harris and Ewing, courtesy National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution



This changed somewhat when Ripley became Secretary in 1962. Ripley wanted to rationalize the study of human life. He pointed out to staff, quite candidly, that “defeat has a lot to do with who gets studied.” He brought in Sol Tax, a distinguished professor of anthropology from the University of Chicago, to help plan a National Museum of Man. Tax was a pioneer in bringing together anthropologists internationally and founded the prestigious journal *Current Anthropology*. Working in Wisconsin among contemporary Fox Indians, Tax and his students had developed an approach called “action anthropology.” This brand of anthropological work funneled knowledge about culture back into the community for its use and development. Tax was concerned not only with anthropology in the museum, but also with contemporary phenomena, with the responsibility of scholars to the communities they study, and with the collaborative use of knowledge.

This view, and similar ones held by folklorist Alan Lomax, ethnomusicologist Charles Seeger, Folkways record producer Moses Asch, and folk-singer activists Pete Seeger and Bernice Johnson Reagon, influenced Ralph Rinzler. Rinzler was a musician, record producer, manager, and director of field research programs at the Newport Folk Festival who had been hired by operatic tenor and music impresario James R. Morris, the head of the Smithsonian’s Museum Services office, to direct the first Festival in 1967. Rinzler, who specialized in old-time Appalachian, Cajun, and African American musics, had worked with a number of American Indian artists and craftspeople at Newport as well as with a number of contemporary musicians including singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie.



The first festival—named the Festival of American Folklife (until it officially changed to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 1998)—was held from July 1-4, 1967, in two tents, one for crafts and one for sales, with a music stage and performance area on the terrace of the National Museum of History and Technology—now the National Museum of American History. It drew national attention and a massive crowd. Among the 84 participants were the King Island Eskimo dancers from Alaska, Navajo sand painter Harry Belone and Acoma Pueblo potter Marie Chino. The Festival was lauded as a success in Congress and among the public, and plans were put in place for another year.

Rinzler concentrated on lining up states to be featured at the Festival—Texas in 1968, Pennsylvania in 1969, Arkansas in 1970. These were the primary Festival presentations. While there were Lummi Indian performances and Seminole crafts, Rinzler was well aware of his own lack of knowledge with regard to Native cultures. He had been dissatisfied with the presentations of American Indian artists at Newport. Given the status of the Smithsonian and the location of the Festival in Washington in literally the center of government power, he knew the representation of Native cultures had to be handled carefully, knowledgeably, and ethically.

Smithsonian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley, led by Lucille Dawson, participates in an honoring ceremony at the 1975 Festival; Rayna Green with Ralph Rinzler follow. Photo by Reed & Susan Erskine, Lightworks

The Festival's Native American Program

Rinzler hired Clydia Nahwooksy in 1969 to establish what was first called the American Indian Program and later became the American Indian Awareness Program and then the Native American Program of the Festival. Clydia, a Cherokee who had earned her B.A. in anthropology a few years before, immediately became the highest ranking Native American at the Smithsonian.

Well connected in the American Indian community, Nahwooksy organized fuller, more comprehensive programs at the Festival, featuring Southern Plains Indians in 1970, Northwest Coast Indians in 1971, Southwest Indians in 1972, and Northern Plains Indians in 1973. A Native Americans Advisory Group chaired by prominent Native anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz and including such scholars as Dell Hymes, Barre Toelken, and William Sturtevant helped guide programs. Vine Deloria and LaDonna Harris, among many others, spoke from Festival stages. In 1974, the Festival featured California tribes (Tolowa, Pomo, Hoopa, Yurok, Karuk, Luisiño, Maidu, and Cahuilla) and Basin and Plateau tribes (Paiute, Shoshone, Kaibab, Northern Ute, Ute Mountain, Southern Ute, and Nez Perce), as well as traditional sports and games from

