

## Why We Do the Festival

Gladys Widdiss, a Wampanoag Indian from Gay Head on Martha's Vineyard, sat in a rocking chair under a tent on the National Mall. She picked up the microphone to speak to some of the more than one million people who would visit the Festival in 1988. Gladys spoke of her pottery made from the clay of the Gay Head cliffs and of her efforts to teach young people about the traditional Wampanoag respect for the natural environment. She spoke of her own life, and, with her voice cracking from the emotion of the moment, Gladys said:

I'm a Wampanoag Indian grandmother. And that's what I want to be.

I don't ever want to feel ashamed of what I know and who I am. And I want to tell my grandchildren that.

Years ago, my daughter Danielle made a calendar for her preschool art project. For each month she drew an accompanying illustration: Valentine hearts for February, turkeys for November. For July, she drew a picture illustrating fireworks for the Fourth of July, along with three, large, human-like statues in flames. Danielle couldn't explain that her picture evoked the 1985 Festival, when as part of the India program we burned 40-foot-high paper and bamboo statues of the evil king Ravana and his cohorts on the Mall. Instead she recalls that "the fireworks scare away bad things."

In 1987, Alexandre Nikolai Demchenko, deputy director of cultural education at the then USSR Ministry of Culture, was negotiating the terms under which Soviet folk artists and musicians would come to the Festival. "So," he said, "you do not want our best dance academy students to come to your Festival to perform peasant dances. You want the peasants themselves, the real people who do these dances."



Effigies of King Ravana and his cohorts burn on the Mall in 1985, symbolizing the destruction of evil during Hindu Ram-Lila enactments in India.

Photo by Karen Brown



*I'm a Wampanoag Indian grandmother. And that's what I want to be. I don't ever want to feel ashamed of what I know and who I am. And I want to tell my grandchildren that.*

— Gladys Widdiss, Potter, Gay Head, Massachusetts, 1988





*You should be proud of your nationality, you should be proud of your region. I want to respect your culture, you respect my culture. And if we ever learn to do this, America is a beautiful country, but it would be even more beautiful. And we can do that.*

— Dewey Balfa, Cajun fiddler, 1982

*We are a people from many different backgrounds, and yet one, in the middle of God's Pacific, based on our native Hawaiian heritage which bonds us together in a spirit of love and pride, and built upon by those who came later for a better life, reaching out so that their children's future would be secure. All of this is here for you to enjoy. To you, from the community of communities, to the nation of nations, we bring our spirit of aloha.*

— John Waihee, Governor of Hawai'i, 1989



LEFT Dewey Balfa was an exemplary, articulate Cajun fiddler whose participation in the Festival encouraged a renaissance in Cajun culture. Photo by Reed & Susan Erskine, Lightworks



ABOVE White House workers Lillian Parks, Alonzo Fields, Eugene Allen, Armstead Barnett, and Sam Ficklin talk about the history of that institution from their perspective at the 1992 Festival with Worth Long (far left). Photo by Richard Strauss



Cuban performers participate in a Caribbean program at the 1989 Festival. Photo courtesy Smithsonian Institution





In 1976 for the Bicentennial Festival, Ethel Mohamed from Belzoni, Mississippi, worked with Festival designer Janet Stratton to make a tapestry illustrating the diversity of American and world cultures based upon the previous years' Festivals. The colorful, memory-style tapestry illustrates folk dancing, cooking demonstrations, musical performances, and children's games on the Mall. According to Ethel, the tapestry is like the Festival — a celebration of all of us joined together.

Gladys, Danielle, Demchenko, and Ethel are each right. We do the Festival to encourage grandmothers to teach their granddaughters, to scare away possible public evil, to give voice to living traditions, and to celebrate our common, though multicultural, humanity.

While the Festival seems to us both logical and valuable, it is viewed by some as an

Cape Verdean *mast* traditions celebrated at the Festival in 1995 indicate the transnational character of the community, and its mixing of cultural symbolism. Photo by Richard Strauss

innocuous diversion and possibly even deceitful. Consider Allan Bloom's views in *The Closing of the American Mind*:

The "ethnic" differences we see in the United States are but decaying reminiscences of old differences that caused our ancestors to kill one another. The animating principle, their soul, has disappeared from them. The ethnic festivals are just superficial displays of clothes, dances and food from the old country. One has to be quite ignorant of the splendid "cultural" past to be impressed or charmed by these insipid folkloric manifestations.... And the blessing given the whole notion of cultural diversity in the United States by the

culture movement has contributed to the intensification and legitimization of group politics, along with a corresponding decay of belief that the individual rights enunciated in the Declaration of Independence are anything more than dated rhetoric.

Accordingly, if this view is correct, it would make little sense to do the Festival: folklife should be relegated to a museum of dead cultures, and the Smithsonian should reject representations of cultural diversity. Why then do we do the Festival? Are our reasons well founded?

### *For the People to Be Heard*

We do the Festival so that people can be heard. The Festival gives voice to people and



# National Heritage Fellows at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival

The highest honor the U.S. government bestows on a traditional artist is the National Heritage Fellowship, awarded annually under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Honorees have received their awards at the White House and in the U.S. Capitol. The idea for the awards came from Bess Lomax Hawes, the NEA Folk Arts Program founding director, who had been deputy director of the Festival during the U.S. Bicentennial. For the first two years, 1982-83, the fellowships were awarded at the Festival. As of 1997, 209 fellowships had been given; 126 awardees have appeared in one year or another at the Festival.

