

## **ABSTRACT**

Title of thesis: **SMITHSONIAN FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL  
2007 AND THE PRESENTATION OF  
CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN AMERICA**

Anh Hong Duong  
Master of Arts, 2008

Thesis directed by: Dr. Mary Corbin Sies,  
Department of American Studies

This thesis examines the way in which “cultural diversity” in America was constructed and presented at the 2007 Smithsonian Folklife Festival (SFF) and how American Studies scholars and the museum professionals assess the presentation of diversity at the SFF. I examine the unique museum genre of the SFF and the ways in which the folklore cultures are featured and the grassroots participants are self represented at the Festival. I argue that the Festival has created a civic and social space for cultural diversity in America to be represented and dialogued.

I use my double cultural traditions as an outsider from Vietnam and an insider in an American Studies graduate program to provide perspective on the conceptualizations of “cultural diversity” undertaken by Smithsonian Institution museum professionals and those of American Studies scholars. I analyze their thoughts about the presentation of diversity at the SFF and compare the latter with treatments of cultural diversity in American Studies approaches in the United States.

**SMITHSONIAN FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL 2007 AND THE PRESENTATION  
OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN AMERICA**

By

Anh Hong Duong

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
2008

Advisory Committee:

Professor Mary Corbin Sies, Chair  
Professor John Caughey  
Professor Ellen Roney Hughes

Copyright by  
Anh Hong Duong  
2008

## Acknowledgements

This thesis could never have been possible without the support of many kind people around me. While it would be impossible to list all from these groups those to whom I am indebted, the following people cannot go unmentioned.

To begin with, I am indebted to Mary Corbin Sies and her spouse who have always been so nice and helpful to our family since our first days in College Park. She is a trusted instructor and valued advisor to me who always inspired my working spirit every time I left her office. She was with me since the very first day of the thesis, helped me complete the writing of this thesis as well as the challenging research that lies behind it. I have learnt a lot from her as a student, a teacher and a scholar. She taught me how to write academic papers with good citations, proofread and marked up my papers, asked me good questions to help me think through my problems. Without her encouragement and constant guidance, I could not have finished this thesis.

I have been greatly grateful to Dr. John Caughey, from whom I learned a lot about being a scholar, an ethnographer. Without his help, I could not have gotten through the IRB process for this thesis. He was always there, encouraging me, building up the confidence and the good ideas in me in me when I doubted myself.

I would like to thank the final member of my committee, Dr. Ellen Roney Hughes, who agreed to be in the committee and spent her busy time from her work at the museum to read my work on a very short notice and gave me insightful comments.

I have benefited immeasurably from many knowledgeable instructors and professors at the Department American Studies and its Affiliate faculty at the University of Maryland who have given me insightful and complicated views and approaches of American Studies in America.

I have learnt a great deal from those who have studied with me at the University of Maryland over the last two years, especially Christopher Pérez who often talked to me and helped me with technical problems in dealing with computer issues.

I gratefully acknowledge my debt to all American Studies scholars (my friends, you know who you are!) who enthusiastically helped me in my research, filled in the questionnaire and answered the interviews.

I would like to acknowledge my appreciation to museum professionals and organizers of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2007 at the Center For Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Smithsonian Institution and Center for American Folklife at the Library of Congress for their sharing of precious experiences and perspectives on the Festival as well as their materials and recordings on the Festival at their Archive.

I would like to emphasize my great appreciation to the Henry Luce and The Asia Foundation for their financial supports for my graduate study at the University of Maryland.

Less directly responsible for the thesis but most importantly to its completion is the unconditional support of my family, my husband and my children. Their endless love and encouragement and sharing of happiness and difficulties in life have helped me get through this phase of my life.

Words can not express all my gratitude to you all!!!

## List of Tables

Table 1: Evaluation of the research participants' learning effect

## List of Illustrations

Map of the 2007 SFF

Diagram of the perspectives of American Studies scholars and museum professionals  
on cultural diversity in SSF 2007

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	ii
List of tables.....	iv
List of illustrations .....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Section 1: Introduction of the thesis.....	1
Section 2: Introduction to the initial scene of the SFF 2007.....	6
Chapter 2: How “cultural diversity” is constructed and presented at the 2007 SFF... 18	18
Section 1: SFF in history .....	18
Section 2: The approach to diversity of the CFCH .....	20
Section 3: The theoretical framework.....	23
Chapter 3: The presentation of “cultural diversity” at the SFF 2007: From the perspectives of the American Studies and the museum professionals.....	42
Section 1: Perspectives of American Studies Scholars.....	42
Section 2: Concerns from American Studies scholars and perspectives from museum professionals about the presentation of the SFF 2007 .....	50
Chapter 4: Conclusion.....	63
Section 1: Reasons for different takes of American Studies scholars of the SFF .....	65
Section 2: Reasons for different perspectives of the two groups on the issue .....	67
Section 3: Cultural diversity in Vietnam and its American Studies program.....	75
Appendices.....	85
Bibliography .....	95

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Section 1: Introduction to the thesis

In this thesis, I explore how “cultural diversity” in America is constructed and presented at the 2007 Smithsonian Folklife Festival (SFF) and how two different groups of scholars, American Studies scholars and the museum professionals, assess the presentation of diversity at the SFF.

The issue of constructing and performing cultural diversity in such a diverse country as America has been a concern of many people; among them are American Studies scholars and museum professionals. American Studies scholars have both an opportunity and responsibility “to engage in, to facilitate the conversation that occurs in the public marketplace by ensuring the perpetuation of a processual notion of America”<sup>1</sup> as well as “participate in the public understanding of culture”<sup>2</sup> “to narrow the gap between academic talk and professional action.”<sup>3</sup> The increased dialogue between museum curators and academic scholars helps to create a sharing of responsibility for the management of cultural property. Museums, which are often centers of research and training, provide a site--and perhaps one of academia’s most

---

<sup>1</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3. (Sep 1992), 311.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 285.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), xi.

public sites for the discussion and representation of identity and difference in society. Their perspectives should be shared in popular media to better society.

With my dual cultural traditions as an “outsider” from Vietnam as well as an “insider”--as a graduate student in an American Studies Program in America--I choose to take the SFF as my case study to get to know the presentation of cultural diversity in America for several reasons. Firstly, it is because the Smithsonian has remained true to its mission for “the increase and diffusion of knowledge,”<sup>4</sup> for 160 years. Over time, the Smithsonian has become “the world’s largest and most respected provider of museum experiences, supported by authoritative scholarship to connect Americans to their cultural heritage, and an international leader in scientific research and exploration.”<sup>5</sup> Secondly, the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH) produces research-based public programs that promote the understanding and continuity of traditional grass-roots regional, ethnic, tribal, and occupational heritage in the United States and abroad. Thirdly, the SFF has been the annual exhibition of living cultural heritage and cultural democracy from across the United States and around the world for forty-one years and it has been considered a “museum without walls of any kind”<sup>6</sup> for cultural diversity in America.

I agree with the argument that “the Festival is an on-going representation of cultural diversity”<sup>7</sup> and cultural diversity is an ongoing process from year to year and from program to program of the Festival. However, it would be too ambitious and

---

<sup>4</sup> The quotation is from James Smithson (1765-1829), the founder and benefactor of the Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>5</sup> [www.si.edu/about/budget/2006/2006-04-Overview\\_Congress06.doc](http://www.si.edu/about/budget/2006/2006-04-Overview_Congress06.doc) (accessed Jan 20 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Robert McAdams, Secretary of Smithsonian Institution, 1986, In Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Culture Of, For, By the People* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1998), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Questionnaire filled out by Participant number 4.

undoable to examine the “cultural diversity” of an entire forty-year-old festival. Within the scope of a thesis for such a big issue as the representation of “cultural diversity”, I focus on the representation of “cultural diversity” at the 2007 festival in the regions that are being featured as a case study for the representation of the SFF in general. It is necessary to clarify that the sample size of informants who are involved in filling out questionnaires and answering the interviews in my research is small and focused; therefore the conclusions for this thesis are preliminary. The museum professionals in my research are those associated directly with the SFF. Therefore, they do not represent the ideas of all other museum professionals on cultural diversity and its representation.

To find out the answers for the thesis questions, I am using ethnographic field research methods such as participant observation in the SFF, making an ethnographic record of the SFF’s cultural features, and using auto ethnography and cultural analysis to discover and describe the Festival. I am also using visual media such as photographs, a map to illustrate the exhibits of cultures in the SFF, and a diagram to compare and contrast the conceptualizations of the two groups. To get to know the conceptualization and practice of cultural diversity I also asked the research participants<sup>8</sup> to fill out questionnaires about the SFF and followed up with in- depth interviews with them as well as with the curators and organizers of the SFF. I am also using analyses of cultural traditions of the research participants to compare and contrast answers from them.

---

<sup>8</sup> The term “research participants” is used to identify American Studies scholars who agreed to attend the Festival, filled in the questionnaires and agreed to be interviewed. See more of their cultural traditions in Fig 1.

Sources for the thesis include primary ones consisting of questionnaires, and interviews with the Festival curators and organizers, with the festival participants<sup>9</sup> and visitors<sup>10</sup>; recordings of the speeches and talks by museum professionals and festival organizers and festival participants taken by the author during the festival, visual media photos taken at the festival; documents from the Archive of the CFCH at the Smithsonian Institution and the Center for American Folklife at the Library of Congress. A number of secondary sources of literature written about cultural diversity and about the SFF in American Studies and Museology as well as world media coverage on the SFF published in magazines, newspapers and websites collected by the CFCH's archive will be used in my thesis.

The issues of public cultural representation have drawn attention from academic scholars, museum curators and educators and others in the past few years. My thesis, therefore, hopes to add a voice to the existing literature on cultural diversity in American Studies and Museology. The theoretical and practical findings of the thesis will be applied in teaching and doing research on American cultural diversity in my home country of Vietnam.

The thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter One introduces the questions of the thesis, the reason for choosing the thesis, the scope of the thesis, its significance to the scholarship as well as to the author's profession, and the methods and the sources of material used in the thesis. Also in Chapter One, I walk the reader through my initial experience of the scene of the 2007 SFF with the three programs from Northern

---

<sup>9</sup> The term "festival participants" is used to identify performers, craft people, and artisans who are invited to participate in the Festival.

<sup>10</sup> The term "visitors" is used to identify people who visit the Festival.

Ireland, Mekong Region and Virginia Roots with a special focus on the Mekong Region, as my home country's cultural traits are featured in this program.

Chapter Two aims to find out how “cultural diversity” is constructed and presented at the 2007 SFF. This chapter explores the history and characteristics of the SFF and its approaches to cultural diversity by the curators and organizers at the CFCH. The conceptual framework of the concept of “festival” and “cultural diversity” is put in the history of the development of American Studies and its literature in academic talks as well as in the defined tasks of museums in professional action and helps explain the perspectives of the two groups in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three explores the diverse perspectives of American Studies scholars on the representation of cultural diversity at the 2007 SFF. Although they are in the same program of American Studies and see “cultural diversity” with its components of race, gender, class, ethnicity, etc., as interrelated systems of inequality based in social relationships of power and control, they have different personal cultural traditions which influence their standings of the festival. Their comments and suggestions to improve the Festival are also mentioned in my personal arguments on the issues as I consider myself as both insider and outsider of the research who had the chance to listen to both groups. Chapter Three also works on the perspectives of museum professionals and Festival organizers on their performance of the task of being culture brokers for cultural diversity of the cultures featured.

Chapter Four as a conclusion chapter provides additional analysis based on my insider and outsider perspectives. It explains how and why there are different takes even among one group of American Studies scholars and between the two

groups of American Studies scholars and museum professionals regarding their understandings of “cultural diversity”. I relate the findings of the research regarding the issue of diversity to the practice and teaching of American Studies in Vietnam.

### **Section 2: SFF 2007’s initial scene**

As I got off the Smithsonian metro station, the Mall was in front of me, more crowded and more hectic than usual in the atmosphere of the annual folklife festival in the heat of July. Colorful banners and posters flying in the wind and the sound of music from one of the stages made me excited. Several policemen were standing at the end of the elevators, ready to give direction and information to unfamiliar visitors. Some other volunteers were giving free paper fans to every visitor passing by. I took 2 fans, with information about Virginia and Northern Ireland, two of the three programs which are featured in this year’s festival. I was looking for the fan with some information about the Mekong Region program but there was no sign of it. I approached the Information kiosk and bought a program book of the festival. In front of me, one elderly woman wearing black glasses, sitting in a wheel chair which was controlled by a middle-aged man, was asking for the audio cassette of the program book. Beyond my expectation, large print and audio cassette versions of the daily schedule and audio cassettes of the program book were available at this kiosk and the Volunteer tent. Looking at the map of the Festival<sup>11</sup>, I could see signs of wheel chair accessibility as well as audio loops and American Sign Language interpretation. I was wrong in personally assuming that the Festival only provides access for the able. It was for everyone!

---

<sup>11</sup> For reference, see Map of the Festival attached.

The landscape of the Festival spread along the Mall between 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> streets. The Northern Ireland exhibit was located in front of the National Museum of American History. The region was easily recognized by its murals, the distinctive feature of Northern Ireland culture. A house with two gable walls was set up for the east Belfast artists on one side and the Bogside ones on the other side. The east Belfast artists, who historically represented the Protestants, were painting a black and white mural depicting Belfast industry, from the shipyard workers who built the Titanic to linen workers and the city's skyline...The Bogside muralists, who historically represented Northern Ireland's Catholic majority, depicted a peace mural with U.S civil rights hero, Martin Luther King Jr., the statue of Liberty, and a white dove in the center. Northern Ireland has a diverse and unique culture and showcasing it in America is an opportunity to demonstrate the amazing transformation that has taken place in recent years. "Now is the time to step out of the shadows and into the spotlight and show the world the real Northern Ireland."<sup>12</sup> More than 160 of Northern Ireland's finest musicians, storytellers, cooks, craft workers, sports persons and cultural experts shared with Festival visitors the living traditions that make and sustain the cultural life of contemporary Northern Ireland. They were using art, music, sports, food and even Irish whiskey to showcase their homeland as it works to heal communal divisions following four decades of bloodshed.

According to the Festival organizers, the Festival program comes at a very important time in the history of the island region, just several months after the self-government was formed between the major parties, Unionist (Protestant) and

---

<sup>12</sup> By Northern Irish Culture and Arts Minister, Maria Eagle MP at [www.nwipp-newspapers.com/FH/free/306696919278827.php](http://www.nwipp-newspapers.com/FH/free/306696919278827.php) - 49k, (accessed June 13, 2007).

Republican (Catholic)<sup>13</sup>. The idea of doing a program on Northern Ireland at SFF 2007 was proposed by the Northern Ireland Bureau in the U.S. and the various Northern Ireland government departments as a part of the reconciliation process for the country's conflict. The SFF expected to present a new, changing and "accurate reflection"<sup>14</sup> of contemporary Northern Ireland "...to get Americans to rethink Northern Ireland"<sup>15</sup> as a vibrant, culturally diverse region with thriving economy, revitalized cities, its peoples' sense of pride and passion...."<sup>16</sup> This idea can be seen easily by looking at the murals. Murals created at the SFF no longer take political and militant messages on sectarianism and racism and cultural aggression in Northern Ireland in the 60s and 70s, but were excellent examples of how murals can and must change to reflect new social, political realities and cultural celebration of the country.

The next tent was agriculture and renewable resources. As agriculture plays an important part in the country's economy, special attention was paid to the development of sustainable agriculture and the conservation of the environment through the use of renewable resources. Walking across the mini model of the famous fishermen's precarious and breathtaking rope bridge at Carrick-A- Rede and the Giant's Causeway in the North coast, I enlightened myself about how underwater excavations off Northern Ireland's coast and marine archeology were done.

In the program's genealogy area, a big crowd of many people gathered around to listen to Irish history. Interestingly, Northern Ireland has a close tie with the

---

<sup>13</sup> 2007 *Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Mekong River, Northern Ireland, Roots of Virginia Culture*, Smithsonian institution, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (Smithsonian Institution: 2007), 8.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Groce, curator of the Northern Ireland Program, video chat with the curator.

<sup>15</sup> Nancy Groce, curator of the Northern Ireland Program, video chat with the curator.

<sup>16</sup> "A Slice of Northern Ireland Life on the Mall," *Washington Post*, Friday June 29, 2007.

U.S: one in every ten Americans claims Irish or Scots-Irish heritage; seventeen U.S presidents had their origin in Ireland, even Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. No wonder seven Northern Ireland ministers came to attend the SFF this year with the hope of boosting economic and diplomatic ties with the U.S. Later it was reported that more than 4,000 people came to the genealogy tent of the Festival to track their Northern Ireland family roots.<sup>17</sup> Just several days ago, right at this tent, an Illinois woman checked up on her Ulster roots and uncovered the unused ticket from her grand mom for the Titanic's ill-fated voyage.<sup>18</sup>

A little bit farther way from the mural was the sport and games village. I am not keen on sport but the enthusiasm of the sport clinic's presenters provoked my curiosity about the practice and the importance of sports in Irish culture. First was the children's game section. Younger visitors can learn about traditional Irish games by visiting the Play Board tent, where games leaders instructed them how to play these games and helped them to organize group play. Next, on my right, was the play field for indigenous Irish games such as Gaelic sports, hurling and soccer and rugby, the popular sport and games in the region. The cheer of the visitors who "had a go" at *camogie*, Gaelic football, and that from the spectators--who were watching the motor race (also a popular sport in Northern Ireland) near by--mingled with the sound of fiddles from the Lagan Stage next to that really made the Irish atmosphere on the Mall. Having burned a lot of my energy at the sport village, I took a rest at the Lough Erne Inn to enjoy the taste of Northern Ireland cuisine with mussel soup and smoked

---

<sup>17</sup> From Valerie Adams, Public Records Office at SFF, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>18</sup> 2007 Smithsonian Festival Media Reports, CFCH, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Folklife

salmon. They were so good that I decided to buy a Northern Ireland cook book with compliments from chef and culinary instructor, Hugh Browne.