Creek, Cherokee, Eskimo, Acoma, Athabaskan, Jemez, and Laguna communities. In 1975, the Iroquois Confederacy was featured along with representatives of other eastern tribes, and in a massive 1976 program for the American Bicentennial, Native Americans came from scores of tribes and communities from every region of the United States. With the expansion of programs came more permanent, temporary, and contract Native American staff for the Festival. Lucille Dawson (Narragansett) coordinated programs and went on to an accomplished career in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Rayna Green (Cherokee) and Barbara Strickland (Lumbee) came to the Smithsonian for specific Festival programs and have played prominent roles continuing to the present day. Green went on to found the Native American Program at the National Museum of American History. Strickland has served continuously with the Festival and the Center and is currently its assistant director for finance and administration. Helen Schierbeck (Lumbee), directing the Office of Indian Education at the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, chaired the Indian Education Task Force of the American Indian Policy Review Commission and helped assure vigorous Native American programs for the Bicentennial years. She came to the Smithsonian years later, first as a board member and then as a staffer to direct public programs at the National Museum of the American Indian. Rinzler also hired non-Native experts including anthropologist Thomas Kavanagh (an honorary member of the Comanche) who served as assistant coordinator and later at Indiana University's Mathers Museum, and Thomas Vennum, a Harvard-educated ethnomusicologist who specialized in American Indian musical and performance traditions.

Veteran Festival staffer Barbara Strickland (center), with Navajo code talkers Sam Smith (left) and Keith Little (right) at the National World War II Reunion in 2004. Photo by Ginevra Portlock, Smithsonian Institution

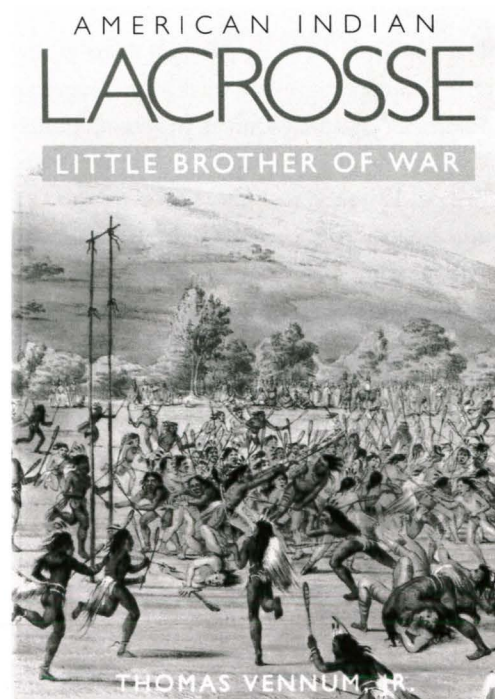


Post-Bicentennial Programs

Though the Festival itself was much reduced in size after the 1976 extravaganza, Native American programs continued in 1977 with Ojibwa, Tolowa, San Juan Pueblo, Navajo, and Seneca participation, and in 1978 with the San Juan Pueblo. In 1979, scholar Peter Nabokov developed a program focused on Native American vernacular architecture. Venum developed an Ojibwa program in 1981, and published *The Ojibwa Dance Drum: Its History and Construction* the next year as part of the Smithsonian Folklife Studies monograph and film series, to accompany his award-winning 1978 documentary film, *The Drummaker*. A contemporary drummer—Mickey Hart of the Grateful Dead—was captivated by these works, and established a friendship and professional collaboration with Venum that continues to the present and has led to a variety of recordings and numerous other projects.

Venum was also “borrowed” by the Library of Congress to serve as the initial director of its groundbreaking Federal Cylinder Project. This project took the old wax cylinder recordings from the Smithsonian’s Bureau of American Ethnology—that had been transferred to the National Archives and then to the Library of Congress—and reproduced them on cassettes with notes for distribution back to the tribes and communities that had originally generated them. Members of those communities, and in some cases descendants of those originally recorded almost a century earlier, helped identify the recordings and supplement them with precious additional details.

In 1982, the National Endowment for the Arts initiated its National Heritage Fellowships program under the direction of Bess Lomax Hawes, who had been Rinzler’s assistant director for the Bicentennial Festival.



During the first two years of that program, the Fellowships were conferred at the Festival, and such Native artists as ribbon worker Georgeann Robinson (Osage) from Oklahoma, basket maker Ada Thomas (Chitimacha) from Louisiana, potter Margaret Tafoya from Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, Eskimo mask maker Paul Tiulana from Alaska, and hula master Emily Kau’i Zuttermeister from Hawai’i were among the early honorees.