Juan Alindato, carnival mask maker, Puerto Rico

Eppie Archuleta, Hispanic weaver, Colorado

Alfonse "Bois Sec" Ardoin, Creole accordionist, Louisiana

Howard Armstrong, African-American string band musician, Michigan

Pedro Ayala, Mexican-American accordionist, Texas

Kenny Baker, bluegrass fiddler, Tennessee

Dewey Balfa, Cajun fiddler, Louisiana

Louis Bashell, Slovenian-American accordionist, Wisconsin

Kepka Belton, Czech-American egg painter, Kansas

Sister Mildred Barker, Shaker singer, Maine

Jerry Brown, Southern potter, Alabama

Natividad Cano, *mariachi* musician, California

Liz Carroll, Irish-American fiddler, Illinois

Inez Catalon, French Creole singer, Louisiana

Gladys Leblanc Clark, Acadian spinner and weaver, Louisiana

Jack Coen, Irish-American flutist, New York



Adam Popovich and his brothers play at the 1973 Festival. Photo courtesy Smithsonian Institution

Betty Piso Christenson, Ukrainian-American egg decorator, Wisconsin

Raphael Cepeda, *bomba* musician, Puerto Rico

John Cephas, Piedmont blues musician, Virginia

Nicholas & Elena Charles, Yup'ik wood-carvers, Alaska

Clifton Chenier, Creole accordionist, Louisiana

Joseph Cormier, Cape Breton fiddler, Massachusetts

Elizabeth Cotten, African-American singer, New York

Burlon Craig, Southern potter, North Carolina

Paul Dahlin, Swedish-American fiddler, Minnesota

Clyde Davenport, Appalachian fiddler, Kentucky

Belle Deacon, Athabascan basket maker, Alaska

Giuseppe & Raffaella DeFranco, Italian-American musicians, New Jersey

Sonia Domsch, Czech-American lace maker, Kansas

Lyman Enloe, old-time fiddler, Missouri

Albert Fahlbusch, dulcimer musician, Nebraska

Fairfield Four, gospel singers, Tennessee

Michael Flatley, Irish-American dancer, Illinois

Canray Fontenot, African-American Creole fiddler, Louisiana

Thomas Edison "Brownie" Ford, cowboy singer, Louisiana

Juan Gutiérrez, Puerto Rican musician, New York

Jose Gutiérrez, *jarocho* musician, California

Richard Hagopian, Armenian-American musician, California

Periklis Halkias, Greek-American clarinetist, New York

Charles Hankins, boat-builder, Louisiana



Robert Jr. Lockwood performs in 1991, here with Ruth Brown. Photo courtesy Smithsonian Institution

Joe Heaney, Irish-American singer, New York

Wayne Henderson, Appalachian luther, Virginia

Bea Ellis Hensley, blacksmith, North Carolina

Ray Hicks, Appalachian storyteller, North Carolina

Stanley Hicks, Appalachian musician, North Carolina

John Lee Hooker, blues musician, California

Solomon & Richard Ho'opi'i, Hawaiian musicians, Hawai'i

Janie Hunter, African-American storyteller, South Carolina

John Jackson, African-American musician, Virginia

Nathan Jackson, Tlingit woodcarver, Alaska

Tommy Jarrell, Appalachian fiddler, North Carolina

Bessie Jones, Sea Island singer, Georgia

Meali'i Kalama, Hawaiian quilter, Hawai'i

Nalani Kanaka'ole & Pualani Kanaka'ole, Kanahoe, hula masters, Hawai'i

Raymond Kane, slack key musician, Hawai'i

Maude Kegg, Ojibwe storyteller, Minnesota

Ilias Kementzides, Pontic Greek-American musician, Connecticut

Will Keys, Appalachian banjo player, Tennessee



Nimrod Workman performs at the 1978 Festival.

Photo by Fred Herter, Jr.