My discovery of the region continued after lunch. The next part of the lawn was for Northern Ireland's varied craft traditions, distinguished industry, and traditional and changing occupations. I spent hours admiring the craft of Lambeg Drum making and bagpipe making as well as pottery and linen making and carpet weaving in this region. I was amazed by the skillfulness of embroiderers, lace makers, milliners and Irish dancing dress makers. While I was listening to the history of banners from traditional banner painters from Londonderry and East Belfast, the noise of *lambeg* drums attracted me to the musical instrument makers. The show case of *uilleann* or Irish bagpipes as well as *lambeg* and *bodhran* drums made the already festival atmosphere more exciting. In the tent nearby, a lot of people gathered around the giant copper distiller and smelled the barrels of wine. The famous Old Bushmills Distillery, the world's oldest whiskey distillery was present at the Festival in its 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The craft of making Irish single malt, the procedure of transforming the malted Irish barley and the secrets of the special water from St. Columb's Rill, triple distillation in copper stills into the world- famous elixir drew a lot of men's attention. Next to the whiskey tent was the potters and pottery makers from the famous Belleek Pottery Company; its 150-year history, as well as its beautiful handmade vases and baskets, hypnotized visitors. Far away, workers from Belfast's Harland and Wolff, the shipbuilding company that built the Titanic in 1912, showed visitors some skills and trades needed to build ships, a distinguished industry of Northern Ireland. On a big open wooden stage with two rows of straw chairs for the audience, the ancient

mumming traditions of Northern Ireland culture were enjoyably and chaotically presented in the Festival with the performance of seven Aughakillymaude Mummers from County Fermanagh. These “men of straw” were all wearing different costumes made from rye and corn straw. Some of them even had cross-dressing - it is not unusual for men mummers to be dressed as women, and for women mummers to be dressed as men. It is believed that their performance brought prosperity, good luck, to the audience. There is also an educational facility in Northern Ireland to teach children mumming roles, rhymes and straw craft. It was interesting to watch them performing the story of Saint Patrick in a creative version of mumming.

I took a rest at Bann Narrative Stage where Festival participants and shared stories about their jobs, their lives, and their regions with Festival visitors. I recorded their stories for my research. On the way back to the next region exhibit, the Mekong Region, I came by the Lagan and Foyle stages to immerse myself into the music and dance of the dancers. I have learnt so much from the region and its connections and contributions to America. Program curator, Nancy Groce, said, “Few regions of the world have contributed more to the formation of the United States than Northern Ireland. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a succession of immigrants has had a profound impact on the development of American culture, politics, education, science, religion, agriculture and industry.”<sup>19</sup>

Saying goodbye to the Northern Ireland exhibit, I came to the exhibit of the Mekong Region which was also part of my country, Vietnam. The region was familiar to many Americans because of the war three decades ago. Now it has

---

<sup>19</sup> Folklife Festival Presents “Northern Ireland at the Smithsonian”, Smithsonian Institution, May 21, 2007.

become the world's "politically, economically, and culturally dynamic area whose future is increasingly tied to global concerns"<sup>20</sup>. Far away was the sign of the yellow and red banner with the artistic image of catfish, the popular fish in the Mekong River which means *the mother of all rivers*, the tenth longest river in the world running through Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and the Chinese Province of Yunnan. The Festival was an important opportunity for the region to introduce to the world its rich, interrelated cultures such as occupational and artisan traditions, various religious performance and celebratory expressions in a changing cultural and historical context. This was a chance for millions of Americans with Mekong roots to revisit or be exposed to their ancestors' cultural traditions. The Festival examined the complex cultural connections which form "a cradle and crossroads of folklore cultures" among the various ethnic groups, languages, traditions and practices by tracing the flow of the Mekong River. The Mekong River program with two hundred artists, performers, craft people, cooks and ritual specialists showed the diverse cultures which have close ties with the U.S. by recent historical events and by more than two million Americans who trace their heritage to the Mekong River region.

This is only my second time at the SFF after eight years, but I was so excited because for the first time in the history of the SFF, part of Vietnamese culture is presented at the Mall and I was doing an ethnographic participant observation on this Festival for my thesis. I have never been to the Cuu Long Delta (Nine Dragons Delta), where the Mekong River runs through the very Southern part of Vietnam and

---

<sup>20</sup> 2007 *Smithsonian Folk life Festival: Mekong River, Northern Ireland, Roots of Virginia Culture*, Smithsonian institution, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (Smithsonian Institution: 2007), pp 8, 9.

is divided into nine smaller rivers. Whether the cultures featured here at the Mall in America would be the same as what I have been exposed to through media in Vietnam, I wondered myself... Thirty nine Vietnamese folk artists and artisans ranging in age from 19 to 77 belonging to six major ethnic groups--the Bahnar, Cham, Hoa, Kinh, Khmer and Thai-- introduced “the traditional diverse cultures, land and people of Vietnam through craft demonstrations, including weaving, knitting, fishing tools, building dugout canoes, cake making and performance of folk music, highland gong, epos, kylin and dragon dances, etc.”<sup>21</sup> The Bahnar canoe makers in the remote central highland of Vietnam in the Kontum Province bordering Cambodia and Laos hewed and chiseled the poplar tree trunk to make a dugout canoe. It is said that their lives have been largely untouched by modern civilization and their traditional culture is still passed down orally from generation to generation. I was unable (as other Americans) to communicate with them directly because they speak their own language and communication has to go from Bahnar to Vietnamese then to English and back. To many visitors who are not of these groups’ ethnicity, the two-hour show and performance “Sounds of the Mekong” (but dance plays nearly as much of a role as the music) “challenged the Western sensibilities at times but also offered exhilarating, universally pleasing sequences.”<sup>22</sup> During the show, one of the American Studies fellows asked me, “Which of these ethnic groups do you belong to?” I had to explain to her that like America, Vietnam is also an ethnically diverse country with fifty four ethnic groups, and actually “the eleven arts and handicraft style featured didn’t represent Vietnamese folk culture. They are merely typical

---

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.saigongpdaily.com.vn>, (accessed June 13, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Steve Kiviat, “Sounds of the Mekong, With a lot to see”, *Washington Post*, Monday, July 9, 2007.

examples of the cultural life in the Mekong Valley area”<sup>23</sup>. I belong to the largest ethnic group, the Kinh (Viet) which accounts for 87 % of the population. The Kinh emerged as a distinct group from among the various indigenous peoples living around the Red River Delta. Other groups are scattered across 45 of the 61 provinces, but the percentage of minority populations is highest in 13 provinces of the Northern Highlands and Central Highlands. I was born and live in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam which situates in the North of the country. As I live and work at the Northern part of the country, I have never had a chance to visit the very Southern part of the country, the Mekong region. All I know about the region is via books and media. Thanks to the SFF I had the chance to know these cultures and these people of my country with my own eyes. Attending the Mekong Delta section, I have mixed feelings of revisiting some long time experiences familiar to my childhood, and some new exposure to the diversity of the community. I am also proud of the fact that Vietnamese ethnics from the banks of the Mekong River could come to the banks of the Potomac River to demonstrate their cultural heritage to an international audience. Spending a lot of time at the Nine Dragons Stage, I felt nostalgic with some of the familiar musical performances in Vietnamese such as *Hai Boi Opera* ensemble (Vietnam Traditional Opera), and *Don Ca Tai Tu* (Amateur Traditional Songs) of Southern Vietnam. I think that the SFF museum professional has done a good job in setting the stages close to its context such as the Southern style altar in the *Don Ca Tai Tu* singing. I watched with pleasure the enjoyment and admiration on kids and adults’ faces at the Vietnamese Kylin dancing and drumming. Two mythical tiger-like creatures, similar to those seen in Chinese New Year parades, prowled up and down

---

<sup>23</sup> A performance in dream, Vietnam Net, June 18, 2007

the aisles and did gymnastic feats on stage. “The dancers then joined the drummers for powerful displays of precision percussion, using clanging cymbals and a massive three-foot high and wide drum hit with wooden sticks.”<sup>24</sup> It reminded me of my childhood when I joined other kids to follow the dancers during the Mid-Autumn festival till late night....

Although I know that the peoples of the Mekong have developed animist belief systems and rituals to influence the natural forces for moderate climate for water, rice, and fish sources, I was still so much amazed at their sacred rituals and their spiritual meanings, e.g. Khmer people’s sending kites of bamboo and paper high into the sky to summon the hot winds and chase away the rain clouds; Lao and Thai’s rockets skyward to ensure sufficient rain and plentiful harvests and to ensure fertility of rice fields and humans alike.

What was new to me in the musical performance of Vietnam was the Robam mashed dance from the Khmer community, which has “Indian origin since the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century. When the residents of the Southern region embraced it 200 years ago, it evolved into Khmer’s traditional art form”<sup>25</sup>I was so home sick with tastes of traditional food, so thrilled with the craft demonstrations and spiritual ceremony, and also proud of the country’s distinctive cultures featured at the Festival. At Puer Tea House, I was mouthwatering when Mrs. Muoi Xiem fried her *xeo* cake. Like me, many others attended asked her if they could taste them; but no- the National Park service regulations prohibit dispersing of the dishes made by chefs during their demonstrations.

---

<sup>24</sup> Steve Kiviat, “Sounds of the Mekong, With a lot to see”, *Washington Post*, Monday, July 9, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Steve Kiviat, “Sounds of the Mekong, With a lot to see”, *Washington Post*, Monday, July 9, 2007.

However, I was also wondering about the survival of these traditional art forms in the country as well as the welcome of the young generation to the traditional folk art forms before the allure of the modern Western culture in the global world. As Nancy Groce said, highlighting and celebrating folk cultures of one nation outside its border can give the domestic people more notice and respect to those cultures at home,<sup>26</sup> I hope the appreciations of outsiders with one nation's culture will be a catalyst for insider people to have higher appreciation for the non Western culture.

The Festival also traced the roots of Virginia in its 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, Virginia in the *Roots of Virginia Culture*. Native Americans, English, and Africans, the first three groups in Jamestown, interacted through war, slavery, and strife, as well as through a growing economy and an unfolding democracy to define, in large measure, American culture and traditions. A delegation from Kent County, England, which sent over the first settlers in 1607, as well as eight American Indian tribes and West Africans representing the state's black history were invited to come to the Festival to demonstrate root traditions, cultural parallels, and the ways their expressions and those of later immigrants formed a dynamic American heritage. All participants are so honored to represent their community's cultures. Stephen Adkins, chief of Virginia's Chickahominy Tribe said, "Fifty years ago, you wouldn't have seen me here. We have come a long way here in America in appreciating diversity." The appreciation and tolerance of cultural diversity and differences are shown at the Festival. "That idea of reconciliation is a broad theme at the festival, which highlights the Mekong region's history of conflict and the Vietnam

---

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Nancy Groce, curator of the Northern Ireland Program, Washington D.C., November 9, 2007.

War, and Virginia's volatile history involving English settlers, African slaves and Native Americans.”<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> [english.pravda.ru/news/world/29-06-2007/94280-festival-0](http://english.pravda.ru/news/world/29-06-2007/94280-festival-0) - 36k, (accessed June 20, 2007).

## Chapter 2:

### How “cultural diversity” is constructed and presented at the 2007 Smithsonian Folklife Festival

#### Section 1: SFF in history

The SFF is an annual international summer event which happens around America’s Independence Day during a ten-day period to exhibit the diverse living cultural traditions of people around the world and the U.S. “There is no better place, no better time to celebrate the culture of the American people and those from around the world.”<sup>28</sup> “No better place” as it is staged outdoors on the National Mall of America, the “symbolically potent space”<sup>29</sup> and also “people space”<sup>30</sup> for public life, so it provides access for everyone free of charge. “No better time” because this is “the symbolically loaded time”<sup>31</sup> of American Independence Day for Americans and the high season for international tourists. It is also because summertime enables different people in America especially students and pupils to come and learn; as Jimmy Driftwood- teacher and musician in the 1970 Festival acknowledged, “one can learn

---

<sup>28</sup> Ralph Rinler, Festival Director, 1971, in Richard Kurin, *Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, (Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage, 1998), 7.

<sup>29</sup> J. Carter Brown, “The Mall and the Commission of Fine Arts”, in Longstreth, *The Mall in Washington D.C.*, 297-295.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 122.

<sup>31</sup> J. Carter Brown, “The Mall and the Commission of Fine Arts”, in Longstreth, *The Mall in Washington D.C.*, 297-295.

more here in an afternoon than a semester at college.”<sup>32</sup> The maximum attendance of the festival so far amounted to 4,400,000 visitors in the 1976 Festival.<sup>33</sup> The great deal of publicity comes from the fact that the Festival has been called “a national treasure”, “best event in the U.S” (in 1994), and “going to the Festival likened to an act of cultural citizenship”<sup>34</sup> to the American people at large. It usually includes programs of an international country, a region/ state in the U.S., and an occupational or thematic program. The Festival typically includes “daily and evening programs of music, song, dance, celebratory performances, craft demonstrations, cooking demonstrations, story telling, illustration of workers’ culture and narrative sessions for discussing cultural issues.”<sup>35</sup>

In its 40 years of history, the Festival has featured exemplary representatives from more than 90 nations, every region of the U.S., scores of ethnic communities, more than 70 occupations and more than 100 American Indian groups<sup>36</sup>; some 20,000 keepers of culture from all across the United States and from more than 80 nations around the globe have spoken for more than 38 million visitors to the Festival on the National Mall<sup>37</sup>. With the idea that culture is an ongoing, living and dynamic process which is “alive in homes, workplaces, dance halls, community centers, and other sites--virtual and real--where people gather, it is through the festival that the Smithsonian shows that history doesn’t stop, that the life of people cannot be reduced to an object in a case or a sign on a wall. It is through the festival that people speak

---

<sup>32</sup> Richard Kurin, *Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, (Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage, 1998), 12.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Kurin, *Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Kurin, *Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Kurin, *Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, 6

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.folklife.si.edu/center/festival.html>, (accessed Dec. 25, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Smithsonian Folklife Festival sign, July 2008.

for themselves, about their lives and accomplishments, and about how they have made everyday life meaningful and, sometimes, beautiful.”<sup>38</sup> Survey results from the Festival performed by CFCH year after year indicate that visitors believe that they learn from the Festival performances and representations more than they learn from museum exhibitions, reading books, or watching documentary films. The Festival’s use of multi-sensory, participatory experiences has been increasingly adopted by museums as sound education practices.

### Section 2: The approach to diversity of the CFCH

The Festival was initiated by James Morris, director of the Division of Performing Arts and developed by James Morris and Ralph Rinzler in 1967 (under the name of American Folklife Festival<sup>39</sup> (AFF) with support from Smithsonian Institution Secretary S. Dillon Ripley. While traveling and documenting the diversity of the community-based root music for the Newport Folk Festival, Ralph Rinzler and others helped develop a new model of cultural presentation for the Smithsonian. The AFF shared some affinity with other folk life festivals which were “construed more in terms of advocacy--of people, causes, and aesthetics,”<sup>40</sup> such as the Newport Folk Festival. However, other folklife festivals at that time didn’t attempt to “display others and certainly not in a racial and cultural evolutionary framework.”<sup>41</sup> In the historical and social context of the 1960s when the importance of race was in heated

---

<sup>38</sup>Michael Heyman, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, In Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> The Festival was named American Folklife Festival until 1989; after that it is called Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 127.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 127.

debate, the attempt to use the festival as a means to deliver a message for social justice and social change was quite a revolutionary idea.

The AFF was progressively influenced by Civil Right Movements in the wake of “Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.’s use of the Mall as pulpit to assert civic participation.”<sup>42</sup> As early as in the 1960s, the AFF’s founders set up diverse and high expectations for the AFF--not only as entertainment but also as advocacy to demonstrate cultural rights, as well as a means of education for public service and dispersing knowledge via scholarship and experience<sup>43</sup>. The AFF from its early years of operation has been expected to be “a means of livening up the Smithsonian, of broadening and enlarging its visitor-ship”<sup>44</sup> (according to Secretary S. Dillon Ripley); a “device for both signaling and developing artistic endowment for the American people”<sup>45</sup> (according to James Morris); and “a massive demonstration of the desire of grassroots people for aesthetic justice”. With the oriented goal set from the beginning, the SFF has carried out its mission in the past forty years. Moreover, the idea of empowering the festival for civic rights and cultural value was mentioned in the introductions and statement of the Secretary in the program book of the Festival in the late sixties and early seventies. The Festival must be “the way to give voice to people and announce to the public, the media, and Congress that there was “culture”

---

<sup>42</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 127.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 128.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 128.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 128.

back home and that that culture was worthy of national pride, attention and respect.”<sup>46</sup>

Within the conceptual framework of “cultural diversity” in the museum context, museum professionals use the Festival as a means to “broaden knowledge and appreciation and increase support for all art forms and practitioners overlooked in a society whose sense of beauty and value is generally driven by the exercise of power and the commodification of the market place.”<sup>47</sup> While celebrating the diversity of the nation and the world, the Festival also celebrates the ability to “talk with and to join with each other to appreciate and bridge human differences.”<sup>48</sup> By creating a platform for people’s understanding, tolerance and appreciation of different cultures, the Festival also empowers the grass roots to “reinvest the social order with legitimacy--connecting that order to higher powers, cosmic purposes, and sacred history.”<sup>49</sup> By giving people the right to express themselves, the Festival is said to be the place for people to practice cultural democracy. “The Festival may also provide a release valve, so to speak, giving members of society a chance to revolt against the usual social order, counter the structure of relationships with either inverted ones or none at all.”<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> See introductions and secretary’s statements in the program books of the Festival in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 128.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 113.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 113

<sup>50</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 128.