Through the 1980s, scores of Native musicians, artisans, storytellers, and other cultural exemplars were represented in a range of state programs—Oklahoma in 1982, Alaska in 1984, Louisiana in 1985, Tennessee in 1986, Michigan in 1987, Massachusetts in 1988, and Hawai’i in 1989. These programs all raised the visibility of Native American communities and cultural exemplars, both nationally and back home in their respective states. Other thematic programs such as one on Cultural Conservation featured case studies of how

Native people were preserving their traditions in a contemporary world. An American Indian Access to Resources program curated by Vennum in 1989 examined how Yaqui, Washoe, Paiute, Shoshone, Ojibwa, Mandan, and Hidatsa utilized their natural and social environments and faced legal, political, and

musical anthropologist Tony Seeger, led to new opportunities. Folkways had more than a hundred albums in its historic American Indian collection, and the idea was to republish older, archival recordings, as well as make new ones. Seeger, who specialized in the musical culture of the Native people of the Amazon region, was amenable to the symbolism implicit in the proposal that our first published Smithsonian Folkways title should be an American Indian one. The intention was to re-issue *Navajo Songs*, based upon field recordings made in New Mexico and Arizona in 1933 and 1940 by documenter Laura Boulton. Getting permissions, though, delayed the project. Instead, the first Native recording was prompted by Festival research for the 1989 Hawaiian program, and turned out to be *Hawaiian Drum Dance Chants: Sounds of Power in Time*.

The 1989 Festival was noted for another birth. As part of the Festival, Mandan and Hidatsa were demonstrating the reintroduction of buffalo (bison) herding and herd management among Plains Indians. On the Mall, we had several buffalo and one, unbeknown to us, was pregnant. In the early morning hours of June 24, in a pen in sight of the Washington Monument and the National Museum of American History, she gave birth. Named Nasca Nacasire (or Summer Calf) by Mandan elder William Bell, the baby buffalo received national media coverage.

The birth came at a time when the Smithsonian had just completed a deal to acquire the amazing Heye collection of Native American artifacts then housed in New York. Legislation authorizing a new National Museum of the American Indian was pending in Congress, and was sure to pass. A new museum building would be “born” on the Mall, just as surely as the buffalo. Festival



Earl Nyholm, an Ojibwa Indian, and Dwight Bowman from Hawai'i discuss comparative canoe making techniques at the 1989 Festival. Photo by Dane Penland, Smithsonian Institution

technical challenges toward the continued practice of their cultural traditions. Two more books by Vennum, *Wild Rice and the Ojibwa People* and *American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War* complemented this theme.

The acquisition of Folkways Records in 1987, and its transformation into Smithsonian Folkways Recordings under the leadership of

participants, seeing the linkage, wrote the following letter to Senator Daniel Inouye, the leading advocate for the museum, and Robert McC. Adams, then-Secretary of the Smithsonian.

Dear Senator Inouye and Secretary Adams:

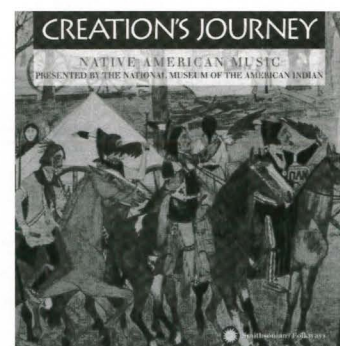
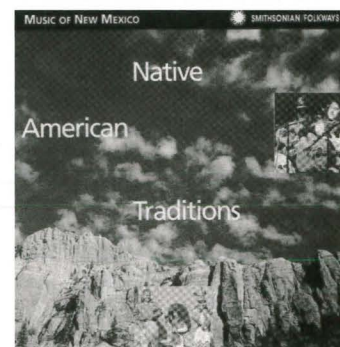
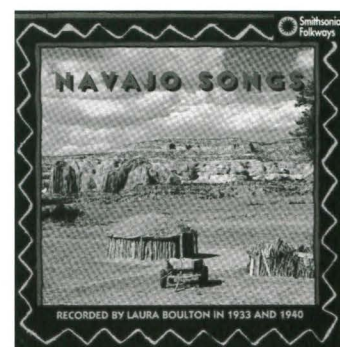
At 2:06 a.m. on Saturday, June 24, a calf was born to the buffalo cow who was on the Mall as part of the American Indian Program of the Folklife Festival.

