

THE VERA LIST CENTER



ARE WE READY FOR A CABINET-LEVEL POSITION FOR CULTURE?

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Preface

The "culture wars" of the past two decades affirm an unfortunate truth about Americans and the arts: most people do not place art and artistic freedom high on their list of things that matter. Indeed, the right-wing attack on the National Endowment for the Arts and the campaign to censor or discredit progressive culture would not have proceeded as effectively without widespread public indifference to arts. The central questions of this debate are not about issues of free expression or the appropriateness of government support for the arts, but rather about the symbolic place of the arts in society at large: How can we get Americans to care about the arts? How can we communicate the importance of culture in American life? Who should be responsible for upholding these cultural values?

This occasional paper represents a refreshing approach to answering these important questions. Its central call—"Are We Ready for a Cabinet Level Position for Culture?"—is not simply an academic exercise. Sondra Myers, the force behind this question, has devoted a good part of her life to the study of practical solutions to the questions of democracy and cultural freedom. Myers is aware of how easy it is to distort and manipulate information and ideas about the arts. As such, she presses her panelists for honest opinions and even, at times, for pragmatic solutions. Most inquiries into the issue of government support for the arts are ineffective, hampered as they are by empty surveys or reasoning that is so idealistic that it is impractical. The frankness and intelligence of this paper suggest the rare instance where such interrogations can really matter.

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Sondra Farganis: Welcome to the Vera List Center for Art and Politics. I am Sondra Farganis, its director. The honor falls to me to introduce Sondra Myers, as it falls to her to introduce the panel. Many of us know her as the editor of *Democracy is a Discussion: Civic Engagement in Old and New Democracies*, as well as *Democracy is a Discussion II: The Challenges and Promise of a New Democratic Era*. Others know her as a world traveler and a world class consultant on international, cultural, and civic projects that stretch from Aspen to Johannesburg. Others, probably the majority in this room, know her as a friend of the arts. It is in all of these capacities that the Vera List Center invited her to plan and moderate this discussion on the state of the arts.

I would not be the first to make reference to the legitimate concern that Plato in the *Republic* has for the arts. He worries that artists distract us from the important issues at hand. He also worries that they inculcate patterns of thinking that make us question the received knowledge of the society. While we might not support his logic in banning the arts, we can certainly appreciate how on-target Plato was, and is, in seeing the social import of the arts. It is precisely their ability to challenge, bother, annoy, and push us to think that many of us, like Sondra Myers, find ourselves friends of the arts. Please join me in welcoming her and her panelists to this evening's discussion on the politics of the arts.

Sondra Myers: Thank you, Sondra. It's not by accident that we're both Sondras — we wanted to make it easier for you to remember us.

Culture, for better or worse, has entered the vocabulary of the American people. Whether to describe our artistic and intellectual pursuits or our beliefs and customs, we use the word freely — if not always accurately. That, in itself, marks a step forward in how we see the world, what we acknowledge as part of our public sphere — and how we define and describe our human existence. Tonight's symposium is about culture, as in the arts and humanities, and public policy in relation to it —but in all that we say and do here we cannot escape the culture, in the sociological/anthropological sense, that defines us as Americans and westerners living at the end of the twentieth century. Whether our actions speak louder than words, or vice versa, our actions and words reflect the culture we inhabit and, indeed, create.

So, back to making note of the fact that we now talk about culture. In the press, the culture wars are the hottest cultural topic and the National Endowment for the Arts the most frequently and vividly maligned scapegoat. Meantime, mayors and governors, corporate executives, urban developers and tourism planners have come to recognize that cultural life enriches the quality of their domains and enterprises, both economically and socially. And legislators fighting against public support for the arts, humanities and public broadcasting reflect not necessarily their hopeless philistinism or their puritanical piety, but their political expediency at a time when the voices of religious and political conservatism have great currency.

Perhaps it is the battles of the past ten years, and the desire of many of us to put them behind us as a rite of passage, that have made tonight's discussion possible and have opened up what appears to be the growing interest of foundations and think tanks to ponder the issue of culture and public policy. The research that will proliferate over the next ten years will, no doubt, lead to public policy about culture that acknowledges its value to a vibrant democratic society. Bill Ivey, chairman of the NEA, is already sounding optimistic. Soon after his appointment, he remarked to a *New York Times* reporter, "By the time I leave the chairmanship, the federal role in the arts should be equal to our role in the Department of Defense."

That statement prompted me to cut to the quick and title tonight's Discussion, "Are We Ready for a Cabinet-Level Position for Culture?" Although the cultural community has at least as much resistance to the idea as the political, I believe it is time we address that question head-on. At the very least it will improve our dialogue, because it will focus on what's next and not on what's passed.