“The strongest feature of the Festival is its attempt to foreground the voices of tradition bearers that demonstrate, discuss and present their cultures”<sup>51</sup> By doing so the Festival is powerful because the people are real participants in the represented cultures- not actors who forge the link between cultural history and a cultural future.<sup>52</sup>

### Section 3: The theoretical framework

To set the theoretical framework for examining the way cultural diversity is framed at the Festival, it is necessary to explore the notion of “festival” and “cultural diversity” in the contexts of Museology and American Studies.

According to anthropologist and museum curator Richard Kurin<sup>53</sup>, the term “festival” itself is seen as somewhat “often used and misused.”<sup>54</sup> It brings the atmosphere of a celebration of national holidays, a harvest time or a religious commemoration or the ceremony of an ethnic holiday or even a sporting event. It also makes people think of consumers’ culture, enjoying food, drink, games and pleasure activities. One can join to celebrate a festival without really knowing the significance of the holiday. “Most community residents [and some American Studies scholars as well] believe the festivals are organized to bring in tourist dollars,”<sup>55</sup> from exploiting subcultures by making use of the local merchant/vendor to sell food and craft, or to superficially improve the public relations of the host city, without really

---

<sup>51</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 113.

<sup>52</sup> Manuel Lujan, Jr., “The Quincenterany: Understanding America’s Cultural Heritage,” in *Festival of American Folk life Program Book* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1992), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Kurin is Acting Under Secretary for History and Culture, Director, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, 30.

<sup>55</sup> Audrey C. Shalinsky, "Studying Community Festival," *AnthroNotes*, vol. 7, no. 1, Winter 1985.

understanding or dealing with existing injustice and inequality of the daily lives of the grassroots cultures. However, festivals are generally considered to be types of cultural performances and as such are studied by folklorists as well as anthropologists.<sup>56</sup>

Anthropologists have compared town festivals to “traditional society’s public rituals, which reflect and justify contemporary values and social situations, and which offer a vision of the future.”<sup>57</sup> According to them, the Festival itself is not merely an entertainment but also a great site for learning and doing research. “Throughout the United States, community festivals provide an easily accessible resource for students’ field involvement. Festivals offer a unified focus for learning about history, government, community, social interaction, traditional values, and social change. Furthermore, numerous skills (observation, note-taking, analysis, and written description) are involved in the study of community festivals.”<sup>58</sup>

Richard Kurin argues that the SFF “is somewhat misnamed as such because there is probably no better name for it”<sup>59</sup> and it has been likened to many things in “combining and crossing various categories such as education and entertainment, scholarship and service, the authentic and the constructed, celebration and contemplation...”<sup>60</sup> The SFF is considered a “modern form of cultural production”<sup>61</sup> that is “built upon the building block and dynamics of festivals and fairs: complex, scheduled, heightened and participatory events in which symbolically resonant

---

<sup>56</sup> Stoeltje, Beverly. "Festival." In Bauman (ed.), *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 261-271.

<sup>57</sup> Audrey C. Shalinsky, "Studying Community Festival," *AnthroNotes*, vol. 7, no. 1, Winter 1985.

<sup>58</sup> Audrey C. Shalinsky, "Studying Community Festival," *AnthroNotes*, vol. 7, no. 1, Winter 1985

<sup>59</sup> Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, 30.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997) 110.

<sup>61</sup> Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist* ( New York: Schoken, 1976)

cultural goods and values are placed on public display.”<sup>62</sup> The SFF itself is a genre of museum, but “a museum without walls of any kinds”<sup>63</sup> with similarities and differences from more traditional museum exhibits. “Examining the Festival as a genre of museum /cultural institution display provides a benchmark for examining case studies of large- scale public representation events.”<sup>64</sup> Like other Smithsonian exhibitions, the Festival has “museum- quality signs, photo text panels, a published program book/ catalog, learning centers, museum shop (market place), and food concession.”<sup>65</sup> However, it is different in the ways that it is a “living” museum in the open air of the National Mall, the People’s place, during the time of America’s Independence Day celebration, with live music, with “living practitioners before a live audience,”<sup>66</sup> with people of grassroots “not only as cultural carriers and transmitters but also agents in the heritage itself.”<sup>67</sup> Former Smithsonian official Dean Anderson was quite articulate when suggesting that, “Whereas museum is a noun, the Festival is a verb”<sup>68</sup> to highlight the active and lively features of a “festival

---

<sup>62</sup> Roger D. Abrahams, “Shouting Match at the Border; The Folklore of Display Events,” in Richard Bauman and Roger D. Abraham, eds., *And Other Neighborly Names: Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); Beverly J Stoeltje, “Festival,” in Erick Barnouvw, *International Encyclopedia of Communication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>63</sup> Robert McC.Adam, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, 1986.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 110.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, (Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, 1998), 42.

<sup>66</sup> Karp, Ivan, Corinne A. Dratz, Lynn Szawaja, and Thomas Ybarra- Frausto, eds., *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/ Global Transformations*, (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2006), 179.

<sup>67</sup> Karp, Ivan, Corinne A. Dratz, Lynn Szawaja, and Thomas Ybarra- Frausto, eds., *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/ Global Transformations*, (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2006), 179.

<sup>68</sup> Dean Anderson, under secretary of the Smithsonian, speaking at the opening of the 1986 Festival of American Folklife.

of, by and for the people.”<sup>69</sup> The SFF provides an open dialogue in a forum for performers, visitors and organizers to speak, to conspire with and learn as much from each other. “Back home,” the Festival would “encourage traditions within practitioners’ communities; stimulate cultural research and documentation efforts; boost sales of crafts, music, and food; lead to public recognition by government leaders and the media; increase tourism and economic development; and inspire educational programs in schools.”<sup>70</sup>

The involvement of the various audiences in the Festival is put on the forefront. “... as museums seek to widen their natural constituency to reach more varied audiences, so the visiting public will become increasingly more diverse and may have more varied, or even competing, demands. In particular if this new audience includes those communities which the museum represents, or their descendants, then the museum’s representations may have to accord with the sense of self this new constituency holds in addition to that of the wider public.”<sup>71</sup>

Regarding cultural diversity, it is asserted that culture and cultural diversity are “topics that generate some of the most significant social issues in the world today, and issues that promise to carry well into the next century.”<sup>72</sup> In reality, “diversity is so pervasive, so deeply imbedded in every day of life that we [Americans] tend to

---

<sup>69</sup> Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, (Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> *2007 Smithsonian Folk life Festival: Mekong River, Northern Ireland, Roots of Virginia Culture*, Smithsonian institution, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (Smithsonian Institution: 2007), 10.

<sup>71</sup> Henrietta Lidchi, “The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures”, in Stuart Hall (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 202.

<sup>72</sup> Larry Taylor, L. *American Culture: Myth and Reality of a Culture of Diversity*, (West port CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1998).

ignore it until our intention is called to it.”<sup>73</sup> Sometimes the word “diversity” is abused in daily life; people talk about it so much without deeply understanding what it means and what its working mechanism is. “The major force of change we believe to have implication for museums--is our society’s evolving sense of its own pluralism.”<sup>74</sup> “Multiculturalism is a term that is used synonymously with cultural diversity. It is used whenever a multitude of cultures can be identified in the context of human society.”<sup>75</sup> In other words, multiculturalism is a set of ideas which focus on respect and toleration for cultural differences-globally, nationally, locally or individually. “As multicultural and intercultural issues emerge ever more on the public agenda, so the inherent contestability of museum exhibitions is bound to open the choices made in those exhibitions to heated debate.”<sup>76</sup>

The conceptualization of “cultural diversity” itself, at present, is remarkably diverse and dynamic. Its operation plays a central role in academic talk and professional action in American Studies and Museology, and in graduate courses in American Studies programs. Take the one at University of Maryland at College Park, where I am studying, as an example. Studies that examine the intersections between class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality are put in the fore front in fundamental courses of American methodology and theories (AMST 601: Introductory Theories and History and American Studies, AMST 603: Current Approaches to American Studies). The

---

<sup>73</sup> Peter H Schuck, *Diversity in America: Keeping Government at a Safe Distance*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>74</sup> American Association of Museums, Commission on Museums for a New Century, *Museums for a New Century* (Washington D.C.: American Association Museums, 1924), 24.

<sup>75</sup> Taylor, Larry L, *Cultural Diversity in the United States*, (Westport CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1997), 22.

<sup>76</sup> Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine eds., *Exhibiting cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 1.

following section will provide an inside look into the treatment of diversity in the literature of American Studies.

*Section 4: The literature on cultural diversity*

The literature on cultural diversity is large and growing, potentially. It draws from a theoretical framework that views cultural diversity as focusing upon culture and including a cross cultural perspective. “Culture itself is a construction of ideas and beliefs, one aspect of modern identity based on a perception of shared historical, social and ethnic traits; diversity would be that degree to which one feels aligned or different from another perceived “culture”. That sense of difference serves to construct boundaries and a sense of eligible “others” while also shoring up internal concepts about one’s own culture”.<sup>77</sup>

The conceptualization of cultural diversity had undergone a long path of social construction in the history of American Studies and came to the fore in the field much later than the practice of diversity in Museology. The development of American Studies moved through several paradigms, from its earliest incarnations of generalities about the United States to the 1960s movements for social justice and social change in American society. However, it was still clearly bounded by a national paradigm of the United States as a geographical and political space.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile the first AFF with its orientation toward representing diversity was in

---

<sup>77</sup> Participant No. 3

<sup>78</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies," Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004, *American Quarterly* 57.1 (2005) 17-57.

1967.<sup>79</sup> The first era of American studies is understood as the pre-institutional stage of American studies during the 1920s and 1930s, influenced by the dissatisfaction with the preference for European history and culture and practiced by individual scholars located primarily in history and English departments.<sup>80</sup> Several programs offered courses in American Studies at some universities<sup>81</sup> by the early 1940s and the institutionalized stage of American Studies began as individual courses evolved into departments and programs during the 1950s. During the 1950s, the interdisciplinary wide-ranging freedom of American studies programs in the academy was considered unusual in the academy.<sup>82</sup>

The publication of Gene Wise's essay, "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History,"<sup>83</sup> clearly marks the end of the first era of American Studies and the beginning of the second with its greatest transformation during the 1960s. American Studies scholars became more self-conscious about methods and some began to attempt a definition of the field in an effort to distinguish American Studies from other academic domains.<sup>84</sup> "By 1968, cultural strains brought about by the U.S. civil rights movement, the war in Vietnam and the women's movement illuminated the cultural diversity that is the strength of the United States.

---

<sup>79</sup> See more in Chapter 2, section 2

<sup>80</sup> John Stephens, "American Studies At Home and Abroad: An overview," *Electronic Journals of the U.S. Information Agency*, Volume 1, Number 15, October 1996.

<sup>81</sup> George Washington University, the University of Pennsylvania, Yale University, and Harvard University, among others.

<sup>82</sup> Linda K. Kerber, "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3. (Sep., 1989), 418.

<sup>83</sup> Gene Wise, "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement," (1979) in Lucy Maddox ed., *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of A Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp 166-214.

<sup>84</sup> John Stephens, "American Studies At Home and Abroad: An overview," *Electronic Journals of the U.S. Information Agency*, Volume 1, Number 15, October 1996.

In response to these forces for change, American Studies expanded its boundaries to include black studies, women's studies, popular culture, folklore and material culture. American studies helped to break down disciplinary boundaries to allow for a more inclusive and pluralistic curriculum and scholarship across the disciplines.”<sup>85</sup>

“American Studies was similarly positioned to be substantively comfortable with the insistence of the sixties and seventies on the importance of race and the insistence of the eighties on the importance of ethnicity”<sup>86</sup>

“By the early 1980s, criticism of what later became known as multiculturalism had already begun, and calls for "synthesis" could be heard everywhere.”<sup>87</sup> Critics of multiculturalism fear that courses in multiculturalism will displace traditional subjects, depriving students of their heritage of western culture<sup>88</sup> and that the forces of the so-called “study of people and cultures outside the Western tradition”<sup>89</sup> “are fighting against the conservation of the common culture that is the nation's social cement.”<sup>90</sup> In response to this criticism, it is argued that “to construct a new identity does not mean to abandon the concept of American identity. Rather it should spur us to think about democratic culture as a continuing and unending process.”<sup>91</sup> The 1985

---

<sup>85</sup> John Stephen, “American Studies At Home and Abroad: An overview”, *Electronic Journals of the U.S. Information Agency*, Volume 1, Number 15, October 1996.

<sup>86</sup> Linda K. Kerber, "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3. (Sep., 1989), 423

<sup>87</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3, (Sep., 1992), 307.

<sup>88</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3, (Sep., 1992), 336.

<sup>89</sup> Anthony dePalma, "Another Bass Gives Yale \$20 Million," *New York Times*, 18 Apr. 1991, A20.

<sup>90</sup> George F. Will, "Literary Politics," *Newsweek*, 22 Apr. 1991, 72.

<sup>91</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3. (Sep., 1992), 307.

American Studies Association (ASA)<sup>92</sup> conference was romantically created as a democratic space of marginalized topics and communities but there were no panels totally dedicated to marginalized populations and categories of difference such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, gender, etc. Far fewer scholars of color were included in the ASA then than in 1997. Not until the annual meeting of the American Studies Association in 1988 did the theme, "The Intersection of Race, Class, Gender, and Ethnicity in the Study of American Culture," mark the transition of the field to officially speak of intersectionality and the full range of diversity of race, class, gender and ethnicity in the study of American culture.<sup>93</sup> Since the 1997 annual meeting, American Studies has significantly expanded its scope to include non-privileged perspectives, incorporating intersecting categories like race, class, gender, sexuality, and language within emerging scholarship. Such analysis erodes "the very idea of 'centrality'" as formerly marginal topics become mainstreamed.<sup>94</sup> Apparently, the present conceptualization of "cultural identity" was gradually socially constructed in the American Studies field throughout the nearly sixty years of its development. As Linda Kerber argues, American Studies once "freed from the defensive constraints of cold war ideology, empowered by our new sensitivity to the distinctions of race, class, and gender, we [Americanists] are ready to begin to understand difference as a series of relationships of power, involving domination and subordination, and to use

---

<sup>92</sup> The American Studies Association, chartered in 1951, is devoted to the interdisciplinary study of American culture and history.

<sup>93</sup> Linda K. Kerber, "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3, (Sep., 1989), 416.

<sup>94</sup> Mary Helen Washington, "Disturbing the Peace: What Happens to American Studies if You Put African American Studies at the Center?" Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, October 29, 1997." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 50.No. 1 (1998): 1-23.

our understanding of power relations to re-conceptualize both our interpretation and our teaching of American culture.”<sup>95</sup>

The concepts of race, class, gender, sexuality are often contested and obscured because they are the “social system--concepts of social relationship among people”<sup>96</sup> which provide windows through which cultural diversity is understood. Alice Kessler-Harris argues, “When we construct ourselves, we do so out of a sense of what makes us distinctive. Those of us who are immigrants, African American, Latin, gay or lesbian, or any combination of these and a dozen other identities have no difficulty seeing in ourselves the otherness out of which we construct the person that faces the world and limits or expands our vision. As powerful as these perspectives are in shaping a sense of well-being or grievance, they provide us with only partial visions--visions that each of us daily reconciles with the larger culture.”<sup>97</sup> In other words, they are “complex, pervasive, variable, persistent, severe and hierarchical.”<sup>98</sup> Existing throughout history, race, class, gender and sexuality hierarchies are “never static and fixed but are constantly changing as a part of the new economic, political and ideological processes, trends and events. Their meaning varies not only across historical time periods but also across nations and regions during the same period.”<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Linda K. Kerber, "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3. (Sep., 1989), 429.

<sup>96</sup> Lynn Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001), 17.

<sup>97</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3. (Sep., 1992), 308.

<sup>98</sup> Lynn Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001), 17.

<sup>99</sup> Lynn Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, 74.

As Lynn Weber argues, there were times when the privilege--advantage, benefits, options--of one group is dependent upon the oppression--disadvantages, harms, and restrictions--of others. "Race, class, gender and sexuality are historically and geographically specific, socially constructed systems of oppression--they are power relationships. They do not merely represent different lifestyle preferences or cultural beliefs, values and practices. They are power hierarchies where one group exerts control over another, securing its position of dominance in the system and where substantial material resources (e.g. wealth, income, or access to health care and education) are at stake."<sup>100</sup>

In the literature of American Studies, Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*<sup>101</sup> is one of the important books in understanding the issue of race in dialectic interrelationships with other issues like class and gender in America. They "provide an analytic framework" to be used "to view the racial politics"<sup>102</sup> of the past [three] decades. By setting a conceptual structure to deal with the issue, they also point out the racial signifiers in the United States which developed when people from different cultures, tribes and national origins were treated as a single racial group. They discuss the historical development of race, theories of racism, how "concepts of race are created and changed" and how the concepts "become the focus of political conflict," and "permeate" American society.<sup>103</sup> They argue that "Based on our account of the

---

<sup>100</sup> Lynn Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, 87.