Lily May Ledford,  
Appalachian musician,  
Kentucky

Esther Littlefield, Tlingit  
regalia maker, Alaska

Valerio Longoria,  
Mexican-American  
accordionist, Texas

Robert Jr. Lockwood,  
Delta blues musician,  
Ohio

George Lopez, Hispanic  
woodcarver, New Mexico

Wade Mainer,  
Appalachian banjo play-  
er, Michigan

Mike Manteo, Italian-  
American marionettist,  
New York

Hugh McGraw, shape-  
note singer, Georgia

McIntosh County  
Shouters, African-  
American spiritual/  
shouters, Georgia

Lanier Meaders,  
Southern potter,  
Georgia

John Mealing, African-  
American railroad work  
song singer, Alabama

D. L. Menard, Cajun  
singer, Louisiana

Lydia Mendoza,  
Mexican-American  
singer, Texas

Art Moilanen, Finnish  
accordionist, Michigan

Glenn Ohrlin, cowboy  
singer, Arkansas

Vernon Owens,  
Anglo-American pot-  
ter, North Carolina

Irvan Pérez, Isleno  
singer, Louisiana

Elijah Pierce,  
African-American  
carver/painter, Ohio

Adam Popovich,  
*tamburitza* musician,  
Illinois

Hystercine Rankin,  
African-American  
quilter, Mississippi

Ola Belle Reed,  
Appalachian banjo  
picker/singer, Maryland

Almeda Riddle, Ozark  
ballad singer, Arkansas

Georgeann Robinson,  
Osage ribbon worker,  
Oklahoma

LaVaughn Robinson, tap  
dancer, Pennsylvania

Mone & Vanxay  
Saenphimmachak,  
Lao-American weavers,  
Missouri

Mark Savoy, Cajun  
accordion maker,  
Louisiana

Earl Scruggs, bluegrass  
banjo player, Tennessee

Duff Severe, saddle  
maker, Oregon

Joe Shannon, Irish-  
American piper, Illinois



**John Cephas with Phil Wiggins has performed at numerous Festivals.** Photo by Jeff Tinsley

Harry Shourds, decoy  
carver, New Jersey

Kenny Sidle, Anglo-  
American fiddler, Ohio

Philip Simmons,  
ornamental ironworker,  
South Carolina

Howard "Sandman"  
Sims, tap dancer,  
New York

Willie Mae Ford Smith,  
gospel singer, Missouri

Dolly Spencer, Inupiat  
doll maker, Alaska

Clyde "Kindy" Sproat,  
cowboy singer, Hawai'i

Simon St. Pierre, French-  
American fiddler, Maine

Ralph Stanley, bluegrass  
musician, Virginia

Alex Stewart, cooper,  
Tennessee

Margaret Tafoya,  
Pueblo Indian potter,  
New Mexico

Cleofes Vigil, Hispanic  
singer, New Mexico

Douglas Wallin,  
Appalachian ballad  
singer, North Carolina

Lem Ward, decoy  
carver, Maryland

Newton Washburn, bas-  
ket maker,  
New Hampshire

Arthel "Doc" Watson,  
Appalachian musician,  
North Carolina

Arbie Williams, African-  
American quilter, California

Dewey Williams, shape-  
note singer, Alabama

Horace "Spoons"  
Williams, spoons player,  
Pennsylvania

Melvin Wine,  
Appalachian fiddler,  
West Virginia

Nimrod Workman,  
Appalachian ballad  
singer, West Virginia

Cornelius Wright, Jr.,  
African-American  
railroad work song  
singer, Alabama

Kau'i Zuttermeister, hula  
master, Hawai'i



**John Lee Hooker plays at the 1983 Festival, here with George Thorogood.** Photo by Jeff Tinsley

Narciso Martinez,  
Texas-Mexican accor-  
dionist/composer, Texas

Marie McDonald, lei  
maker, Hawai'i

Sylvester McIntosh,  
Crucian musician,  
U.S. Virgin Islands

Brownie McGhee, blues  
guitarist, California

Bill Monroe, bluegrass  
musician, Tennessee

Vanessa Paukeigope  
Morgan, Kiowa regalia  
maker, Oklahoma

Seisho "Harry" Nakasone,  
Okinawan-American  
musician, Hawai'i

Joyce Doc Tate  
Nequaqua, Comanche  
flutist, Oklahoma



**Sonia Domsch demonstrates lace work at the 1994 Festival.** Photo by Jeff Tinsley



*The closer you look at us, the more you will see. At this Festival, we can see ourselves, not as others see us, or think they see us, but as we really are.*

— Robert Ray, Chair, Iowa Sesquicentennial Commission, 1996

*Bahamians came to fully appreciate that we do in fact have a rich cultural tradition of which we can be justifiably proud. On behalf of the government and people of The Bahamas, I want to thank you.*

— Hubert Ingraham, Prime Minister, The Bahamas, 1995

cultures not otherwise likely to be heard in a national setting. The Festival emphasizes folk, tribal, ethnic, occupational, and regional traditional culture, generally non-elite and noncommercial forms created in communities throughout the United States and abroad. It is the culture of people trained by word of mouth and practice, doing what they do largely for members of their own family, town, city, social group, or religious community. The Festival has been instrumental in representing the cultures of particular groups who often do not appear in the nation's cultural consciousness. The Festival has been a leader in illustrating the occupational cultures of working people — taxicab drivers, waiters, firefighters, railway workers — and the cultures of deaf people, of children, and of new immigrant groups.

By enabling culture bearers to speak from the “bully pulpit” of the National Mall, the Festival disseminates alternative forms of aesthetics, history, and culture. Musical performances, crafts, foodways demonstrations, and other programmatic activities meet Smithsonian standards of authenticity, cultural significance, and excellence. Their

placement in a national museum setting conveys their value to artists, to home communities, to general audiences, and to specialists.

Some worry that “lesser others” will be embarrassed in public or exploited for their “otherness” in front of Festival crowds. Sometimes there is good cause to worry. But sometimes it is the worriers themselves who are most embarrassed, and who either from their own shame, romanticism, or paternalism would prefer to talk for those “others.” From my point of view, the problem is not in giving people, all sorts of people who have something cultural to say, the center stage. The issue is the quality and quantity of mediation — how to effectively provide the ways by which people can speak for themselves. We have found that people who come to the Festival are pretty skilled in self-representation, or get to be so quite quickly.

When we ask crucial questions to former Smithsonian Folklife Festival participants about their experience, the results are overwhelmingly positive. In surveys, 81 percent rate their Festival experience as “excellent,” 18 percent as “good”; very few rate their

experience as “fair,” no one bad. When we ask participants if they’d come back again, an overwhelming 86 percent say “definitely yes”; almost all the rest respond “maybe yes.” Participants like the Festival, generally feel they are well represented and that they impart some useful information to visitors. The majority also feel the Festival has a positive effect on their life and that of their community.