Mandan and Hidatsa people from North Dakota also had been singing buffalo songs, performing buffalo dances, tanning buffalo hides and making buffalo head dresses and bull boats as part of this Festival. There is also a great exhibit about our people in the Museum of American History. The Indian presence this year is, we hope, only a sign of what is yet to come. All of the Indian people who have been here—Yaqui, Ojibwa, Northern Paiute, Washoe, Western Shoshone, Mohawk, Onondaga, Tuscarora, Rappahannock, Cherokee, Sioux, Arikara—and the Mandan and Hidatsa people who prayed for this calf, sang for her, and named her Nasca Nacasire (Summer Calf), feel that this calf is a great sign of good for the Indian people and for the Smithsonian. We believe our buffalo dance, which calls forth the buffalo, contributes to the mystique surrounding the birth of Summer Calf on the Mall. Mandan and Hidatsa people will pray for her during her entire life, and songs will be made about what happened here.

In that spirit, we are asking you to acquire her for the new Museum which we understand will be built on the Mall. Her presence would be a sign to all people that Indian people have been here and have a place on the National Mall, and that there is great hope for the future of this new museum and the Indian people. It would be a sign that this place was a place of living people and living cultures. No symbol exists like that of the buffalo—perhaps only an eagle—for its significance among the Indian people of North America. She could remain with her mother until weaned, then perhaps could stay in the National Zoo until a place is made for her on her birthplace, the National Mall.

Though Summer Calf was not “acquired,” the legislation establishing the new National Museum of the American Indian was signed later that year by President George H.W. Bush on November 28, 1989. A director had to be found.

In the late 1980s, issues of cultural diversity within the nation and within the Smithsonian were coming to the fore. Ralph Rinzler, who had





become the Smithsonian's Assistant Secretary for Public Service and Education, and his assistant, James Early, had put together a cultural education advisory committee to help the institution diversify its staffing and programs. The committee was composed of distinguished figures from outside the Smithsonian, among them Jeannine Smith Clark, Esther Coopersmith, Peggy Cooper Cafritz, Suzan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee), and a Washington-area lawyer, W. Richard West (Cheyenne and Arapaho). The committee helped forward initiatives concerning the representation of African American, Latino, Asian American, and American Indian culture and history in the Smithsonian. While Secretary Adams was amenable to hiring a Native American as the founding director of the new museum, he didn't have a candidate. Rinzler strongly recommended West, who took the job in 1990.

Native American Programs as Paradigm

Native American programs at the Festival continued through the 1990s. Olivia Cadaval curated a program at the 1991 Festival entitled *Land and Power in Native American Culture* and involving representatives from Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Hopi, Aymara, Quechua, Chiapan Maya, Zapotec, Ikood, Canelos Quichua, Shuar, and Achuar communities, stretching from Alaska to the Andes and the Amazon rainforest. Another program in 1994 on *Culture and Development*, organized with Kevin Healy and Chuck Kleymeyer, demonstrated how Native peoples in Central and South America were utilizing cultural skills and resources for the economic and social development of their communities. Vennum curated a program on *The Changing Soundscape in Indian Country* highlighting the ways Native musicians incorporated their own languages, musical instruments, and traditional themes into contemporary styles of rock 'n' roll, blues, country, and folk. Native participation in the New Mexico program in 1992 spawned a Smithsonian Folkways Recording produced with Howard Bass and Rayna Green of the National Museum of American History. This led to another Festival program in 1995 entitled *Heartbeat: Voices of First Nations Women*, featuring a panoply of traditional and contemporary American Indian singers, among them



(Top) Founding Director Rick West addresses tens of thousands of guests and national and international media during the opening ceremony for the new Museum. Photo Smithsonian Institution

(Left) The National Museum of the American Indian opened on the National Mall of the United States in September 2004. Photo Smithsonian Institution



Betty Mae Jumper (Seminole), Elena Charles (Yup'ik), the Olla Maidens (Zuni), the Six Nations Women Singers, Sharon Burch, and Ulali, among many others. A Smithsonian Folkways Recording of the same title was published, and followed by a second volume.