<sup>101</sup> Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>102</sup> Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

<sup>103</sup> Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), vii.

construction and transformation of racial meanings, today, as in the past, concepts of race structure both state and civil society....Race continues to shape both identities and institutions in significant ways.”<sup>104</sup> Omi and Winant discuss and criticize what they characterize as the “defects” in existing racial theories--both mainstream ethnicity-oriented and radical class-oriented theories which reduce the significance of race and overlook it as important to the understanding of American politics and society. Omi and Winant set forth the premise that race is at the center of American political history and that “Most racial theory fails to capture the centrality of race in American politics and American life.” They explain that although they “locate race at the center of American political history,” it does not displace class, sex and gender or other important social relationships--but it corrects the “reductionism characteristic of racial theory.”<sup>105</sup>

In a multicultural society like America, the concept and model of cultural and political representation of Asian America is questioned, as is the ideal of an abstract citizen, an impartial language of law, and a model of political organization justified by the promise of equal access for all citizens. That is the argument by Lisa Lowe in her book, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*.<sup>106</sup> The central argument of Lisa Lowe is the paradoxes of the multiculturalism in the fabric of American culture and cultural citizenship and political identity of Asian Americans in America. “The notion of the formally equivalent citizen in representative democracy suggests that all individuals of different constituencies have equal access to and are

---

<sup>104</sup> Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), vii.

<sup>105</sup> Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

<sup>106</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996).

represented within the political sphere, while simultaneously masking the degree to which strata and inequalities continue to exist . . . facilitating the capitalist system in which one dominant class group prospers.” “The universal subject at the heart of democracy's body politic is in conflict with capitalism's continual differentiation of its own subjects for purposes of labor exploitation, class division, consumer lifestyle creation, and product marketing to ever-new niche groups.”<sup>107</sup>

The representation of queer, transgender, and transsexual bodies and subjectivities in popular cultures is examined in Judith Halberstam's book, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*.<sup>108</sup> Halberstam examines trans-gendered possibilities and productions of space and time which provide alternatives to hetero-normative conceptions. She has a strong opposition against the artificial binarism of distinctions between masculinity and femininity, man and woman, and heterosexuality and homosexuality. In her opinion, time and place in queer time are not wrapped around the generation of families' importance of marriage and children; instead “Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. She looks at queer subculture and proposes a conception of time and space independent of the influence of a normative heterosexual/familial lifestyle. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification. ... Obviously not all gay, lesbian and trans-gender people live their lives in radically different ways from their heterosexual counterparts, but part of what has made queerness compelling as a form

---

<sup>107</sup>Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>108</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (NYU Press: 2005).

of self-description in the past decade or so has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space”.

In *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*,<sup>109</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman talks about the objectives and frameworks of feminist criticism. She argues that the future of academic feminism moves beyond conventional boundaries of gender to establish a framework for intellectual inquiry. “Moving beyond gender doesn’t mean forgetting it but rather returning to it in a newly spatialized way ...locational feminism”; she doesn’t insist that “categories like gender and difference should be abandoned but rather ... be supplemented.”<sup>110</sup> Instead of taking either a view of equality or of difference, Friedman argues all possibilities should be taken into account. In this sense, "negotiation" is the key word through which Friedman seeks to break out from the stagnant situation of contemporary feminist discussion. “Feminism needs to be understood in a global context, both historicized and geo-politicized to take into account its different formations and their interrelationships everywhere.” She proposes the idea of flexible identity by using geographical metaphor as a “kind of dialectic that reflects the opposing movements in the world today revolving around the issue of identity.” “Identity is constructed relationally through difference from the other; identification with a group based on gender, race or sexuality, for example, depends mostly on

---

<sup>109</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: 1998).

<sup>110</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: 1998), 19.

binary systems of "us" versus "them." "The geographics of identity, she goes on to say, "moves between boundaries of difference and borderlands of liminality."<sup>111</sup>

The concept of ethnicity was extended and continues to extend beyond race; at times it meant language, customs, religion, and national origin, but it has also meant race and to some it has only meant race.<sup>112</sup> John Hope Franklin recounts the trends in Americanization over the past three centuries. He argues that Crèvecoeur<sup>113</sup> and the Founding Fathers' conception of the true American was only for Europeans in the new states and the new nation. Even when the Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution of the United States, they did not seem troubled by the distinctions based on ethnic differences that the Constitution implied.<sup>114</sup> Race becomes the defining factor in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even though this factor has receded in its importance in the twentieth century, the acceptable American is still that person whom Crèvecoeur described two hundred years ago. Franklin argues that "One of the great tragedies of American life at the beginning was that ethnicity was defined too narrowly. One of the tragedies of today is that it continues to be the case. One can only hope that the nation and its people will all some day soon come to reassess ethnicity in terms of the integrity of the man rather than in terms of the integrity of the race."<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: 1998), 19.

<sup>112</sup> John Hope Franklin, *Ethnicity in American Life: The Historical Perspective*, (New York: 1971).

<sup>113</sup> J Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, in Susan Manning, ed., *Letters from an American farmer* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>114</sup> John Hope Franklin, *Ethnicity in American Life: The Historical Perspective*, (New York: 1971), 323.

<sup>115</sup> John Hope Franklin, *Ethnicity in American Life: The Historical Perspective*, (New York: 1971), 331.

The current discussions of cultural diversity in America focus on racial and ethnic diversity and their relationship to diversity in gender, class and sexual orientation. In the scope of American Studies, it means “recognition of variations among people related to their cultural heritages, racial and ethnic identity and gender and class experience.”<sup>116</sup> “If it redefines identity from a fixed category to a search for a democratic culture, if it refuses to acknowledge a stable meaning or precise unchanging definition of America, multiculturalism nevertheless opens the possibility of conceiving democratic culture as a process in whose transformation we are all invited to participate.”<sup>117</sup> Kessler–Harris argues that at the heart of this debate is the fear of fragmentation and loss of the meaning of what underlies the nature of Western civilization as triumphal. Those who attack multiculturalism support the idea of America as something fixed and given, whereas those who support it embrace an idea of America that is more fluid and open to change. One side fears fragmentation of a cultural unity; the other derides unity as a myth and resists loss of their (non-American) cultural identity. The issue is joined: how do we preserve cultural unity and still do justice to the multiplicity of American cultures? To accomplish this, Kessler–Harris argues, we must redefine American identity. Her main thrust is to get American Studies scholars to think of their work and history in the context of multiculturalism. So if the fight for multiculturalism is a demand for inclusion and the goal of American Studies is the pursuit of what constitutes American culture, then

---

<sup>116</sup> Ida Susser and Thomas C. Patterson (eds.), *Cultural Diversity in the United States A Critical Reader*, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers In. 2004), 392.

<sup>117</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3. (Sep., 1992), 311.

American Studies scholars need to deal with the struggle over what constitutes public culture and knowledge, whom it serves and whom it represents<sup>118</sup>.

While American Studies scholars problematize and question “cultural diversity” in the operation of interaction between identities and differences, inequality and power, museum studies also addresses contextual frameworks of cultural diversity with multiplicity of interactions and cultural borders of race, ethnicity, color, gender, class, age, physical ability, regions, location, language, faith, creed, economic status, sexual preference and so on.

In the age of globalization, museums are aware of the importance of representing cultural diversity as it is one of their main tasks. “There is an increasing recognition that cultural diversity is a historical and social reality at the local, regional, national and global levels and that museums should reflect the cultural diversity of the clientele and constituencies. The cultural diversity of different nations is a rich inheritance of humanity that will endure as the central pillar for peace, harmony and cultural sustainability of the world. The promotion of this global inheritance through the processes of cultural pluralism is the responsibility of all societies. There is a fundamental need to acknowledge that all cultures and their manifestations are equally valid in a culturally democratic world. Within this context museums in different parts of the world are exploring ways of relating to community cultural and economic development, the sense of place, identity and self-esteem of different people.”<sup>119</sup> The International Council of Museums Working Group on

---

<sup>118</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debat*, *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3. (Sep., 1992), 311.

<sup>119</sup> <http://icom.museum/diversity.html>, (accessed August 5, 2007).

Cross-Cultural Issues emphasizes the need for museums to increase awareness about the cultural needs of minorities, indigenous populations and “societies in transition” who have experienced disempowerment through displacement, dispossession and the ravages of war. It has identified its role as one of strengthening cultural identity and consciousness in the face of rapid and world-wide cultural change; to strengthen national identity within an internationalized system of states; and to make use of the educational potential of museums in the context of development. “When it comes to preserving cultural pluralism, museums have an important role to play. They represent cultural diversity in their collection and their exhibitions. The museum community--within its own institutional make up--exemplifies our cultural pluralism.”<sup>120</sup>

The conceptualization of cultural diversity in Museology goes in line with the task of museums in representing cultural diversity and its implementation. According to British museum curator and scholar Henrietta Lidchi, “...a museum does not deal with *objects* but, more importantly, with what we would call for the moment, *ideas*--notions of what the world is, or should be. Museums do not simply issue objective descriptions or form logical assemblages; they generate representations and attribute values and meaning in line with certain perspectives or classificatory schemas which are historically specific. They do not so much reflect the world through objects as use them to mobilize representations of the world past and present.”<sup>121</sup> The task of the museum is “to acquire, safeguard, conserve and display objects, artifacts and works

---

<sup>120</sup> American Association of Museums, Commission on Museums for a New Century, *Museums for a New Century* (Washington D.C.: American Association Museums, 1924), 25.

<sup>121</sup> Henrietta Lidchi, “The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures”, in Stuart Hall (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 160.

of arts of various kinds”<sup>122</sup> The Diversity Coalition, an administrative committee of the American Association of Museums, defines diversity as “inclusion, valuing, respecting, and appreciating the differences in ethnicity, gender, national origin, disabilities, age, religion, and/or sexual orientation. Others extend the definition to include economic status, geographic origin, educational background, organizational role, and each person as a unique individual.”<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> Vergo, P, “The reticent object”, in P. Vergo, (ed.), *The New Museology*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1993), 41.

<sup>123</sup> [www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/PDF/diversity.pdf](http://www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/PDF/diversity.pdf). (accessed August 8, 2007).

## Chapter 3:

### The presentation of “cultural diversity” at the SFF 2007: From the perspectives of the American studies scholars and the museum professionals

#### Section 1: Perspectives of American Studies Scholars

I selected a group of six American Studies scholars who are both faculty and graduate students (including me) in American Studies as participants in my research. Among graduate students, some of them have a B.A and/or M.A in American Studies and most of them are PhD students or PhD candidates. Therefore, they are really familiar with issues in American Studies such as cultural diversity. As stated in the questionnaire,<sup>124</sup> “the concepts of representation, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, etc. are in line with those in American Studies.” This group voluntarily filled in the questionnaire and participated in the follow-up interview(s) about perspectives on the extent to which the SFF recognizes and represents cultural differences. On one hand, I purposely selected those who share the same scholarly major of American Studies. On the other hand, I intentionally diversified their different cultural traditions of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, sexuality, etc. I did so because, firstly, American Studies is a multidisciplinary field which often puts to the fore issues of power and inequality between groups of people. Secondly, I wanted to find out the possible influence of personal cultural traditions over research

---

<sup>124</sup> See Questionnaire designed for research participants attached as Appendix A.

participants' views on the SSF. The participants in my research are encouraged to reveal their cultural traditions to the extent that they are comfortable doing so in the questionnaire in terms of gender, race, age, sexuality, class, citizenship, religious preferences and scholarly interests. Among six of them who participated in both filling out the questionnaire and participating in the interviews, four out of six are women; three are white; five out of six are middle-aged (in their 30s); five of them are heterosexual; all are middle class; one out of six is non American citizen; all of them are of different religions. As some of the research participants are not quite comfortable in revealing their names, I identify them by putting a number after each.<sup>125</sup> As I am also one of the research participants, I position myself in this research as an “outsider”- a foreigner from Vietnam in America as well as an “insider”- as a graduate student in the American Studies Program.

It is agreed among American Studies scholars that “cultural diversity” is a challenging, complicated, and even problematic concept. This concept goes beyond over simplifying the category of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, religion, region, etc. The patterns of relationship between these categories are hierarchical and interrelated with no priority over any other. In general, American Studies scholars conceptualize cultural diversity as interrelated systems of inequality based in social relationships of power and control. “Power, it seems, has to be understood here, not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in

---

<sup>125</sup> See more of their cultural traditions in the Diagram for possible context regarding the perspectives of the two groups on the presentation of cultural diversity in the SSF 2007.

a certain way--within a certain “regime of representation”. It includes the exercise of *symbolic power* through representation practices.”<sup>126</sup>

In a diverse society such as America, every one is situated in race, class, gender and sexuality hierarchies. All of us as individuals and groups are more than these categories allow for on a daily basis. “There are commonalities that produce nationalities, religions, races, and so on, and there are differences within and between each of these groups.”<sup>127</sup> American Studies scholars take into account all dimensions of the workings of the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality simultaneously to analyze social life. They empower people to challenge and overcome injustice centered in race, class, gender and sexuality.

Although it is defined in different and complicated ways by American Studies scholars, or not (“since defining means reducing or putting limits on its meaning”<sup>128</sup>), it is agreed among them that “cultural diversity” is not simply the gathering or arrangement or combination of different biological races or ethnicities with different practices and objects within a particular context or site (i.e. the Smithsonian Folklife Festival). American Studies scholars<sup>129</sup> interrogate the operational function of “cultural diversity” by raising questions like:

- How do the identity and differences of these cultures work together?
- If not, how do they work apart?

---

<sup>126</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the “Other,” in Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 259.

<sup>127</sup> Questionnaire filled out by research participant number 6.

<sup>128</sup> Participant number 4.

<sup>129</sup> Participant number 4.

- Is “cultural diversity” supposed to have objectives (for whom) and for what purposes?
- What are the implications of defining “cultural diversity”? (does it erase or privilege representation/difference/understandings?)
- How is the term “diversity” being used?”

To address these questions, research participant number 1 puts “cultural diversity” in the positive interaction and relationship between people and cultures in daily life with the awareness and openness of the differences among them. People can interact and exist side by side in a peaceful, tolerant, and respectful way and talk openly about the differences. According to her, “cultural diversity” exists when people of a variety of different backgrounds interact with each other in ways that are not only peaceful but that fully involve people of different backgrounds in carrying out everyday activities and practices in harmony. Cultural diversity also allows for recognition that not all differences are created equally in the eyes of conventional American society and we must work to treat all people fairly in light of those historical and contemporary inequities.”<sup>130</sup>

Research participant number 3 conceptualizes cultural diversity as a cultural construction of identity and differences. “Culture itself is a construction of ideas and beliefs, one aspect of modern identity based on a perception of shared historical, social and ethnic traits; diversity would be that degree to which one feels aligned with or different from another perceived “culture”. That sense of difference serves to construct boundaries and a sense of eligible “other” while also shoring up internal

---

<sup>130</sup> Interviewed by author.

concepts about one's own culture."<sup>131</sup> Another research participant considers it as a "variety of socially transmitted patterns of language, foodways, clothing, rituals, manners, beliefs and other habits of daily life."<sup>132</sup>

To address the question "How well does the Smithsonian Folklife Festival present the cultural traditions of communities across the U.S. and around the world"<sup>133</sup> to a broad public, four out of six American Studies scholars thought that generally speaking, cultural diversity was well presented in the Festival and two of them considered that the Festival did a poor job on the issue. However, the former agreed that, to a certain extent, "the SFF does a good job of creating a sense of cultural diversity and multiplicity in terms of the world arena. It definitely portrays a version of cultural diversity in the U.S and abroad."<sup>134</sup> However, they also pointed out that in the setting of an outdoor festival, the success of the presentation was somewhat limited. "It does a fairly good job for what it can do out on the National Mall within the logistical restrictions that come with such a production."<sup>135</sup> Although there were different opinions about the presentation job of the Festival, all of them thought that the job the CFCH has been doing is necessary because "most Americans are utterly ignorant of the world outside its borders and the festival offers some valuable if somewhat idealized knowledge of other cultures."<sup>136</sup>

American Studies scholars reported different learning effects which each exhibit brought to them. For example, one scholar said, "The Virginia exhibit had a

---

<sup>131</sup> Questionnaire filled by research participant number 3.

<sup>132</sup> Questionnaire filled by research participant number 5.

<sup>133</sup> Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2007 Brochure.

<sup>134</sup> Questionnaire filled out by Participant number 1.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with participants number 6

<sup>136</sup> Questionnaire filled out by Participant number 3.

lot of Native American influence, and past exhibits on basket weaving drew upon highly diverse native tribes from Hawaii to Alaska. Exhibits on Bronx culture and the Forestry Service show how broad a spectrum they can present. It does give opportunities for those who are the “best” examples of global music and art to find a national stage. Perhaps the best unintentional result of the SFF is bringing members of diverse cultures together to influence each other.”<sup>137</sup> Another scholar considered that the Virginia section did a good job of telling the stories of white settlers from Kent, a fair job of connecting Virginia culture with West Africa, and a fair job of exposing visitors to the indigenous cultures of the state. But that is certainly only part of Virginia’s diversity, even if one is only considering “roots”. Based on their opinions about each region’s exhibit, the following table shows their evaluation about the learning effect which each exhibit brings to them.

*Table 1: Evaluation of the research participants’ learning effect*

	Very much	Much	Some	Little	None
Mekong Region	15%	35%	35%	15%	0%
Northern Ireland	15%	35%	50%	0%	0%
Roots of Virginia	0%	50%	35%	15%	0%

---

<sup>137</sup> Questionnaire filled out by Participant number 3.

In examining the dimensions of “cultural diversity” expressed at the SFF, American Studies scholars thought that although “race” was present in the festival as “cultures” or “ethnic groups,” the SFF didn’t reflect “race” as an idea or concept (as a process). Instead, the SFF’s representation of “race” was much more essentialized than how American Studies scholars understand the idea or concept of race. It is basically not explored in the Northern Ireland or Mekong Delta exhibits (those two do focus on ethnicity, and the Mekong Delta exhibits talk briefly about the place of Southeast Asia in contemporary American society). The Roots of Virginia Culture exhibit did provide a discussion of racial diversity in early America, including a variety of cultural traditions that came together to form the culture of early Virginia (English, African, American Indian). Another example of race being explored at the SFF was the exhibit promoting and providing information about the planned National Museum of African American History. This exhibition also provided information about African American genealogy.<sup>138</sup> “Race” itself seems a rare idea that was expressed during the festival. “Irish music was never characterized as “white” music, and no one seemed to discuss how the Irish were considered a separate “race” from other white Europeans.”<sup>139</sup> Separate cultures of the Mekong Delta were distinguished, but no effort was made to establish them as sharing an Asiatic racial heritage. If anything, discussion of the tumultuous “racial” history of Virginia was notably absent.