### *So That People May Be Encouraged*

We do the Festival so that practitioners may be encouraged to pass on their skills and knowledge. Much of popular mass culture suggests to traditional practitioners that they are anachronisms, practicing forms of culture and art that have lost their vitality and beauty. The Festival is a way of saying to such people, “What you do is valuable, so valuable that the Smithsonian Institution would like you to show it to the nation.” This recognition — of particular crafts, musical styles, verbal art, folk medical knowledge, occupational lore — provides encouragement to the practitioner and is sometimes a source of strength back home. Some people gain an understanding or appreciation of their own cultural contribution and may promote and transmit the tradition with greater resolve as a result of Festival participation. Over the years, the Festival has had this revitalizing effect on Cajun culture in Louisiana, among various American Indian nations, among African-American communities, among stone carvers. In other countries such as India, Festival participation contributed to the effort of street performers and itinerants to gain rights to practice their arts and gain title to their land. Similar effects are reported elsewhere. In a survey of participants, 63 percent indicated the Festival had a direct, substantial impact upon their lives. Some 56 percent reported the experience had positively affected their community.

The Smithsonian Festival has sometimes helped nations, states, and territories, work-





## *Smithsonian Folklife Festival Participant Survey*

### The Festival experience was:

Excellent .....81%  
Good .....18%

### Would you come back?

Definitely yes .....86%  
Maybe yes .....13%

### Has the Festival made an impact on your life?

Definitely .....63%

### Has the Festival affected your community?

Definitely .....56%

Mililani Allen teaches coconut weaving to children during the 1989 Festival program on Hawai'i.

Photo by Richard Strauss



*Being a participant in the Festival was certainly the highlight of my life.*

— Lloyd Snow, Musician, Castana, Iowa, 1996

*We are very much aware of the impact this Festival has had on our own states and regions. The cultural traditions brought out by the Smithsonian are worthy of respect, celebration, and scholarship on home turf.*

— Mark Hatfield, Senator from Oregon, 1978

ers, and communities reconceive their identity. Letters from officials of other nations, from governors, senators, community leaders, and tribal heads, often attest to this. These kinds of helpful though intangible effects are also felt by individuals, who have sent scores and scores of unsolicited letters asserting the direct impact of the Festival experience upon their lives.

Participants' experience in developing their own means of self-presentation and interpretation as they interact with Festival staff, experts, and the public often helps back home and in other exhibition contexts. In some cases culture bearers have sought professional training and advanced educational opportunities, partly as a result of their Festival experience. They have used this training, combined with their own knowledge, to teach about their cultures in universities and to develop and run programs and exhibits at museums, including the Smithsonian.

As for more tangible impacts, Indian craftspeople gained direct income as a result of Festival participation in 1985 — so much so that a foundation, formed with the help of Jackie Kennedy Onassis and Liz Moynihan, helped channel millions of dollars in sales, and resulting financial benefit, back to India. Festival participants have received recording contracts and royalties; some have started their own businesses; others have

developed strategies for their communities to gain from cultural tourism, performances, and other projects.

The Festival has also made a difference in establishing and supporting local institutions, archives, and professional positions in states — for example in Michigan, Iowa, and New Hampshire — and in other nations.

