

Increasing Cultural Awareness

On March 1, 2001, we opened the doors to the people of Mississippi, and the people of the nation and the world as they come to experience this spectacular display of national treasures. The Majesty of Spain exhibit makes a one-city appearance in North America, which is at the Mississippi Arts Pavilion in downtown Jackson, Mississippi. Never before have so many magnificent objects from Spain appeared in the United States, until now. Spain has chosen Mississippi to host this wonderful exhibit, and we know they made the right choice.

Cultural awareness is important for our future. We must educate ourselves and especially our children. Our must be able to work, live and function in a global environment. They must have the opportunity to experience other cultures and nations.

The Majesty of Spain exhibit is a high-profile step in that direction. This exhibit will provide cultural and educational enrichment for all people of Mississippi and the people that the exhibit will attract from outside our borders. Mississippi is the showcase for this international exhibit to the world. When visitors walk through the exhibit doors they will be transported to a different world and time, and they will have that experience right here in Mississippi.

When asked why Mississippi was chosen for this prestigious exhibition opportunity, the Duke of San Carlos responded by saying, *We chose Mississippi because it was the right time and the right place to exhibit our national treasures.* Spanish officials are in Jackson helping prepare the exhibition and are excited about the opening of the exhibit

The exhibit will not only educate us on the history of Spain, it will also provide visitors from other states the opportunity to become educated on Mississippi's history. Mississippi will also be showcased. This is an excellent opportunity for us, as Mississippians to broaden the context as we show the nation and the world, who we really are.

This is our opportunity to be an actual "living exhibit" for the world to experience. Our entire state will serve as a classroom as tourists visit the Majesty of Spain exhibit.

Tourists traveling our highways and interstates will see our beautiful landscapes and visit with Mississippians across the state. We will let our "true, Southern hospitality" show. Mississippians received this nickname years ago, and we received it for a good reason. It is true; we are "The Hospitality State."

The Majesty of Spain exhibit will provide increased communication, understanding and respect among people who visit the exhibit. They will learn how close Mississippi's and the United States' history relates to Spain's history. Visitors will realize how Mississippi and the United States are truly a woven tapestry of races, cultures and ethnic groups.

We are Mississippians. We are Americans. Most of us have diverse cultural backgrounds, which are often woven and fused with many other backgrounds and shared experiences. We all share common traits and values.

When we learn to appreciate and respect differences in our culture, then we open our minds to learn more about other cultures and races. Mississippians are eager to compete with the world and learn more about our international neighbors, but first we must understand and respect them.

This exhibit gives us the chance to cross borders and go beyond the limits of time to experience the beauty and spectacle of Spain during the period of our nation's birth. It is my hope that every student, every child, every adult, every Mississippian and those people beyond our borders will experience the Majesty of Spain.