The SFF’s curators seemed more comfortable addressing the idea/concept of ethnicity than that of race. Ethnicity, as understood as a generational process (among

---

<sup>138</sup> Interview with participants number 1, 3, and 4.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with participant number 2.

other things), was less complicated than “race” but equally understood to be a culture building process. It can be illustrated by the way in which youth and elders were interacting and how certain cultural traditions were being “taught” to youth. “For example, I saw an older man from one of the Mekong tables showing a young boy (also part of the Mekong) how to play a musical instrument he made. This was also present with the weaving tables with women (points to understandings of gender and ethnicity perhaps).”<sup>140</sup> Ethnicity was openly addressed in the Northern Ireland exhibit and in the Mekong Delta exhibit, and was in fact showcased in the case of the Mekong Delta exhibit, where crafts and performances unique to particular Southeast Asian ethnicities were highlighted. And in the Northern Ireland exhibit, it was discussed in terms of the historical configuration of the region. It is true that the Mekong exhibit attempted to present the peoples of the Mekong River as ethnically similar, or at least geographically and culturally connected. The Virginia exhibit compared and contrasted Virginian and Senegalese cultures and brought in ethnicity by having live representatives present, which I thought introduced the idea of these differences being ethnic. “The Northern Ireland section was careful to point out those of Scots-Irish descent and their opposing political, religious, and cultural stances.”<sup>141</sup>

In terms of the idea/concept of sexuality, no sexuality was reflected in the festival as it was certainly not the subject of the SFF. However, my friend who accompanied me to the Festival pointed out several gay couples going together in the Virginia Roots exhibit.

---

<sup>140</sup> Questionnaire filled out by participant number 4.

<sup>141</sup> Questionnaire filled out by participant number 3.

In terms of age, it was clear that several of the exhibits and performances made references to age differences that might influence who participated in certain traditions or activities. Among those who came to showcase their culture, a broad spectrum of ages was included. It was probably predominantly middle aged to upper middle aged but there were also a fair number of young people. Especially the Mekong Delta exhibit appeared to have the greatest number of young people involved, particularly for the performances, and this was probably due to the fact that there is such a strong presence in the Southeast Asian groups in the United States and that their traditions are still practiced and have not been swallowed by the main stream American Culture, as is probably more the case with Americans of Northern Irish descent. There are always children's activities and elements of children's culture (crafts in the Mekong area, playground games in Northern Ireland, puppet making and claymation in the Roots of Virginia exhibit). The adult spots were those such as the Bushmills whiskey still, and the fishing part of the Mekong.

*Section 2: Concerns from American Studies scholars and perspectives from museum professionals about the presentation of the SFF 2007*

Although acknowledging that “SFF makes a valiant attempt at representing cultural diversity in a way that involves the people being represented and is engaging to the public,”<sup>142</sup> American Studies scholars were concerned about certain things. These concerns reflect the characteristics of the field which Linda K. Kerber summarized as “all the skepticism, irony, and critical stance on which we pride

---

<sup>142</sup> Participant number 2.

ourselves.<sup>143</sup>” And they are also questions that faced Smithsonian curators when they began planning the Festival program more than four years ago. To address answers for these questions, I will put the two groups in the following “conversation” in which I am the “moderator”. I hope my cultural tradition as an insider and outsider at the same time will be able to provide a fair dialogue between the two groups.

The first concern is whether the museum professionals at the CFCH selected and presented “authentic” folklife culture(s) of the regions being featured. I shared the same idea when I first came to the SFF but later on after reading literature on museum and folklore festivals as well as having interviews with the staff of CFCH, I enlightened myself regarding the challenging job of selecting the cultures of others to exhibit which requires “a concern for research, a knowledge base, a sensitivity to the public exhibition or representation of culture and a concern for the people participating.”<sup>144</sup> Take the Mekong Region as an example; museum curators also put similar questions like how to introduce this huge, geographically and environmentally as well as ethnically and linguistically diverse and complex region to visitors at the SFF? “How to select some two hundred people to represent tens of millions? How best to give Festival visitors a sense of the challenging cultural choices that confront the Mekong region and its inhabitants at the beginning of the twenty-first century? How to mobilize the support of governments, funders, researchers, and communities to make the whole effort possible?”<sup>145</sup> The task of representing others for the

---

<sup>143</sup> Linda K. Kerber, "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies", *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3. (Sep., 1989), 429.

<sup>144</sup> Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, 67.

<sup>145</sup> *2007 Smithsonian Folk life Festival: Mekong River, Northern Ireland, Roots of Virginia Culture*, Smithsonian institution, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (Smithsonian Institution: 2007), pp.18-19.

museum professionals “does not mean treating people as non-sentient objects, putting them on display, placing them on pedestals and scripting their participation.”<sup>146</sup>

Theoretically, the process that creates a Festival consists of two principal phases: research and production. “The former includes pre-research selection of culture areas and themes, the raising of funds and securing of necessary approval, field research and research evaluation.”<sup>147</sup> “Curators, scholarly staff and partners--scholars, culture bearers, organizers from the represented community--apply and debate ideas about folklife and grassroots cultural traditions in developing thematic plans and deciding what and whom to research. Curators or curatorial teams are drawn from the Smithsonian staff and local lay and academic scholars from inside as well as outside the community to be represented.”<sup>148</sup> Practically, to reflect the perspectives and the collective wisdom of experienced cultural workers, scholars, and officials from the five featured countries, a unique and complex process of collaborative planning brought together a network of regional experts who shaped the program over several years in a series of consultative meetings, training workshops, and review sessions. Nearly 100 Mekong-region researchers (who are citizens of the five featured countries) fanned out across five countries and visited mountain villages and lowland cities, rice farmers and fishing families, potters and weavers, woodcarvers and silversmiths to conduct hours of interviews and take almost 20,000 documentary photographs.<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>146</sup> Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, 67.

<sup>147</sup> Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, 67.

<sup>148</sup> Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, 67.

<sup>149</sup> *2007 Smithsonian Folk life Festival: Mekong River, Northern Ireland, Roots of Virginia Culture*, Smithsonian institution, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (Smithsonian Institution: 2007), 30.

Chatting with some staff of the Vietnamese Museum of Ethnology, I came to know that “the [Vietnam] Department of Culture Heritage had cooperated with many relevant agencies to select fifty forms of heritage from twenty one provinces which have river branches running to Mekong River. From those, five craft and six folk art forms were chosen for performances in the U.S.”<sup>150</sup> The Vietnam News Agency Bulletin from Vietnam revealed that the preparation for the Festival took three years and the selection of these “indispensable elements of local cultural life”<sup>151</sup> were based on criteria of diversity of ethnicity (six main ethnic groups), forms of art presented (music, singing, dancing etc.), of age of participants (from as young as 17 to old as 77), of geographical regions (northernmost, central, and central highland) and of balance between male and female.

In a word, there is a coincidence of concerns between American Studies scholars and museums professionals about the important process of presenting diversity in the Festival: selecting and exhibiting cultures. This concern has been treated well by museum staff by their coordination with local experts.

Secondly, there is concern that the sense of “cultural diversity” in the Festival is merely an unexamined “sense” with a rather unreflective and uncomplicated version. It assumes harmony among groups and feels uncomfortable speaking about historical conflicts and present inequalities that assumes that folklife is at the heart of all cultural diversity, and thus represents a vision that washes away the messiness of

---

<sup>150</sup> Interview with staff of the Vietnamese Museum of Ethnology July 4, 2007 at SFF.

<sup>151</sup> Eight Khmer Troupe Dances at the Smithsonian Festival, Vietnam News Agency Bulletin, July 9, 2007.

real day to day interaction with people who are very different from us.<sup>152</sup> To address this concern, I had several interviews with the Festival curators. Most of them highly appreciated this concern from the scholars, saying that it helped them to be more thoughtful and cautious in their job of representing cultures. The conceptualization of “cultural diversity” is thought of in terms of “balance” in their museum actions. Actually, to set up a cultural program for one region, there are so many challenges that they need to work out. Nancy Groce mentioned different balances she had to take into consideration from different perspectives such as balance of cultural traditions featured at the Festival; balance between the artisans and performers’ expertise, knowledge and eloquent communication; balance of age in presenters; balance of female and male presenters, balance of geographic regions featured; balance of programs with different race and ethnicity; etc. “There was balance of Catholics and Protestants participating at the Festival. They were here to talk about who they are and where they came from. They can disagree with each other. They don’t have to talk about politics. They are talking directly to the American people.”<sup>153</sup> In the Northern Ireland Program which she curated, it took a lot of efforts and negotiating skills to mix and match the two former political rivals--to sit in one tent and represent a common picture of the present Northern Ireland. “The Festival contains a mix of people across the Irish political spectrum. When we put some of the nationalist and trade union banners in the same tent with banners of the Orange Order, they said that would be a fine idea. They are welcoming it and I think they are looking at it in a way

---

<sup>152</sup> Interviews with research participants.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Nancy Groce, curator of the Northern Ireland Program, Washington D.C. November 9, 2007.

to start a new dialogue here.”<sup>154</sup> According to her, “what is unique about the Festival is that it created a neutral space for the performers and artisans to sit and talk together.”<sup>155</sup> In this sense the museum curators are really culture brokers who enable people to cross the boundaries which they usually wouldn’t cross. However, they need to be very sensitive with their brokering task by reviewing all of the selections to strongly balance all the parties in Northern Ireland.<sup>156</sup> “Everything in Northern Ireland had been negotiated. We [museum professionals] are very careful to think of ways where people could be interpreted or their stories or their traditions could be presented in an interpreted way without making them feel uncomfortable.”<sup>157</sup> The balances that museum curators are trying to keep in their exhibits are such an effort which is recognized by the Festival visitors.

Thirdly, although traditions and rituals are the focus of the museum, as is appropriate for a folklife festival, there is concern that often a very little social context is provided for those traditions. This is also the concern of Robert Cantwell in his book, *Ethnomimesis*,<sup>158</sup> which says that the presentations are far too removed from their original settings, so as to obfuscate and destroy their original meaning. However, according to the festival organizers, the documented “letters from the festival participants, the diaries, articles, and books they write and the interviews they

---

<sup>154</sup> Interview with Nancy Groce, curator of the Northern Ireland Program, Washington D.C. November 9, 2007.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Nancy Groce, curator of the Northern Ireland Program, Washington D.C. November 9, 2007.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Nancy Groce, curator of the Northern Ireland Program, Washington D.C. November 9, 2007.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Nancy Groce, curator of the Northern Ireland Program, Washington D.C. November 9, 2007.

<sup>158</sup> Robert Cantwell, *Ethnomimesis, folklife and the representation of culture*, (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

give indicate precisely the contrary,”<sup>159</sup> i.e. the Festival’s factual feedback is positive. To illustrate this concern, American Studies scholars gave some examples as follows. “While both the Northern Ireland and Mekong Delta exhibits discuss the fact that many people of these backgrounds now live in the United States, there is virtually no emphasis on the status or experiences of these groups in America society.” [Actually visitors can find more information on this in the Festival program book with suggested books and websites for more information.] “And since the roots of Virginia Culture exhibits are historical in focus, it is harder to judge in this sense. Nevertheless I [participant number 1] would have to say that this exhibit probably did the best job of the three of acknowledging diversity in the early Chesapeake society. Perhaps it is due to the fact that it is historical and thus less controversial in an every day sense.”<sup>160</sup> As one participant explained, it is perhaps understandable that the Festival would be oriented in this way, since it is undoubtedly true that many visitors would feel “uncomfortable with a folk life festival that asked them too many probing questions about their places in the society or caused them to feel guilty about the disadvantage suffered by others.”<sup>161</sup>

There is also the idea that the other cultures exhibited in the SFF were mostly marginalized either politically or economically. Much of what was visually presented highlights the “primitive” rather than the progressive aspects of these cultures that is translated as “folklife”. These collaborations did not take into account the privileged locations and geographies of the exhibiting culture. There is an impression that the

---

<sup>159</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 133.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with participant number 1.

<sup>161</sup> Interview with participant number 1.

SFF gave a “sanitized experience”<sup>162</sup> of individuals living and surviving in economically deprived environments. There was no acknowledgment of the effects of global capitalism and political economies on the life of these artisans resulting from new technologies, as, for example, in handloom weaving versus mass produced weaving by textile mills.<sup>163</sup>

Actually, throughout the Festival and especially in its narrative stage, the Festival offered the ability--indeed the desirability--for people (festival visitors, staff, festival participants), to chart their own experiential routes through it. By doing so, more current social context or even economic or political settings were informed through the dialogues between visitors and festival participants. By its “strategic brokering”, as Robert Reich, former Harvard economist and US secretary of labor calls it, the Festival created “settings in which problem-solvers and problem-identifiers can work together without undue interference. The strategic broker is a facilitator and a coach--finding the people in both camps who can learn most from one another.”<sup>164</sup> The Festival also brought the “immediacy and sentient presence of people--possessed of knowledge, skill and wisdom--who can act and speak for themselves.”<sup>165</sup> This is considered cultural democracy which was “as important as any other kind of democracy.”<sup>166</sup>

Thirty percent of the research participants had the impression that the SFF has done a good job of presenting “cultural diversity” to an American public that usually

---

<sup>162</sup> Interview with participant number 6.

<sup>163</sup> Research participant in American Studies.

<sup>164</sup> Robert B.Reich, *The Work of Nations*, ( New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 88, 178.

<sup>165</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 132.

<sup>166</sup> Ralph Rinzler, 1960.

pays little attention and has little practical knowledge of other countries and cultures. They offered no suggestions for improving the SFF. The rest of the informants share some of the following ideas.

Firstly, one area that might be better addressed is the availability of translation for those exhibits with language differences, particularly since it creates a huge barrier between the people in the exhibits and visitors when people in the exhibits do not speak English. I feel that this inability to have a conversation can contribute to the feeling among visitors that the humans in the exhibits are merely props or objects. This can be seen not only in the Mekong region's textile exhibit but also in the West African exhibit. "The attempt to connect early Virginian and West African cultures was severely hampered by language. In the ninety minutes I spent in that area, there were no translators available to help visitors ask the questions on their minds. Some tried to communicate in French, but most chose to speak to the white exhibitors and craftspeople instead."<sup>167</sup> With seven hundred and eight guest artists speaking thirty two languages, the demand of interpretation and translation for communication between them and visitors was really a logistical challenge. Even the museum curators had to acknowledge that it was one of the least impressive things at the Festival because this was one of the biggest festivals. To limit this burden, festival organizers aimed to put the artisans of the same craft into one tent so that they can "speak the same language of mutual learning" by visual observation, technique, pattern of textile, etc.

Another idea that could help to better the SFF is improvements in terms of accommodations for the disabled. My assumption that the Festival provides access for

---

<sup>167</sup> Questionnaire filled out by participant number 2.

the able only was totally wrong. Throughout my participation in the Festival I had been able to witness what I read in the Program book: “limited number of wheelchairs are available for loan at the Volunteer tent. Audio loops are installed at the music stages. Service animals are welcome. American Sign Language interpreters are available on site; the Festival schedule indicates which performances and presentations are interpreted. The Smithsonian will offer a verbal-description tour of the Festival on certain days for visitors who are blind or have low vision.”<sup>168</sup>

However, one scholar noticed that “the crowds made it almost impossible for people in wheelchairs to see exhibits or maneuver around exhibits (the Northern Ireland banners exhibit was poorly designed and I [participant number 4] remember a woman in a wheelchair explaining her frustration because the space between tables was not big enough for her to maneuver around especially with the crowds of people already there. This kind of compact “floor plan” was present throughout the festival and many exhibits were designed for standing participants only (limiting the kinds of participation available to people).”<sup>169</sup> Museum professionals planned to create stages for the big musical performances in big tents that can hold up to thousands of people. For the craft demonstrators, they “won’t be up on stage. There will be no distance between them and the audience. They will be sitting among them demonstrating their craft and the crowd will be touching...what they are doing and asking questions.”<sup>170</sup> Sometimes there are low platforms for some of the artisans who sat during their performances. In this case, there are careful measurements to make sure that the

---

<sup>168</sup> [www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Information.html](http://www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Information.html) (accessed July 29, 2007).

<sup>169</sup> Questionnaire filled out by participant number 4.

<sup>170</sup> Pat Wilson, project manager in Linda McKee, “Northern Ireland goes to Washington D.C with a host of local treasures”, [http:// www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk](http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk) (accessed July 29, 2007).

heights of the platforms are convenient for eyes to eyes contact and conversations between artists and visitors.