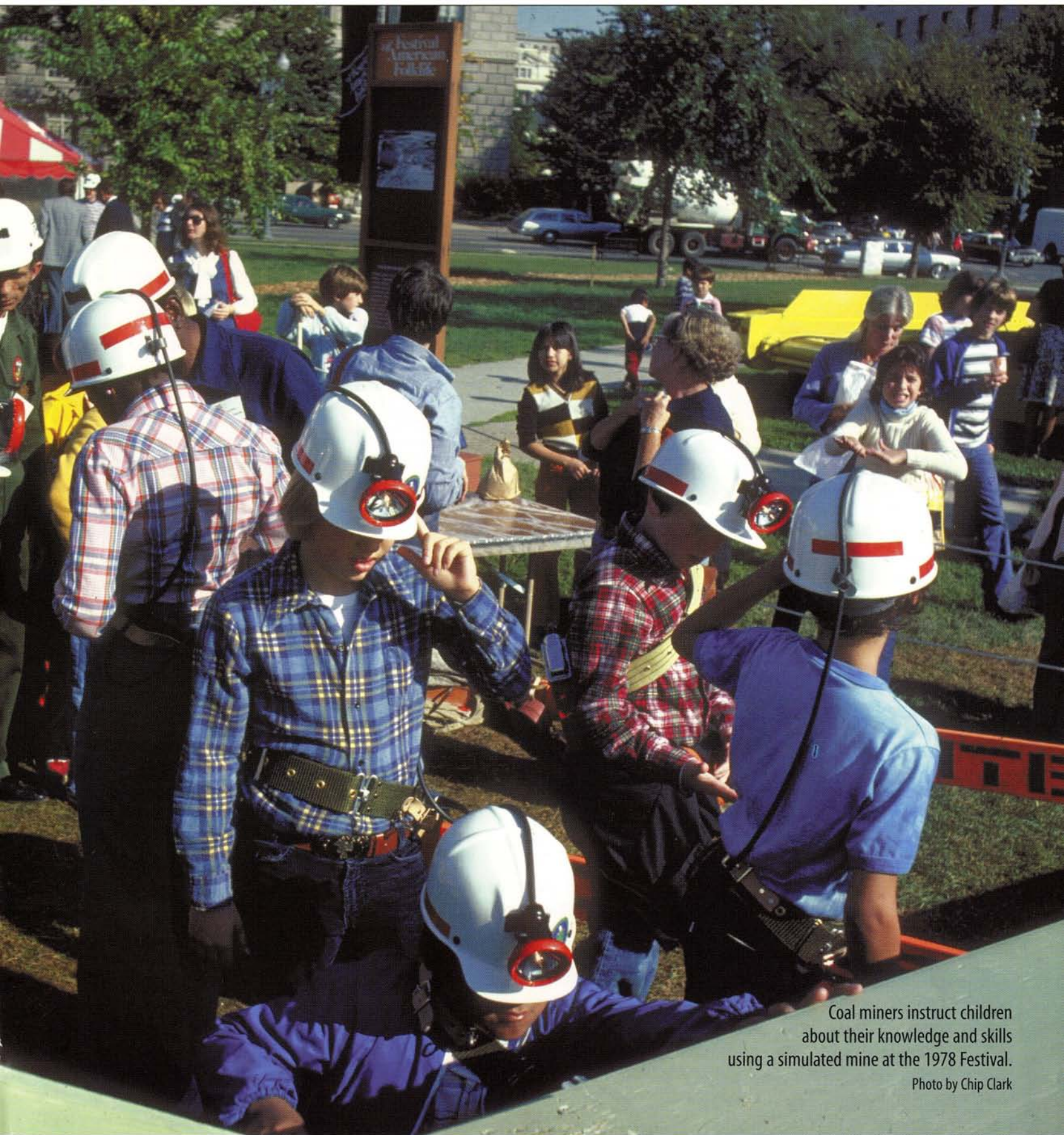
### *So That We Learn*

The Festival provokes dialogue, not didacticism. It contributes to the broad educative function of the national museums, providing a neutral ground for approaching people different from oneself.

The Smithsonian Festival has illustrated a tremendous range of what might be considered grassroots culture. It has, by its very nature, defined as cultural forms of expression that many would overlook. It has addressed world regions and city neighborhoods, world religions and very localized ritual systems, transnational ethnic groups and complex national ones, blue- and white-collar occupations. We've also looked at the culture of groups like the deaf and done comparative, thematic programs, from the musics of struggle to the sounds of the sacred. And while the blues, Appalachian string music, *conjunto*, Cajun music, and Native American drumming are mainstays, over the years there have been a Quaker







Coal miners instruct children about their knowledge and skills using a simulated mine at the 1978 Festival.

Photo by Chip Clark



## Reasons Not to Do the Festival?

There have been critiques of the Festival from its inception, some serious, others spurious. In most cases, critical understanding and assessment of its purposes have contributed to making the Festival a better, more focused, cogent activity. Some people see ways of perfecting the Festival; others think it is fundamentally flawed either because its goals are wrong, or because it is not a viable way of fulfilling the purposes it sets out.

When it was first produced in 1967, some Washingtonians accused Smithsonian secretary S. Dillon Ripley of turning the Mall into "a midway." They thought the Festival was mere song and dance, diversionary entertainment that distracted from the serious nature of the Mall and its surrounding institutions. Within the Smithsonian, several curators argued that the tradition bearers on the Mall were not exemplary, true practitioners of their cultures, but rather marginal, debased survivors, who imperfectly imitated traditions which had died decades, even centuries, earlier. They saw no educational value in the performances and demonstrations — true knowledge, they asserted, resided in their own historical studies. And there was certainly no reason to encourage Festival participants to pass on their flawed artistry or skill.

In the early 1970s, various scholarly and expert observers like David Whisnant, Rayna Green, Herb Shore, Bruce Nickerson, Roy Bryce-Laporte, Peter Seitel, and others were asked to assess the Festival. While their assessments were generally positive, several recurring negatives emerged. Educational materials were not clear enough to audiences, presentations were of mixed quality, and historical background was lacking.

Several staff who worked on the Festival in the mid-1970s questioned whether the concentration on traditional folk culture had a deleterious impact on public understanding of the cultural groups at the Festival. Representation of minority culture groups by their folk traditions might leave visitors falsely thinking that these groups have no fine arts or had made no contributions to theater, literature, or popular music.

Others in the mid-1970s found that Festival logistics and arrangements for participants were not as strong as they needed to be. Arrangements put strains on them, and ran counter to the very purpose of honoring them. Richard Bauman, Inta Carpenter, and a team of graduate students from Indiana University offered similar criticism in a 1987 study, and went further to suggest that participants have their own understandings of the Festival, their own purposes for participating in it — ones not necessarily shared by the Smithsonian.

Charles Camp and Tim Lloyd, who had worked on the Festival, wrote a paper, "Six Reasons Not to Produce Folklife Festivals," published in 1982. They perceived a lack of evidence to support the thinking that folklife festivals actually help folk culture, educate and inform the public about folk culture, or serve as a public celebration of a rich and diverse cultural heritage.

In 1993 Robert Cantwell published *Ethnomimesis*, in part about the Festival. He claimed that people at the Festival become actors of their own ethnicity, that the Festival constructs an image of people not of their making, and then manipulates them and visitors in a magical though pleasurable rite of public theater.

And in 1994, Richard and Sally Price published *Maroons on the Mall*, arguing that folklife festivals are so fundamentally flawed that they are discredited, immoral acts, where producers put exotic people on display, patronizingly exploiting the powerless for the entertainment of the powerful.

Responses to these criticisms have been made in scholarly journals, at professional meetings, in other published studies such as Laurie Sommers' *Michigan on the Mall*, and Richard Kurin's *Reflections of a Culture Broker*. They have also been made by Festival staff, in their practice, and by Festival participants — who, refreshingly, often take issue with what others have to say about them.

clambake; a Hawaiian general store where people could "talk story"; farmers growing taro, corn, potatoes, and filling out forms; gardeners; indoor and outdoor cooks; community celebrations; wakes and memorial services; a few weddings; a birth; cowboys and cowgirls; trial lawyers; Indian lacrosse, Cambodian volleyball, girls' basketball; and Smithsonian security guards.