Native American participation continued to be strong in various state programs through the 1990s with Iowa, the American South, Wisconsin, and New Hampshire. Native participation was also highlighted in various special events produced by the Center. For the Clinton inaugural festival "America's Reunion on the Mall" in 1993, the Center invited the Hawaiian hula group Halau O'Kekuhi and the Badland Singers to perform, and Tlingit carver Nathan Jackson, lei maker Marie MacDonald, regalia maker Vanessa Morgan, Pueblo potters Toni and Cliff Roller, and basket weavers Norman and Bernadine DeLorme to demonstrate their traditions. The Center co-produced the Southern Crossroads festival in 1996 in Centennial Olympic Park for the Atlanta Olympics and included among

others the Kiowa and Comanche American Indian Music & Dance Show, the Kulli Homa Tribal Dancers, The Plainsmen, and Walela (Rita Coolidge and family) in the program. Later that summer, the Center produced the Smithsonian's 150th Birthday Party on the Mall. Highlights included a Native Nations Dance Procession organized with the National Museum of the American Indian and performances by the American Indian Dance Theater and Lakota Sioux Dance Theater. Buffy Sainte-Marie gave a workshop and—with Aretha Franklin and Trisha Yearwood—headlined an evening concert for some 150,000 people, culminating in fireworks over the Smithsonian Castle and Washington Monument. The National Museum of the American Indian held a "Hear Our Nations' Voices" program on the designated museum site featuring Navajo, Iroquois, Andean, and other performances and such activities as Tohono O'odham *to-ka* stick games, Chicasaw stickball, and lacrosse.

Cooperation between the National Museum of the American Indian and Smithsonian

Suyá chiefs from the Amazon rainforest perform and discuss their culture at the First Americans Festival. Photo by Michael Thompson, Smithsonian Institution

Folkways continued, first under the leadership of Charlotte Heth, with albums produced on a variety of Native traditions, and then in more recent years with Helen Schierbeck and Howard Bass. Annual concerts at the Festival provided an important venue for highlighting and giving voice to Native traditions.

Given the Center's long history of presenting American Indian traditions on the Mall, as well as a track record of cooperation, the National Museum of the American Indian called upon it to help with the production of the museum's opening events on the Mall in September 2004. A Native Nations' Procession, Opening Ceremony, and six-day First Americans Festival were planned.

The result was a stunning, amazing, and poignant affirmation of Native American culture and identity. On September 21, more than 24,000 Native people walked down the National Mall of the United States, beginning with a call on the conch shell by Hawaiian Calvin Hoe at the Smithsonian Castle and

ending near the foot of Capitol Hill opposite the architecturally striking new museum. The procession was led by Smithsonian Secretary Lawrence Small, Deputy Secretary Sheila Burke, Rick West, Senator Inouye, Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (Northern Cheyenne), and Alejandro Toledo (Quechua), the President of Peru. Inuit from Canada and Eskimo from Alaska walked with the Suyá of Brazil's Amazon rainforest and Aymara of the Bolivian Andes. Native Hawaiians walked with Navajo, Cheyenne with Choctaw, Hopi with Lumbee. This was not some hollow nostalgic display of costumed and fabricated ethnicity, but rather an exuberant affirmation of identity in the symbolic center of the United States. The mood was poignant and joyous, celebratory and profound. One participant opined that "this is our march on Washington," a sentiment shared by many. In this historic, stirring moment Native people representing more than 600 tribal and cultural groups announced to the world loud and clear that "We are very much still here!"

The Native Nations' Procession on September 21, 2004, stretched the length of the Mall. Photo by Charlie Weber, Smithsonian Institution





The Opening Ceremony, initiated with the Hopi Honor Guard and a Flag Song by Black Eagle, was attended by hundreds of Members of Congress, dignitaries from around the world, participants in the procession, and some 50,000 others who witnessed it on six video monitors spread down the length of the National Mall. The Museum opened immediately afterward, and stayed open through the night to accommodate visitors. The exhibitions in the Museum and the performances and demonstrations at the First Americans Festival brought home the point that Native cultures were part of a heritage lived by real, contemporary human beings—indeed millions of them across the Western Hemisphere.

The First Americans Festival featured hundreds of participants, performances, and demonstrations, and some 600,000 visitors attended. There were among them dances performed by the Inupiat Suurimaanichuat Dance Group, the Quechua scissors dancers, the St. Laurent Métis Dancers, and a Yup'ik-Inuit group, Pamyua. Concerts by Joanne

Shenandoah (Oneida), Keith Secola (Anishinabe), Star Nayea, Warparty (Cree), and others filled the Mall. Sessions at the Raven stage featured Kuna, Schaghticoke, Lakota, Kiowa-Apache, Sac and Fox, and Caddo-Potawatomie storytellers, while crafts demonstrations included the making of regalia by Cayuga, Jalq'a, Kamsa, Mashpee Wampanoag, and Tarabuco master artisans, as well as instrument making by those from the Cochiti Pueblo, Mayo de Sinaloa, Otoe-Missouria, and other communities. Four concessions, operated by Onondaga, Lumbee, Algonquian, and Inka, served a variety of Native food—from buffalo burgers, Indian tacos, and fry bread to turkey, venison, Peruvian corn, and pumpkin—to tens of thousands of visitors. An Indian Market was organized in front of the Museum, with some 40 booths and a big marketplace tent carrying thousands of Native crafts, recordings, books, and other items for sale. Well over a million dollars was generated in sales for these Native businesses.