Next, there is agreement among most of the research participants that there should be more textual description (akin to inside a museum) to provide context and meaning in the exhibits which are less familiar to people, for example the Mekong region. While the other two exhibits provided quite a lot of brochures and hands on material to visitors to bring home, there was absolutely no printed information of that kind in this section. There is also an expectation that there should be more hands on exhibitions, esp. for adults, more variation in exhibitions between cultures, less consumption (the market had the longest line/most public interest). “In the Mekong River program Family Learning Sala, young visitors have an opportunity, through a variety of hands-on activities, to interact directly with Festival participants and, through the Mekong River navigating guide, to learn more about the region. In the Northern Ireland program, children and families can take part in traditional games, hear stories, learn dances, master a few words of Irish or Ulster-Scots, and explore arts and traditional occupations. In the Family Compass tent in the Roots of Virginia Culture program, visitors can learn about the family-friendly fun around the site, including daily participatory performances, workshops, and hands-on activities, such as planting seeds, uncovering artifacts, learning a colonial dance, and mending nets.”<sup>171</sup>

And last but not least, they all expect some improvement on the “authenticity” of food from the food concession. Coming to the Festival to explore the authentic

---

<sup>171</sup> [www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Information.html](http://www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Information.html) (accessed July 29, 2007).

cultures, visitors always have high expectation for good and authentic food. Many people complained that they just had a pale shadow of the authentic food, entirely outside its native atmosphere after a lengthy wait with an expensive price. However, it is difficult to meet this expectation due to the limited logistic issues at the Mall. It is understandable that in a vending situation, the cooks have to mass produce the same dish thousands of times at a high rate of speed with consistency, something that they have never done before until show time. And they have to do it with unfamiliar equipment, no running water, temporary staff, etc. in a field kitchen. The food from the cooking demos can be good but due the National Park Service regulations of food safety, food from food demos can't be distributed to visitors. Festival organizers were aware of the situation but they acknowledged that it was always festival food that they heard different complaints and praises. It's like "being a daughter-in-law of hundreds of clans"; it's really hard to please them all.

These comments are made with an expectation that there is a chance for direct talk between museum curators and organizers and American Studies scholars so they can listen to each other's voices and their conversation will help to better the SFF.

To evaluate the success of the Festival, the official statistics reveal a great number of infield and online visitors: 1,006,195 attended and there were 33,236,357 hits on the Smithsonian website."<sup>172</sup> During a period as short as ten days, rarely can any educational program reach such a number of people. "Not only the hard facts demonstrate the success of the program but there was a genuinely warm response from Washington and the more than one million visitors who attended the

---

<sup>172</sup> *The Irish News*, July 26, 2007, p.14.

Festival.”<sup>173</sup> Most of the media coverage evaluates that “by any standard, the Festival is a great success; Americans need to know one another and to comprehend the many cultures that make up our nation. This cultural diversity can be a source of strength rather than weakness.”<sup>174</sup> In mentioning the Mekong Region, before the Festival, there was hope that “...the performances of Vietnamese singers, dancers and artisans will successfully help audiences understand more about Vietnam’s diverse cultures.”<sup>175</sup> As Richard Kennedy, the curator of the Mekong program said, “When people hear about the Mekong or Mekong Delta, they think of the war thirty years ago. It is very different now; the region is opening up to international community”. There was also expectation that “through the Festival we hope to provide the Vietnamese community abroad faithful information about their homeland, help them cultivate national pride and encourage them to contribute their intellect, creativity and talent to the development of the country.”<sup>176</sup> And it was pleasing to hear the evaluation from the CFCH that “Vietnamese artists are true cultural ambassadors that heighten the festival significantly and aid Americans in better understanding Vietnam and its people and culture.”<sup>177</sup>

---

<sup>173</sup> Richard Kurin.

<sup>174</sup> Kevin Phillips, Reporter, 1971 in Richard Kurin, *Smithsonian Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the People*, 135.

<sup>175</sup> Le Thi Minh Ly, Deputy Director of the Intangible Heritage Department, Ministry of Culture and Information, Vietnam.

<sup>176</sup> A performance in dream, Vietnam Net, June 18, 2007.

<sup>177</sup> Richard Kurin, A performance in dream, Vietnam Net, June 18, 2007.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I offer my analysis explaining the two different evaluations of American Studies scholars about the SFF. My argument is that their evaluations of the SFF are built on the framework of the "Intersectionality paradigm." However, I am aware of the fact that there are other objective and subjective factors that affect their answers. My analysis of their different viewpoints is based mainly on the questionnaires and interviews with them. In this chapter, I also analyze the different conceptual frameworks, task performances, political stances, and approaches that influence the answers of the two groups of scholars about the SFF. The last section of this chapter, also the conclusion of the thesis, provides my reflections on cultural diversity and American Studies programs in Vietnam and in America.

The highly contested conceptualization of "cultural diversity" by American Studies scholars is put in "dialogue" between American Studies scholars and the curators and organizers of the SFF. I put "dialogue" in quotation marks because this interpretation is taken through my questionnaires and interviews with both sides together with the literature on "cultural diversity" but not yet in a shared forum between them. That idea is illustrated in my diagram of the SFF (See Fig.1). In this diagram, two groups of scholars view the issue of the SFF 2007's presentation of cultural diversity through their different understandings of cultural diversity. The criteria set for their judgments are race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, education, sexuality and nationality. Through the processes of participating in the Festival,

filling in the questionnaire, conceptualizing ideas about diversity, and being interviewed, American Studies scholars gave two opposite evaluations. Four participants, who are highlighted in blue, consider that the SFF did a good job of presenting cultural diversity, while the other two, marked in orange color, take it as a poor job that needs some improvements. Museum professionals, on the other hand, believed that after all their careful efforts, the exhibits of Northern Ireland, Mekong Region and Virginia Roots featured the diversity of the region quite well.

My argument is that American Studies scholars theoretically judged the presentation of cultural diversity in the SFF 2007 by their backgrounds of academic cultural theories. They used an Intersectionality paradigm to examine the ways in which various socially and culturally constructed categories interacted on multiple levels to manifest themselves as inequality in society. They hold the perspective that the classical models of oppression within society, such as those based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, class, or disability, do not act independently of one another. These forms of oppression interrelate creating a system of oppression that reflects the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination. Seeing the equality of presentation of featured cultures at the SFF in relation to other social categories such as race, class, disability, sexual orientation and age, American Studies scholars want to make visible not only similarities and differences between the cultures, but also to recognize how the diversity that stems from other social categories affects us in different ways. As they are reflecting the existing issues in the Festival, their knowledge generated from an intersectional analysis can be used to make the Festival better present the diversity of cultures.

*Section 1: Reasons for different evaluations of American Studies scholars about the SFF*

In the following section I am trying to find out the reasons for these different assessments of the same group. According to me, there are several reasons that can help explain the two different evaluations of American Studies scholars about the SFF.

Firstly, during the ten-day period of the Festival, there are different programs of performances and demonstration going on at different times of the day.<sup>178</sup> The experience that American Studies scholars have had at the Festival, therefore, somewhat depends on many subjective criteria. They could be the date of their visit (for example who arrived on the first day of the Festival can not see a complete picture of the mural for Northern Ireland because it hadn't been done yet); the frequency of their visit (All of the scholars went to the Festival one time during the ten-day period of the Festival. As for me, I accumulated and updated my knowledge and information each time I visited the SFF and I did visit the Festival seven times); the length of time one stayed there (the whole day or just a few hours. Apparently the longer one stayed, the more she/he can appreciate the presentation of diversity in the Festival); the frequency one has visited the previous folklife festivals (every year, occasionally, or just first time visitor). All these factors can affect the evaluation and appreciation of each research participant.

Secondly, their evaluations of the most impressive features of the SFF are somewhat influenced by their cultural tradition of taste. For example participant number 4 revealed that he is always more attracted to the arts and crafts. He found the

---

<sup>178</sup> See [http://www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Program\\_Book.html](http://www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Program_Book.html) (accessed July 29, 2007).

ones featured in the Mekong portion of the festival quite impressive (not the arts and crafts of Northern Ireland and the Virginia exhibits). Another factor that can affect their answers is the nature of the cultural feature. For example the traditional craft is appreciated because it is “the most hands-on and user-friendly”<sup>179</sup>; the Music and Tradition are also impressive because they helped contribute to the vibrant atmosphere of the SFF. Fifty percent of the scholars were impressed with the Traditional Crafts, seventy five percent with the Music/Performance tradition, zero percent with the food ways, twenty percent with the decorative arts, and twenty percent with the visitors.

Thirdly, it is interesting to listen to research participants’ acknowledgment that one’s personal cultural identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, taste preference, that they described initially influenced their assessment and experiences of cultural diversity of the festival. “Of course we all like to think of ourselves as neutral observers, but that is never the case. My fascination with place and home always makes me interested in how cultures different from my own make sense of the world around them, so certainly this influenced my assessment of the festival. My ethnic heritage also makes the Mekong Delta exhibit more “foreign” than the other two. My gender also makes me somewhat more interested in the representation of women and women’s activities. My existence as a scholar of American culture also makes me a harsher critic of the SFF than most would be.”<sup>180</sup> With a complication of cultural identity, participant number 4 revealed that “Well, thinking about identity as a process, I think what I initially described about my identity has influenced my

---

<sup>179</sup> Questionnaire filled out by participant number 1.

<sup>180</sup> Questionnaire filled out by participant number 1.

assessment and experiences of “cultural diversity” of the festival very much. When I went to the festival, I was constantly questioning the objects, practices, and peoples represented much like I do when I think about myself.”<sup>181</sup> Interestingly enough, religious preference also plays an influential role in participant 2’s perception. “I was aware of a significant level of “white guilt” while visiting the Virginia exhibit, and, to a lesser extent, the Mekong exhibit. The heavily Christian content of the African American sacred music concert made me feel alienated and unwelcome (particularly one singer’s assumption that the entire audience was Christian, and shared his belief system). Although I was raised Lutheran, I no longer consider myself a traditional Christian, and I find public evangelical Christianity rather oppressive.”<sup>182</sup>

Last but not least, all participants assert that their academic background and scholarly interests help them shape their perspectives on the SFF. “My cultural identity, which includes a developed sense of critical analysis, tends to make me skeptical of large institutions.”<sup>183</sup> The fact that participant number 6 is in an American Studies program “has more of an influence than does her cultural identity per se (race, class, age, religion, gender etc.).”<sup>184</sup>

### *Section 2 : Reasons for different perspectives of the two groups on the issue*

As a non- American citizen or an “outsider” in terms of national origin, and an insider in the American Studies Program, I try to keep my evaluation on cultural diversity in America as fresh and fair as I can. In my previous visit to the SFF, I was

---

<sup>181</sup> Interview with participant number 4.

<sup>182</sup> Questionnaire filled out by participant number 2.

<sup>183</sup> Questionnaire filled out by participant number 3.

<sup>184</sup> Questionnaire filled out by participant number 6.

just a visitor coming to enjoy the atmosphere of the Festival without any enquiry about the museum presentation and the equality of the presented cultures. My current status as a graduate student at an American Studies Program equipped me with tools to have more cautious evaluations of the Festival's success and more critical views of the museum professionals' job on the Festival. However, I am aware of the reminder that "One must be extremely cautious about either being too critical of any museum's exhibit or becoming co-opted too fully by any museum display. By criticizing how power works, one must not simply critique one limited set of political engagements by the established social formation in order to substitute his or her own apparently different, but also quite limited, ends to the service of these same large-scale public representations."<sup>185</sup>

Before attending the Festival, I was somehow skeptical about the representation of the Festival. I personally assumed that the Festival had little to do with the true representation of "cultural diversity"; it was mainly for fun, for commercial, tourist attraction, etc. However, the role of a researcher who wanted to understand the conceptual framework of two groups gave me the chance to have dialogue with both of them. After really participating in the Festival during seven days in its ten-day period, I discovered so many new things that I did not know before. Talking with the museum curators and organizers enabled me to understand that they had combined a scholastic background (most of them hold PhD degrees in many majors such as Anthropology, American Studies, History, Musicology, etc.) and their professional experiences (they are all senior curators who had done many

---

<sup>185</sup> Timothy W. Luke, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 226.

other cultural programs in many previous festivals) to do their brokering job. The Festival itself is a great effort of Smithsonian staff, workers, volunteers, etc., and has achieved many great successes recognized by the public and media.

During my research, however, I realized that there are issues about which the two sides need to have a conversation. It is necessary for the two close and interrelated fields to have a dialogue to better understand others' perspectives. I hope that my research will add a voice to this conversation. It is clear that there is a high expectation from the public and scholars that museums will provide a more full presentation of cultural diversity in America: "...museums must honor American diversity without paternalism and condescension."<sup>186</sup> The United States is home to an incredibly diverse population, but many communities are currently underrepresented in and underserved by museums. "Museums that diversify their audiences, employees and collaborators can help ensure future financial stability, broader cultural understanding, the indispensable asset of community goodwill, and the intellectual capital gained through diverse perspectives and experiences."<sup>187</sup> Scholars are aware that "...museums as educational institutions can serve to deepen knowledge but they are usually not confrontational; their representations must be held to be appropriate and to connect broadly with the view of social reality the visitors hold."<sup>188</sup> However, they argue, "...museums are never just spaces for the playing out of wider social relationships: a museum is a process as well as structure, it is a creative agency as

---

<sup>186</sup> Edmund Barry Gaither, "Hey! That's mine. Thoughts on Pluralism and American Museums", in Karp, Ivan, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Stephen D. Lavine, eds. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 1992), 58.

<sup>187</sup> [www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/PDF/diversity.pdf](http://www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/PDF/diversity.pdf) (accessed July 29, 2007).

<sup>188</sup> Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tour and Glass Boxes: the Anthropology of Museums*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992).

well as a “contested terrain”.<sup>189</sup> As a multidisciplinary organization, a museum holds a particular reflexive promise for social and cultural theorizing because of its close historical associations with the development and concerns of the social sciences.

While museum professionals acknowledge that “there is clearly a need for broader and better forms of public cultural representation,”<sup>190</sup> they see that “most of the attempts to convey anthropological knowledge to the general public have been viewed by professionals as somewhat degrading or beneath their dignity. Museum anthropology is often regarded by the academy as somewhat antiquated and suspect, as it must gear its representations to its public visitor-ship.”<sup>191</sup> In a word, museum curators and organizers of the SFF 2007 think that they are doing a good job. What needs to be done, what should be explained and heard between them will surely address any remaining issue of representing cultures.

My argument is that the presentation of cultural diversity of the SFF is seen by two groups of people through the lens of differences and identities of race, ethnicity, gender, age, nationality, etc., but their views are somewhat different due to the differences in their conceptual frameworks, tasks, political stances, approaches, and many other factors among which the first three are the most important factors that influence their answers.

In terms of conceptual framework, focusing on the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality, American Studies scholars with their perspectives can analyze

---

<sup>189</sup> Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine eds., *Exhibiting cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), p .1.

<sup>190</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997) 14.

<sup>191</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997) 14.

and criticize social life by taking into account all dimensions simultaneously and through this complex analysis and criticism to “empower people to challenge and overcome injustice centered in race, gender, class, sexuality.”<sup>192</sup> Their perspectives are much influenced by their major whose characteristics are finding the paradoxes of the theory and reality, to be cynical, analyze and criticize, and work out the solutions. I also discovered that their perspectives are influenced by some other factors, among which are their own cultural traditions.<sup>193</sup>

By doing so they help to empower--further the course of social and economic justice by providing understanding and insights that lead to effective action to challenge injustice. Differences, in the eyes of American Studies scholars, should be sources for the construction of distinctive cultural identity. “Those of us who are immigrants, African American, Latino/a, gay or lesbian, or any combination of these and a dozen other identities have no difficulty seeing in ourselves the otherness out of which we construct the persona that faces the world and limits or expands our vision. As powerful as these perspectives are in shaping a sense of well-being or grievance, they provide us with only partial visions--visions that each of us daily reconciles with the larger culture.”<sup>194</sup> This conceptual framework of cultural diversity that American Studies scholars are using today was formed in American Studies in the late 1980s<sup>195</sup>, much later than the practice of cultural diversity by museum professional in the late 1960s.

---

<sup>192</sup> Lynn Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001), 6.

<sup>193</sup> See the following section on the reasons for different takings on the presentation of cultural diversity on the SFF 2007.

<sup>194</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, " Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3. (Sep.1992), 308.

<sup>195</sup> See more detail in Chapter 2.

In the context of global museums, museum curators and the organizers of the CFCH situated cultural diversity as the complex composition of society, i.e. the complex mix of individuals and groups who together make up global society. They embrace a variety of traditions, values, attitudes and beliefs that influence their identities and the identities of society around them. These influences may relate to ethnicity, faith, gender, sexual orientation and intellectual and physical ability, but might equally include health status, locality, and educational, economic and social background. These groups are often very distinct in their cultural identity with their own sense of history, its own values and a specific 'language' or form of self-expression, while still holding to a general commonality which tolerates and respects differences and is responsible for the rich layering that constitutes society.

In terms of approaches, while the Festival may, in some literal way, recall nineteenth century forms of cultural exhibitionism and voyeurism, it has benefited from decades of cultural research and discussion about cultural representation and has become quite different<sup>196</sup> in ways of shifting authoritative voice, collaboration in self-representation, and treatment of contemporary context and form of discourse.<sup>197</sup> The selection of cultures is based on the curators' and researchers' conceptualizing, negotiating and managing a program on community traditions to produce the appropriate representation of a community or group of communities with the consultation, agreement and cooperation of local museums, communities, individuals

---

<sup>196</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Object of Ethnography", in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

<sup>197</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997), 131.

and government.<sup>198</sup> “Representation of peoples, cultures and institutions does not just happen. They are mediated, negotiated, and, yes, brokered through often complex processes with myriads of challenges and constraints imposed by those who are involved; all of whom have their own interests and concerns.”<sup>199</sup> As Smithsonian officials go on to say, “the dialogue created at the Festival, in which cultural traditions can be respectfully presented, discussed and even passed along, is vital to our continued civic health. Sometimes this dialogue is celebratory, sometimes sobering. But to appreciate its importance, one needs to look around the globe to places where cultural conversations have stopped and where they have been replaced by intolerance, abuse of human rights, and violence.”<sup>200</sup>

In terms of task performance, the task of representing cultures of others that a social institution like the Smithsonian CFCH is doing--producing and representing ideas and knowledge about cultures of others--urges the staff to understand about structural equality and inequality to help citizens see and understand how our differences matter and how they do not, or should not. SFF organizers and scholars need to seek methods of analysis of social life that are "complex--not superficial and simplistic--and incorporates multiple dimensions of inequality in the same analysis.... When analyses have a single focus in a world that is far more complex, the conclusions generated and the resulting change strategies are incomplete.”<sup>201</sup> The task of promoting cultural diversity and cultural heritage to encourage harmony and

---

<sup>198</sup> Interview with the museum curators by author.