People learn two types of things at the Festival. One is a general message that goes something like this: the world and the country are full of interesting people with a variety of cultural traditions — and that's okay, even good. The second thing at least some people learn is particular information — where Cape Verde is on a map, that there are such people as Maroons, that there's a legacy of French song styles in Missouri, that Amana makes more than radar ranges, and so on. It is easy to observe people at the Festival reading sign text, looking intently at maps and photographs, asking questions at workshops, and studying someone's musical style during a performance. There are numerous cases where visitors, staff, and even other participants become entranced with a particular tradition, where the Festival experience provides an epiphany of sorts. In such cases, visitors have often gone off to visit or study with the participant after the Festival in order to learn more. We also find children who, as a result of the Festival, start learning more about a tradition from their parents or other elders. And we've had several people who, through their Festival experience, decided to go to graduate school for advanced training on something relating to their experience.

Surveys of Festival participants and visitors confirm these observations. More than 95 percent of participants surveyed thought that the public actually learned from what they did at the Festival — even though many thought they could have done an even better job. In a 1994 survey, 86 percent of visitors thought participants did a good job in conveying knowledge about their tradi-



*The Festival is the surest antidote for what ails America down deep. Too bad there isn't more of it.*

— William Fulbright, Senator from Arkansas, 1970

*At the Folklife Festival, everyone gets to be neighbors.*

— Phyllis Richman, *Washington Post*, 1987

*This woman came up to me and said, "Can you tell me when any group will be playing 'America the Beautiful'? I said, "Ma'am, every group here is singing that song in their own special way."*

— Mike Herter, Stage manager, 1987

*The Festival is a Walt Whitman sampler of this country's culture.*

— Richard Harrington, *Washington Post*, 1986

*Festival goers find a world in miniature on the National Mall — an international version of the county fair.*

— *Destinations* magazine, 1993

*The Smithsonian had one component of the Festival called "Old Ways in the New World." I was hired to do the Irish-American part of it, and it was that research, going around the country for a few months, seeing what was there, that really opened all the doors to me and enabled me to find out what a wealth of Irish music there was in America. That was a pivotal event because it brought musicians from Ireland into contact with musicians from America. It was a major coming together for the scene here in America.*

— Mick Maloney, Musician and folklorist, 1995

*I grew up in a very Russian, very Molokan community in San Francisco. I never really thought of myself in any other way other than as a Russian Molokan. I guess we were very insular, and did not see our connections to anyone else. The Festival has now changed all this. Standing on the Mall, seeing the wealth of cultural heritage under those beautiful trees in the midst of Washington, I had the realization, and the feeling for the first time in my life that I too was an American. That I had a place here. And that my Russian, Molokan heritage made me part of America, not separate from it.*

— Edward Samarin, Festival participant, 1995

tion. Some 80 percent think they learned something at the Festival; only 13 percent thought that no learning took place. Some 65 percent indicated that what they learned was interesting and enlightening.

Another study in 1997 by Krista Thompson, an Emory University-Rockefeller Humanities fellow, pointed to the centrality of the tradition bearer in conveying knowledge. Visitors ranked the quality of participant performances and demonstrations highest, followed by participant explanations of their traditions. Festival program book articles, presentations by scholars, and content signs followed in perceived importance.

The educational function of the Festival is recognized by teachers, who use its presentations in developing curriculum units and particular lesson plans. Additionally, teachers use education kits we've produced from Festival research and documentation.

The Festival also contributes to the development of scholarship and museology. Festival programs are based on research. This research is usually multidisciplinary, involving folklore, ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, history, cultural geography, various ethnosciences, and area and ethnic studies. In its methodology, our research veers away from the monographic, tending toward group efforts involving academic, museum, and community scholars. Descriptive and analytic efforts focused on particular traditions are balanced by synthetic attempts to understand and present larger wholes. A considerable amount of fieldwork and archival research may be accomplished in the course of Festival program development. Through the course of Festival research, linkages are established for scholars, community people, and institutions that have resulted in products beyond the Festival — books, dissertations, recordings, radio programs, and documentary films. Just as the writing of an ethnography can sharpen the understanding of a culture, so does curating a Festival program aid the process of synthesizing knowledge. Festival programs, such as



*As an African American I was particularly affected when learning of the Maroons. That was never in the history books I read.*

— C. Chapelle, Friend of the Festival, 1996

*Just when it seems that the nation has been McNuggeted, Roseanned, and Classic Rocked into dull sameness, the Festival comes along to prove otherwise.*

— Marsha Mercer, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 1989

*To celebrate my becoming a citizen of the United States, we went to Washington, D.C. I saw a huge July 4th parade and got to visit the White House too. While both these events were fun and appropriate, nothing could compare to the thrill of attending the Festival on the Mall.*

— L. Vickers, Festival visitor, 1996



Jesse Jackson joins a discussion with Maroon leaders at the 1992 Festival. Photo by Jeff Tinsley

those on the African diaspora, help generate new and important scholarly understandings of cultural relationships.

The Festival contributes to the development of methods for the representation of culture. Folklorists, art historians, semioticians, exhibition designers, and others are continually involved in exploring the varied means by which cultures may be represented in museum contexts. Mannequins and objects in glass cases provide one of the older means of museum exhibitry, now enhanced by interactive computer terminals and screens, talking robots, and multimedia presentations. The Festival has long served as a model for museum-based living cultural exhibitions and as a laboratory for experimenting with new presentational formats and theories of presentation.