The Hawaiian hula group Halau O'Kekuhi performs at the First Americans Festival. Photo by Michael Thompson, Smithsonian Institution

The opening day evening concert was a rousing one, hosted by Charlie Hill (Oneida), and featuring Buffy Sainte-Marie (Cree), Lila Downs (Mixtec), Indigenous (Yankton Sioux), and Rita Coolidge (Cherokee)—who was joined for some numbers by Grammy winning flutist Mary Youngblood (Aleut and Seminole) and surprise guest Mickey Hart.

The significance of the whole event was the strikingly public affirmation of Native American lifeways in our contemporary world.

Broadcast around the planet, events were widely seen and overwhelmingly appreciated. The reaction of participants and American Indian visitors was exceedingly positive. For those in the Center, the opening events also reaffirmed the value of the Folklife Festival. Here was the Festival as model and historical practice providing the framework for the engaged participation of Native people and a huge, broad audience interested in learning about and from them. For older Festival veterans, Rick West's awarding of a certificate of recognition to

Barbara Strickland at the conclusion of the last performance wonderfully summarized careers and struggles that had gone on for decades to recognize and represent Native people on the Mall in Washington. For a younger generation of staff new to the Festival and such events, the effect was telling. Here was a world-class standard of programming and production, of widespread and heartfelt community engage-

ment, and of immense impact upon a visiting and viewing public that could motivate professional goals for decades to come.

Old Foundations, New Beginnings

The involvement of the Festival and the Center with Native peoples and their cultures did not end with the opening of the new museum. It continues. In 2005, Clydia Nahwooksy was honored for her accomplishments at the annual Ralph Rinzler Memorial Concert. New Smithsonian Folkways Recordings are being produced. A special American Indian Heritage page was created for the Smithsonian Global Sound digital music website to reach teachers and students with audio and video recordings of Festival participants and Folkways artists—so they too might hear those compelling voices. And of course this year, the Festival brings together the National Museum of the American Indian and long-time collaborator and Smithsonian affiliate, the Michigan State University Museum, in a partnership with Native basket makers from across the United States to feature their work, accomplishments, and challenges on the Mall.

Certainly the case of helping to preserve Native American culture by working closely with its exemplars is a special and important one, meriting 40 years and more of effort. But so too are other cases. Our work with the Native peoples and the National Museum of the American Indian provides a model that we are anxious to follow with other communities and colleagues. Over the past three years we have joined with the Smithsonian Latino Center in producing the *Nuestra Música* programs at the Festival and on Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. Scores of performances, radio broadcasts, and several recordings—including



Mandan-Hidatsa flute maker and player Keith Bear with Gayle Hunt during the 2005 Forest Service, Culture, and Community program. Photo by Joe Furgal, Smithsonian Institution

four nominated for Grammy awards—have entertained and educated millions about Latino cultural traditions. This year we also join with the newly established National Museum of African American History and Culture to produce a series of Festival concerts on the African American musical traditions of New Orleans, as well as a series of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. Given our historic commitment to the research and presentation of African American culture, I expect this will be a very strong and enduring partnership.

There will of course be others as the Festival continues. For as long as there is a need for people on this planet and in this nation to understand their fellow human beings and fellow citizens—of the U.S. or the world—there is a need for the Festival. Here in a place of enormous national and global significance, people can gather in a spirit of tolerance and respect with the aim of meeting, understanding, and even learning from their fellow man. James Smithson, whose bequest founded the Smithsonian for the purpose of the “increase and diffusion of knowledge among men,” would, I think, have been pleasantly surprised, but quite proud of the Festival and what it has become.

RICHARD KURIN

Richard Kurin is the Director of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, which produces the Festival, Smithsonian Folkways, Smithsonian Global Sound, and other cultural programs and includes the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections. He first worked at the Festival in 1976.

Further Reading

KURIN, RICHARD. 1999. *Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Culture Of, By, and For the People*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.

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