<sup>199</sup> Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997) 12.

<sup>200</sup> Bruce David, Secretary of the Interior Festival program books, 1995, 1996, In Richard Kurin, *Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the people*, (Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage, 1998), 23.

<sup>201</sup> Lynn Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001), 6.

cultural sustainability through the processes of cultural pluralism is the responsibility of CFCH in its annual SFF.

In terms of political stance, while American Studies scholars are in a purely academic environment and can protect their personal political stance without any political or social pressure in the academy, the situation for museum professionals is much different. It is clear that the Smithsonian Institution as a public institution is responsible for their exhibits and activities and to some extent under the influence of national diplomatic if not political influence from the government. Although it is acknowledged that the Festival receives half of the yearly funding from the government and the CFCH has their own autonomy in these cultural and educational programs,<sup>202</sup> there were cases of intervention from the government. For example in the SFF 2007, the Mekong Region Program omitted Myanmar “because of U.S. laws that would have made its participation impractical.”<sup>203</sup> It is true that the Festival is a form of cultural democracy in the sense that it creates a platform for conversation of grassroots cultures and visitors, for museum professional and scholars, etc. By including so many grassroots groups in their exhibits, they are creating ground work for understanding, and tolerance of cultural differences. It is difficult for Smithsonian Institution representatives to take more overtly political positions. However, they don’t overlook issues of injustice, conflict, and exploitation among groups, but they focus on making the Festival a neutral social space for further cultural understanding and negotiation of conflict (if any). They said, “It’s on the National Mall of the U.S. If you don’t like what someone is saying--you can stand up, say something or ask

---

<sup>202</sup> Interviews with CFCH’s staff.

<sup>203</sup> *2007 Smithsonian Folk life Festival: Mekong River, Northern Ireland, Roots of Virginia Culture*, Smithsonian institution, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (Smithsonian Institution: 2007), 34.

them questions.”<sup>204</sup> And they also reaffirmed to the protest of small groups from Northern Ireland that “It’s not a political program. It’s a cultural program. It’s not Unionist versus Nationalists. We didn’t sit down and quiz people about their politics.”

Museums professionals also have to be very cautious in their printed documents before the public. “Every sign was sent to the local governments at Northern Ireland to double check that they are not politically sensitive at their home; there was no word that “spells nationalism.”<sup>205</sup> A similar case happened in the Mekong Region Program in SFF 2007. A group of five or six Vietnamese Americans waved the Flag of the South Vietnam Regime on the stage of *Don Ca Tai Tu*. They were requested by the museum curators to step down because the flag waving was really blocking the view of other audience members and, more importantly, the Festival was a cultural one not a political one. As a measure of any political riot prevention, the Smithsonian tries to “make sure that there is no flag”<sup>206</sup> or signs that “spell nationalism”.<sup>207</sup>

### Section 3: Cultural diversity and American Studies program in Vietnam

Having the opportunity to be in a graduate program of American Studies in America, and doing research on the presentation of cultural diversity at the SFF 2007, I have educated myself about the issue of cultural diversity. The outcome of this enlightenment will be reflected in teaching and doing research about American

---

<sup>204</sup> Richard Kurin

<sup>205</sup> Interview with Nancy Groce, curator of the Northern Ireland Program, Washington D.C. November 9, 2007.

<sup>206</sup> Interview with Nancy Groce, curator of the Northern Ireland Program, Washington D.C. November 9, 2007.

<sup>207</sup> Interview with Nancy Groce, curator of the Northern Ireland Program, Washington D.C. November 9, 2007.

cultural diversity in the program of American Studies in Vietnam. In Vietnam, not until 2002 was Vietnam National University (VNU)'s American Studies Program officially approved at the Faculty of International Studies (FIS), Division of Americas Studies as a discipline. Before that, American Studies with special emphases on history and literature was started in the 1960s at different departments of several universities. At the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), parts of American history have been dealt with in courses in world history in the History Department. Lectures on American literature have been given to advanced students in the Department of Literature. American politics and economics have been briefly introduced to students of law, philosophy, and economics in those respective departments.

Thanks to the generous support of the Asia Foundation and the Henry Luce Foundation, FIS is the first and now still the only institution with programmed comprehensive undergraduate curricula on American Studies. Its model is being studied and expanded throughout the country in several universities. Its undergraduate program is construed as being centered in traditional disciplines in the social sciences with required or core courses such as American History, American Political System, American Legal System, American Economy, American Culture, and American Foreign Relations providing systematic and basic knowledge of the United States to Vietnamese students who are not exposed to the everyday experience of living in the U.S. The program of American Studies in Vietnam shares some similarity with that in neighboring countries such as China and Japan, i.e. undergraduate American studies courses are designed to provide basic knowledge of

the United States to students, while graduate courses focus on major areas and issues. For instance, American history is taught to undergraduate students and history of American social movements is taught to graduate students. However the program also has significant differences from what is taught in America.

The issue of cultural diversity in America has been considered in the course of American Culture and in a VNU research project entitled “Characteristics of American Culture”. As the first step to help Vietnamese students understand the components of American cultural diversity, Vietnamese scholars view the project of trying to identify and investigate traits of distinctive cultures of different ethnicities in the United States as the principal task of identifying cultural diversity in American studies. However the scholarship does not yet mention key issues in cultural diversity, such as race, class, gender, sexuality etc., and especially the relations between power and inequalities between groups of people. The use of an intersectional lens when investigating gender equality issues, race issues, sexuality issues, etc...is only in a provisional stage in Vietnam. Vietnamese students study American studies with an exploratory and receptive scholarly attitude while inside the United States students are more likely to study American studies to develop critical analyses of American culture and society. As John Carlos Rowe has noted, we need to recognize "the different social, political, and educational purposes American studies serves in its different situations around the globe."<sup>208</sup> American Studies is studied as a part of the humanities and American students are equipped with a foundational knowledge of American history, culture, society, politics, etc., drawn from whatever they have

---

<sup>208</sup> John Carlos Rowe, "Globalism and the New American Studies," in *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, 27-28.

absorbed from the culture around them and their education and experiences in life. Therefore, the idea that there *could* be universal national characteristics is widely viewed with suspicion. The task set for U.S.-based Americanists is to “eschew imperial ambitions in scholarship as readily as we [Americans] condemn them in U.S. politics; reluctant to impose our [American] own perspectives on others who may not share them, we [Americans] should learn to listen more and talk less....U.S.-based American studies scholars need to make an effort to connect with scholars outside the United States through all of these channels—in print and in person.”<sup>209</sup> When all members of the society as diverse as America understand the real value of the operation of “cultural diversity”, they have more chances to “contribute their fullest potential, more efficient, more effective, more creative solutions to problems... When everyone has an excellent education, basic health care, and quality housing, multiple cultures can bring diverse knowledge and perspectives to bear effectively on the complex issues facing modern society in an increasing interdependent world system.”<sup>210</sup>

My conclusion for this thesis is cultural diversity is not merely the existence of different groups of people with different skins like the situation in America or different ethnic groups like the situation in Vietnam. Celebrating cultural diversity is not only bringing different faces of different backgrounds to a space to commemorate. As with many other social categories, cultural diversity is also socially

---

<sup>209</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies” — Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004, *American Quarterly* 57.1 (2005) 17-57.

<sup>210</sup> Lynn Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001), 14.

and culturally constructed in a continual living context. It can be compared “like a blastula of cells undergoing mitosis. American society constantly proliferates new divisions and differentiations.”<sup>211</sup> The concept of cultural diversity is also contextual, instrumental, and tactical. Sometimes one praises or condemns diversity in order to express his/her values to others, to perhaps signal others about the kind of person he/she is - or because he/she wants people to think how kind he/she is.

Diversity is not taken for granted but is socially and culturally constructed. The concept has undergone a long history of conflict to achieve its status as it is understood by some people today. Diversity was once considered to be a threat that should be suppressed or contained. The traditional resistance to diversity has been seen in the history of race discrimination against black people, or repression of gay relationships and life styles. The growing social acceptance of diversity is nowhere more striking than in the evolving view of openly gay relationship and life styles by a society that harshly repressed them – and to some extent still does.<sup>212</sup>

As Jonathan Rauch said, “we are becoming so diverse that we are no longer sure what we mean by diversity.”<sup>213</sup> In comparison with the society at large, American Studies scholars are somewhat radical in putting the working concept of diversity in relationship with the practice of power in every day life activities. By doing so, they are empowering diversity, shaping the concept and idea as a source of strength rather than weakness. I also think that diversity is the invisible glue that defines America and attaches Americans together. It’s a fact that “America has never

---

<sup>211</sup> Peter H. Schuck, *Diversity in America: Keeping Government at a Safe Distance*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>212</sup> Susanna Danuta Walters, *All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America*, 2001.

<sup>213</sup> Jonathan Rauch, “Diversity in a New America: Charting the Changes,” *Brookings Review* 5, 2002.

been united by blood or birth or soil, but “by the ideas that move us beyond our [American] backgrounds. ...Every citizen must uphold them. And every immigrant, by embracing these ideals, makes our country more, not less American.”<sup>214</sup> Diversity besides being presented and promoted needs to be safeguarded by law. In the construction of a civic society where diversity is a major force of development but not inferiority, the voice of scholars in academia surely counts. American Studies in the U.S. has really engaged in the conversation of cultural diversity and facilitated its performance in American society.

While American Studies scholars use the theoretical approach of Intersectionality, which is still more common within research than in policy processes, museum professionals deal with diversity in their professional practice. Although the term Intersectionality was not spelled out by museum professionals, they embraced that concept when acknowledging that “It would be wonderful to do programs that transcend nationality, ethnicity, language and religions, for example on urban culture, on immigrant culture, on cultural fusion, and creativity across traditional boundaries.”<sup>215</sup>

The festival-like characteristics of SFF don’t provide an easy framework to examine the exercise of power or oppression within a society based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, class, and other markers of difference. The SFF creates a peaceful setting for the cultures to speak and to be heard. However the underlying cultural message is that the presentation of cultures at the SFF promotes equality and

---

<sup>214</sup>George Bush, Inaugural address, 2001

<sup>215</sup> Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Washington Post.com , Richard Kurin June 28, 2007 online. [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2007/06/21/DI2007062101690.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2007/06/21/DI2007062101690.html) -

combats discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability and age.

The Festival as a genre of museum /cultural institution/ display is a great means of education for the public in the way that it broadens knowledge and appreciation that visitors and festival participants have about the cultures of others. The Festival is helpful in disseminating cultures of humankind by bringing the invisible cultures in some corners of the world to public presentation in the most open and accessible space, the Mall. These cultures can have little regular access for people at large to understand due to geographical reasons (the case of Mekong Region), political and religious reasons (the case of Northern Ireland) or historical reasons (Virginia Roots). Therefore the Festival creates an open space for people to perceive cultures with their own senses so they can appreciate and bridge differences that always exist with cultures that are not their own. They may come to the Festival with the first and foremost temptation as to celebrate it and enjoy it but actually their participations in the festival is a source of protecting, promoting and tolerating and empowering diversity. It is clear that the job that the CFCH at the Smithsonian Institution has been doing for the past forty years helps disseminate cultural awareness and a growing social acceptance of diversity, and helps create the flowering of cultural diversity. At the Festival, Northern Ireland's First Deputy Minister McGuinness and Finance Minister Robinson both eloquently declared the troubles over, the society in transformation, and spoke of the importance of tolerance-accommodation, dialogue and agreement.<sup>216</sup> "America does more than tolerate diversity. It views diversity as constitutive of the national mythos and underwrites

---

<sup>216</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2007/06/21/DI2007062101690.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2007/06/21/DI2007062101690.html) -

this by welcoming close to one million legal immigrants each year. America's embrace of diversity "finds no parallel in any other society or culture in the world today."<sup>217</sup> Besides importing diversity through immigration, and defining it through affirmative action, the American government perpetuates diversity through its cultural maintenance programs such as the SFF. The SFF is also an advocacy for cultural rights and cultural democracy when grassroots peoples at the Festival can be in an open forum to have free dialogue about their cultures, and counter the structures of relationship that may be hampered by historical or political obstacles. The voice of the Festival participants in cultural programs or cultural policies at their home institutions can partly meet the expectation from the founders of the SFF of making the SFF a "release valve" to revolt against the power of social order.

Diversity is surely one of the issues that American Studies scholars are aware of in their mission of reflecting the existing issues of society. "In telling the story of the American people, we [American Studies scholars] must describe the diversity, the conflict, the racism, and the despair".<sup>218</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris said, "As students and scholars of American Studies, we are called on to engage in, to facilitate, the conversation that occurs in the public marketplace by ensuring the perpetuation of a processual notion of America."<sup>219</sup> Scholars are the ones that help to answer the question "whether this country is to be etched indelibly in the minds of young Americans simply as a strange collection of races and ethnic groups without real

---

<sup>217</sup> Orlando Patterson, *The Ordeal of Integration: Progress and Resentment in America's "Racial" Crisis*, (Washington: Civitas/Counterpoint, 1997) p 18, 19.

<sup>218</sup> Allen F. Davis, "The Politics of American Studies," *American Quarterly*. Vol. 42, No.3 (1989), 370.

<sup>219</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3. (Sep., 1992), 311.

identity or purpose in common, or as a great creative action of nationhood in which the building of one became the purpose of many.”<sup>220</sup>

#### Section 4: Summary

In conclusion, I have shown that cultural diversity in its various forms is an important aspect of American society and world cultures and as such is something that not only is but should be represented at the SFF. I have also shown that “cultural diversity” is itself a cultural concept that is understood and wielded differently by differently located people including American Studies scholars and Museum professionals. American Studies scholars tend to use an intersectional approach to cultural diversity which emphasizes dimensions of difference such as race, class, gender and ethnicity and which focuses on forms of social oppression linked to these differences. American Studies scholars who evaluated “cultural diversity” at the 2007 SFF used this lens in constructing their assessments and were usually at least somewhat critical of the fact that this form of diversity was not particularly well represented. We also saw that different American Studies scholars saw the festival’s representation of diversity somewhat differently depending on their own cultural identities.

Museum professionals who are associated with the Festival tend to use a somewhat different definition of cultural diversity which is more oriented to the varying customs, material cultures, and folkways of the different groups they portray. While these professionals are well aware of dimensions of difference like race, the

---

<sup>220</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3, (Sep., 1992), 311.

purposes and constraints of the festival lead them to downplay the importance of intersectional differences and resulting forms of oppression. As I have suggested, dialogue between American Studies scholars and Museum professionals could lead to an improved presentation of cultural diversity at the festival. A more complex broader view of diversity would benefit both fields. I also hope to help bring such a broader view of diversity in to the teaching of American Studies in Vietnam.

## Appendices

Questionnaire for the American Studies scholars

Questionnaire for museum professionals and festival organizers

Map of the SFF 2007

Diagram on the perspectives of the American Studies scholars and Museum professionals on the SFF 2007

## Questionnaire for the American Studies scholars

*This is an open-ended survey on your perspectives on the Smithsonian Folklife Festival (SFF) and its representation of cultural diversity in America. The concepts of representation, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, etc. are in lines with those in American Studies. Feel free to use as much space for your answers as possible. Your time and ideas are very much appreciated!*

Your full name:

Institution:

Degree/Title:

Email:

Phone number:

State of residence:

- 1. If you were giving your autobiography statement for Dr. Sies's AMST 603 class, how would you describe yourself in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, citizenship, age, religion preferences and scholarship interest ?** *(Understanding that in that exercise, we only reveal what we are comfortable revealing). Suggested length: one paragraph.*

- 2. How often do you go to the SFF? Circle your choice.**

Every year

Occasionally

First time

- 3. How much did you learn about the culture of the following: Circle your choice.**

a. Mekong River: Connecting culture    Very much    Much    Some    Little    None

b. Northern Ireland at the Smithsonian    Very much    Much    Some    Little    None

c. Roots of Virginia Culture                      Very much    Much    Some    Little    None

- 4. What is/are the most impressive feature(s) in this year's SFF? Circle your choice(s).**

a. Traditional Crafts

b. Food ways

- c. Music/Performance tradition
- d. Decorative Arts
- e. Other(s) (Please indicate)

**Why?** *Please explain.*

**5. How do visitors participate in the activities of the festival?**

*Please expand your answers by giving three examples of what you observed or what you did at the festival.*

- 6.** The Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage of the Smithsonian Institution has shaped the Smithsonian Folklife Festival to model an approach to representing culturally diverse people and their lifeways that involves members of those cultures directly to help shape how they are represented at the festival. Richard Kurin states in his book- Reflections of a Culture Broker that *“One of the way in which the Smithsonian has, in the last generation, attempted to turn museology outward, to connect with the public and its constituencies, and to include the voices of the represented has been through the Festival of American Folklife. The festival raises historical and ethical issues with regard to the representation of culture and the engagement of people in that endeavor. It is strongly negotiated among its organizers and a myriad of collaborators. It offers insights into the way culture is presented to mass audiences and stands as an alternative type of scholarly curatorial practice that is useful to consider vis-à-vis other forms. Examining the festival as a genre of museum/ cultural institutional displays provides a benchmark for examining case studies of large –scale public representational events.”* <sup>221</sup>

**In your judgment, how does this year’s festival fulfill these goals?** *Circle your choice.*

Very much                      Much                      Some                      Little                      None

*Please expand your answers by giving three examples of what you observed at the festival.*

---

<sup>221</sup> Richard Kurin, Reflections of a Culture Broker, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, p110

**7. How would you define cultural diversity? Please explain; I am asking for your own definition.**

**8. What is your assessment of how well public cultural institutions in the U.S. e.g. museums represent the cultural diversity of America? Please give any example of how you see this.**

**9. How well does the Smithsonian Folklife Festival present “the cultural traditions of communities across the U.S. and around the world”<sup>222</sup> to a broad public?**

**10. How much of the cultural diversity of America is reflected in the SFF?**  
*Please explain.*

**11. How much is the idea/concept of race reflected in the festival?**  
*Circle your choice.*

Very much      Much      Some      Little      None

*Please expand your answers by giving three examples of what you observed at the festival.*

**12. How much is the idea/concept of ethnicity reflected in the festival? Circle your choice.**

Very much      Much      Some      Little      None

*Please expand your answers by giving three examples of what you observed at the festival.*

---

<sup>222</sup> Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2007 Brochure

**13. How much is the idea/concept of sexuality reflected in the festival? Circle your choice.**

Very much      Much      Some      Little      None

*Please expand your answers by giving three examples of what you observed at the festival.*

**14. How much is the idea/concept of age reflected in the festival? Circle your choice.**

Very much      Much      Some      Little      None

*Please expand your answers by giving three examples of what you observed at the festival.*

**15. In your judgment, how well does the SFF represent cultural diversity in the U.S. and the world? Please explain.**

*16. "It is through the festival that the Smithsonian shows that history doesn't stop, that the life of people cannot be reduced to an object in a case or a sign on a walk. It is through the festival that people speak for themselves about their lives and accomplishments, and about how they have turned everyday experience into beauty."<sup>223</sup>*

**How much is this idea/concept of cultural preservation reflected in the festival?**

Very much      Much      Some      Little      None

*Please expand your answers by giving three examples of what you observed at the festival.*

**17. What most needs to be improved in the way they do this year's festival? Please explain.**

**18. In your judgment, in what ways does the SFF contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage? Please explain.**

---

<sup>223</sup> Mike Heyman in Richard Kurin, Brokering the Smithsonian, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, p110.