### *So That We Celebrate Cultural Democracy*

The Smithsonian's Festival, and I think most folklife festivals, offer a forum for the inclusion of cultural diversity within a civil society; diverse means of expression find a valuable place within a larger, global, or national whole.

This inclusionary spirit prompts extraordinary sharing among participants. It happens at special moments, either on the Mall or back at the hotel out of public view. New experiences and ways of thinking arise from the juxtaposition of cultures at the Festival. For example, a saint's day procession in 1988 was recreated on the Mall by Italian and Portuguese Americans from Massachusetts. As the procession reached the *Migration to Washington, D.C.* program, Salvadorans awaited with traditional sawdust drawings, which in Latin America are to be trod upon by processions. The Italian and Portuguese Americans took their cues from the Salvadorans and participated in the ritual. Similarly, Russian singers greeted the procession with songs to saints, and the people from Massachusetts hugged the singers, cry-



ing and dancing. More commonly, musical juxtapositions take place at the hotel, where musicians from India have jammed with Cajuns, Eskimos have sung with Koreans, Azerbaijanis have played with Greeks. The Festival too becomes a topic of cultural creativity. Bahamian Kayla Edwards and the Dicey Doh singers composed a Festival anthem in 1994, Zuni Roger Cellicion a flute piece in 1992, and Massachusetts craftspeople a multimedia sculpture of their common experience. While participating in the 1994 Festival, temple painter Sakaya Khunpolpitak redrew the Mall in a Thai aesthetic style. He saw the Mall as the American *sanam luang*, the "field of kings" in central Bangkok where major events of national scope take place. Like the Festival, these forms of expression are ephemeral, but often unpredictable, emergent, and quite creative. U. S. Virgin Islanders discovered some of their root traditions when they were co-featured at the Festival with Senegal in 1990. This led to further

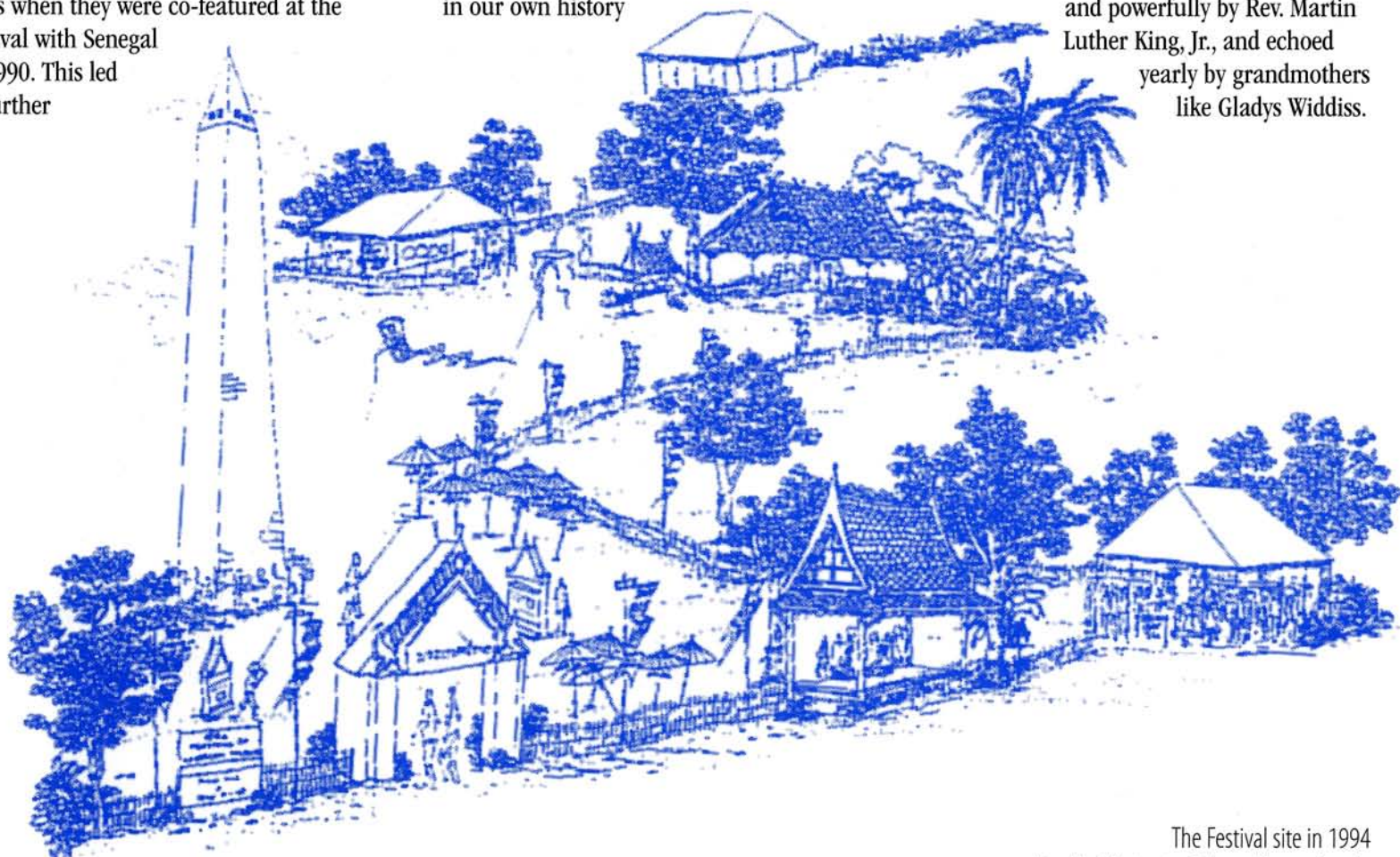
cultural exchange of artists in ensuing years.