**19. (How) Do you think the cultural identity you described initially influenced your assessment and experiences of cultural diversity of the festival? How do you think it influenced your answers on the questionnaire?**

**20. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview about your response?**

Thank you very much!

## Questionnaire for museum professionals and festival organizers

1. Why were the Mekong River region and the Northern Ireland chosen to feature the SFF 2007?
2. Could you talk about the challenges in selecting the features to be represented in the SFF?
3. What are the goals set before the SFF?
4. In your judgment, how did this year's festival fulfill the goals?
5. What are the criteria used to measure the success of the SFF?
6. According to you, what is/are the most impressive feature(s) in this year's SFF?
7. How well did you create activities and conversations for participants and visitors?
8. In your judgment, how well does the SFF represent cultural diversity in the U.S. and the world?
9. How well did SFF present "the cultural traditions of communities across the U.S. and around the world"<sup>224</sup> to a broad public?
10. How much of the cultural diversity of America is reflected in the SFF?
11. How much is the idea/concept of race reflected in the festival?
12. How much is the idea/concept of ethnicity reflected in the festival?
13. How much is the idea/concept of sexuality reflected in the festival?
14. How much is the idea/concept of age reflected in the festival?

---

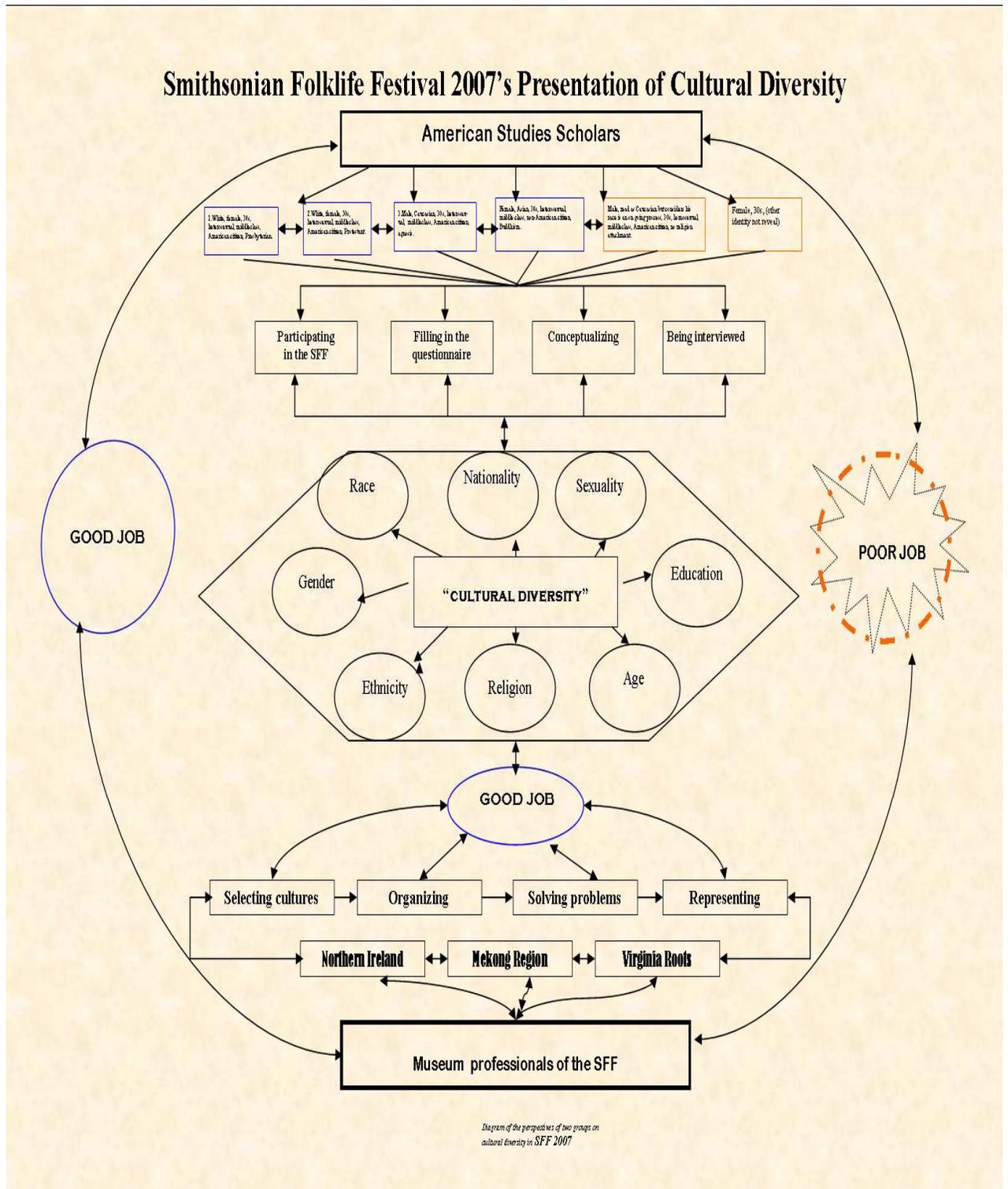
<sup>224</sup> Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2007 Brochure

15. How much is this idea/concept of cultural preservation reflected in the festival?
16. What most needs to be improved in this year's festival?
17. In your judgment, in what ways does the SFF contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage?

# Map of the SFF 2007



**Diagram on the perspectives of the American Studies scholars and Museum professionals on the SFF 2007**



## Bibliography

### Primary sources:

1. Dianna Parker, Director, Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Interviewed by author. Washington D.C. Oct 31, 2007.
2. Nancy Groce, American Folklife Center, U.S Library of Congress. Interviewed by author. Washington D.C. Nov. 9, 2007.
3. Personal participant observation of the SFF 2007. June 27- July 1, July 4- July 8, 2007.
4. Questionnaires filled by research participants.
5. Recording of the Opening ceremony of the SFF 2007. Recorded by author, Washington D.C. June 27, 2007.
6. Recording of the preview meeting of Smithsonian Institution staff prior the SFF. Recorded by author, Washington D.C. June, 2007.
7. Recordings of the SFF 2007 from the Archives of Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.
8. Research participant number 1, Department of American Studies, University of Maryland, College Park. Interviewed by author. College Park, September 2007.
9. Research participant number 2, Department of American Studies, University of Maryland, College Park. Interviewed by author. College Park, August 2007.

10. Research participant number 3, Department of American Studies, University of Maryland, College Park. Interviewed by author. College Park, August 2007.
11. Research participant number 4, Department of American Studies, University of Maryland, College Park. Interviewed by author. College Park, June - August 2007.
12. Research participant number 6, Department of American Studies, University of Maryland, College Park. Interviewed by author. College Park, September 2007.
13. Richard Kennedy, Acting Director of Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Interviewed by author. Washington D.C. Oct 31, 2007.

## Secondary sources

### Websites

1. <http://english.pravda.ru/news/world/29-06-2007/94280-festival-0> - 36k
2. <http://www.saigongpdaily.com.vn>
3. [www.nwipp-newspapers.com/FH/free/306696919278827.php](http://www.nwipp-newspapers.com/FH/free/306696919278827.php) - 49k
4. <http://www.folklife.si.edu/center/festival.html>
5. [www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/PDF/diversity.pdf](http://www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/PDF/diversity.pdf)
6. [www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/PDF/diversity.pdf](http://www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/PDF/diversity.pdf)
7. [www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Information.html](http://www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Information.html)
8. [www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Information.html](http://www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Information.html)
9. [www.nwipp-newspapers.com/FH/free/306696919278827.php](http://www.nwipp-newspapers.com/FH/free/306696919278827.php) -
10. [www.quehuong.org.vn](http://www.quehuong.org.vn)
11. [www.si.edu/about/budget/2006/2006-04-Overview\\_Congress06.doc](http://www.si.edu/about/budget/2006/2006-04-Overview_Congress06.doc)
12. [www.vnnews.vn](http://www.vnnews.vn)
13. [www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk](http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk)
14. [english.pravda.ru/news/world/29-06-2007/94280-festival-0](http://english.pravda.ru/news/world/29-06-2007/94280-festival-0) - 36k
15. <http://icom.museum/diversity.html>
16. <http://www.folklife.si.edu/center/festival.html>
17. <http://www.saigongpdaily.com.vn>
18. [www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Program\\_Book.html](http://www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Program_Book.html)

**Books:**

1. 2007 *Smithsonian Folk life Festival: Mekong River, Northern Ireland, Roots of Virginia Culture*, Smithsonian institution, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution: 2007).
2. 2007 Smithsonian Folklife Festival Media Reports.
3. American Association of Museums, Commission on Museums for a New Century, *Museums for a New Century* (Washington D.C.: American Association Museums, 1924).
4. Ames, M. Michael *Cannibal Tour and Glass Boxes: the Anthropology of Museums*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992).
5. Atkinson, Paul A, Amanda Jane Coffey et al, *Handbook of Ethnography*, (London: Sage 2001-2007).
6. Auerbach, Susan “The Brokering of Ethnic Folklore: Issues of Selection and Presentation at a Multicultural Festival.” in *Creative Ethnicity*, Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicalla, eds. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1991): 223-238.
7. Camp and Lloyd, “Six Reasons Not to Produce Folklife Festivals.” *Kentucky Folklore Record* 26 (1-2) 67-74.
8. Cantwell, Robert *Ethnomimesis: folklife and the representation of culture*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
9. Caughey, John, *Negotiating Cultures and Identities*, (Lincoln: U Nebraska, 2006).

10. Crèvecoeur, J Hector St John de, Susan Manning, *Letters from an American farmer*, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1997, 1998).
11. Feintuch, Burt ed., *The Conservation of Culture: Folklorists & the Public Sector* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988).
12. Franklin, John Hope *Ethnicity in American Life: The Historical Perspective*, (New York: 1971).
13. Friedman, Susan Stanford *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton: 1998).
14. Gaither, Edmund Barry, “Hey! That’s mine. Thoughts on Pluralism and American Museums”, in Karp, Ivan, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Stephen D. Lavine, eds. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 1992).
15. Halberstam Judith, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (NYU Press: 2005).
16. Hall, Stuart (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, ( London: Sage Publications, 1997).
17. Hallam, Elizabeth and Brian V. Street (eds.), *Cultural Encounters: Representing “Otherness”*, (New York, Routledge 2000).
18. Hatcher, Evelyn, *Festivals: Study Notes and Queries* in Evelyn Payne Thatcher Museum of Anthropology Technical Paper No. 1, (St. Cloud, MN: St. Cloud University, 1979).
19. *New Discourse on Heritage*. Champaign, (University of Illinois Press, 1994).

20. Karp, Ivan and Steven D. Lavine eds., *Exhibiting cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).
21. Karp, Ivan, Corinne A. Dratz, Lynn Szawaja, and Thomas Ybarra- Frausto, eds., *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/ Global Transformations*, (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2006).
22. Karp, Ivan, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Stephen D. Lavine, eds. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public* Henderson, Amy and Kaeppler L. Adrienne (eds.), *Exhibiting Dilemmas: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian, Washington D.C.* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).
23. Hufford, Mary, ed., *Conserving Culture: A Culture*. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 1992).
24. Kurin, Richard, *Folklife Festivals: Culture Of, By, For the people*, (Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage, 1998).
25. Kurin, Richard, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A view from the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, (Washington and London, 1997).
26. Lidchi, Henrietta “The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures”, in Stuart Hall (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, (London: Sage Publications, 1997).
27. Loomis, Ormond, *Cultural Conservation: The Protection of Cultural Heritage in the United States*. (Washington D.C., Library of Congress, 1983).
28. Lowe, Lisa, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996).

29. Lujan, Jr., Manuel “The Quincenterany: Understanding America’s Cultural Heritage,” in *Festival of American Folk life Program Book* ( Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1992).
30. Luke, Timothy W. *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
31. MacCannell, Dean *The Tourist* ( New York: Schoken, 1976).
32. Macdonald, Sharon and Gordon Fyfe, eds. *Theorizing Museums; Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing world*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996).
33. Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, (New York: Routledge, 1994).
34. P. Vergo, (ed.), *The New Museology*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1993).
35. Reich, B. Robert, *The work of Nations*, ( New York: Vintage Books, 1992).
36. Rosenzweig, Roy and David Thelen, *The presence of the past: popular uses of history in American life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
37. Schuck, Peter H. *Diversity in America: Keeping Government at a Safe Distance*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).
38. Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2007 Brochure.
39. Stoeltje, Beverly, “Festival,” in Erick Barnouvw, *International Encyclopedia of Communication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

40. Stoeltje, Beverly. "Festival." In Bauman (ed.), *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 261-271. (New York, 1992).
41. Susser, Ida and Thomas C. Patterson (eds.), *Cultural Diversity in the United States A Critical Reader*, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc.. 2004).
42. Taylor, Larry L, *Cultural Diversity in the United States*, (Westport CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1997).
43. Taylor, Larry L. *American Culture: Myth and Reality of a Culture of Diversity*, (West port CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1998).
44. Vergo, P, "The reticent object", in P. Vergo, (ed.), *The New Museology*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1993).
45. Weber, Lynn, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001).
46. Wise, Gene "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement" (1979) - in Lucy Maddox ed., *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of A Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp 166-214.
47. Abrahams, Roger D. "Shouting Match at the Border; The Folklore of Display Events," in Bauman, Richard and Roger D. Abraham, eds., *And Other Neighborly Names: Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

### Scholarly Articles:

1. Brown, J. Carter, "The Mall and the Commission of Fine Arts", in Longstreth, *The Mall in Washington D.C.*, 297-295.
2. Davis, Allen F., "The Politics of American Studies, *American Quarterly*. Vol. 42, No.3 (1989), pp 353-374.
3. Fishkin, Shelley Fisher , "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004, *American Quarterly* 57.1 (2005) 17-57.
4. Kerber, Linda K., "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3. (Sep., 1989) pp 415-431.
5. Kessler-Harris, Alice, "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3. (Sep., 1992), pp 299-312
6. Rowe, "John Carlos, Globalism and the New American Studies," in *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, 27-28.
7. Shalinsky, Audrey C., "Studying Community Festivals," *AnthroNotes*, vol. 7, no. 1, winter 1985.
8. Stephens, John, "American Studies At Home and Abroad: An overview", *Electronic Journals of the U.S. Information Agency*, Volume 1, Number 15, October 1996.
9. Washington, Mary Helen, "Disturbing the Peace: What Happens to American Studies if You Put African American Studies at the Center?" Presidential

Address to the American Studies Association, October 29, 1997." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 50.No. 1 (1998): 1-23.

**Documents:**

Development Orientations in Key Fields, a document of the VIII th National Party Congress of Vietnam.

**Articles:**

1. "A performance in dream", *Vietnam Net*, June 18, 2007.
2. A Slice of Northern Ireland life on the Mall, *Washington Post*, Friday June 29, 2007.
3. Anthony de Palma, "Another Bass Gives Yale \$20 Million," *New York Times*, 18 Apr. 1991, A20.
4. Eight Khmer Troupe Dances at the Smithsonian Festival, *Vietnam News Agency Bulletin*, July 9, 2007.
5. George F. Will, "Literary Politics," *Newsweek*, 22 Apr. 1991, 72.
6. Richard Kurin, "A performance in dream," *Vietnam Net*, June 18, 2007.
7. Steve Kiviat, "Sounds of the Mekong", With a lot to see, *The Washington Post*, Monday, July 9, 2007.
8. *The Irish News*, July 26, 2007.