Sometimes the exchange has been sustained among individuals. During the 1986 Festival a Tennessee cooper observed and started sharing his knowledge with a sake cask maker from Japan. He wanted to learn more about cask making from a Japanese perspective and eventually received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to study in Japan with his fellow craftsman. The influence of Japanese techniques and aesthetics may in the future emerge back in Tennessee, and is likely to baffle future archeologists.

The Festival provides a metaphor for our own national culture. America's political and legal history establishes a context for the intensely public display of our cultural diversity and aspirations at the Festival. There are many countries of the world in which the Festival could not occur. There are also times in our own history

when the Festival would be untenable, when fears of certain cultures, intolerance of minorities, the narrowing of accepted values, racism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of cultural discrimination and hatred subvert the principles enunciated in our political structures and laws.

The Festival is tied to our freedom. It is both a vehicle as well as an indicator of an open national cultural conversation. The Festival makes us proud, not chauvinistically proud but, as Secretary Ripley used to say, quietly proud of who we are. And it is through that understanding and appreciation of who we are that we appreciate others. The Festival is a symbol of our ability as a nation to find strength in our diversity rather than insist on a homogeneous, singular national, or yet worse, human culture. It is no accident that the Festival is tied in time and place to a dream enunciated so clearly and powerfully by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and echoed yearly by grandmothers like Gladys Widdiss.

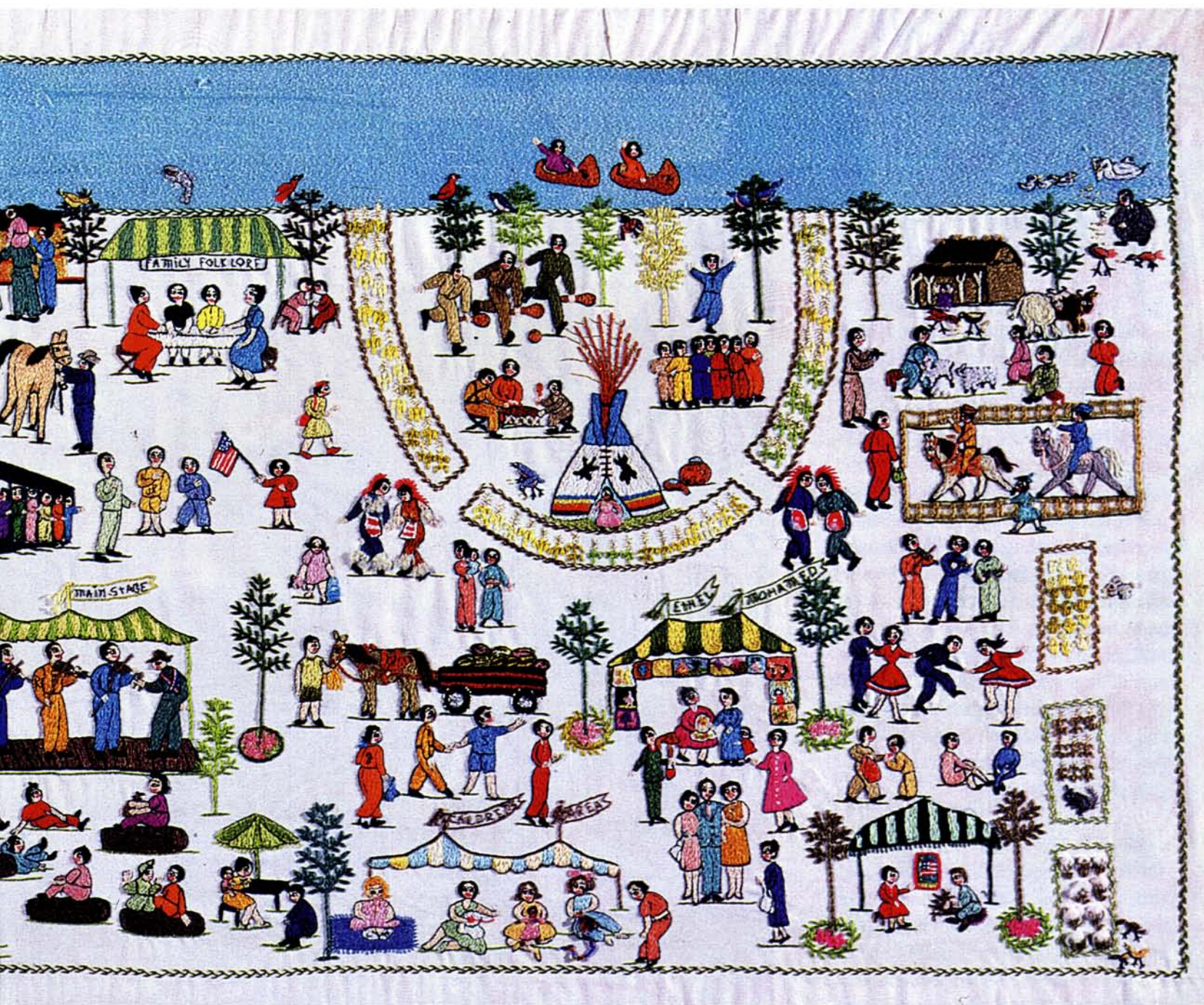


The Festival site in 1994  
stylized by Thai artist Sakaya Khunpolpitak.









This tapestry by Mississippian  
Ethel Mohamed captures Festival  
activities on the Mall for the Bicentennial.