If we were to study ways in which other critically important issues insinuated themselves onto the public agenda—education and the environment to mention two—we would perhaps take less pity on ourselves and show less contempt for elected officials than we do now. Some say the creation of the national endowments for the arts and humanities in the sixties was a sixties-thing to do. Perhaps so. But that does not necessarily suggest their demise in the year 2000. Their fate, and the prospect of a stronger presence for culture in public administrations in the future is, for the most part, in our hands—in the hands of the artists and intellectuals who create art and scholarship, and of the cultural institutions which preserve cultural artifacts and educate us to their wonders. We cannot dismiss the fact that while policy has been scant policy, and funding modest funding, the United States has moved into the highest prominence in the world of the arts and humanities.

The situation is worthy of serious historical, sociological, psychological and cultural research; and worthy, too, of a serious effort to move from here to there—to muse on and discuss what we do now for culture as a nation—and what we should do. Legal scholar Ronald Dworkin observes that [in a democracy] "telling it like it is means, to a point, telling it like it should be."

Our deliberations today, the research of scholars and, ultimately, the legislative actions of politicians will depend on how we see ourselves as a nation. What kind of society are we—and what kind do we aspire to be? What influence does the rest of the world have on our beliefs, tastes and public practices?

Former Montana Congressman Pat Williams, a champion of federal support for culture, put it as memorably and eloquently as anyone when he compared the siege against the National Endowment for the Arts with the threatened extinction of the spotted owl. He observed mournfully, "It's not about the spotted owl, it's about the habitat. And it's not about the arts, it's about the society." Indeed, our nation needs to support its culture more than culture needs its support, if we aspire to be a society that nurtures the spirit as well as the body. Who we are and who we should be as a society sets the scene for tonight's discussion of culture and public policy.

We have brought together four distinguished leaders—thinkers and actors in the cultural world, to give us their views on whether we are ready for a cabinet-level position for culture.

Lonnie Bunch is Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum for American History in Washington. He has curated numerous exhibitions on Afro-American history and written extensively on the role of museums in American society. Lonnie holds degrees from American University and is an adjunct professor of museum studies at The George Washington University.

Annie Cohen-Solal, author of *Sartre: A Life*, cultural historian and former cultural counselor to the French Embassy here in New York, is one of the leading international researchers and prognosticators on the arts in America. Annie's book on the history of the visual arts in America from 1850 to 1950 will be published by Knopf next year.

Frank Hodsoll is best known to us for his service as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts from 1981 to 1989. He is a speaker and advisor on the arts and arts education and served as co-chair of the 1998 American Assembly on the Arts and the Public Purpose. Frank, a county commissioner in Ouray County, Colorado, holds degrees from Yale, Cambridge and Stanford.

Clement Price is a professor of history at Rutgers University, Newark, and Director of the Rutgers Institute on Ethnicity, Culture and the Modern Experience. The author of many publications on Afro-American history and the development of modern American culture, Clement is also a community activist. He has served as chair of the New Jersey Council on the Arts and currently chairs the Fund for New Jersey. He has been a leading supporter of the revitalization of Newark.

And so we begin—with the title question, which I pose to all of you: Are we ready for a cabinet-level position for culture, Frank?

Frank Hodson: Thank you, Sondra. My brief answer is, I don't think so. And I need to give some reasons why I think that. First of all, I see Joanie Cherbo in the audience, who wrote an article in 1992 or thereabouts on why there ought to be a department of culture. And that was useful reading for me. She advanced some good arguments for such a position. One of them was to consolidate and make more effective many federal arts programs that are presently scattered through the federal bureaucracy. Another was to help formulate a national policy agenda. Another was to provide greater legitimacy to the nation's artistic heritage and practice. And another was to provide a central place for arts information and a focal point for arts education and leadership in international cultural exchanges.

Those are all good reasons, and I would be the first to agree they are not being done adequately today. However—and here comes the "but"—these legitimate arguments, I think, fail to take into sufficient account the downside of a central, dominant authority in culture. They fail, too, to recognize the nature of our federal system of government. Thirdly, they fail to account for the unique American tradition of supporting the arts. And fourthly—and this is new—they fail to take into account the nature of the new technology which will, in my view, become more and more central to the distribution of culture of all kinds. And finally, they fail to take into account the budgetary situation at the federal level.

Just briefly to amplify on that. Outside the field of preservation, I don't think there's any real evidence of a link between the presence of cultural "ministries" and cultural excellence. I don't find any real evidence that a cultural ministry results in greater appreciation of a greater variety of art by a greater number of people. I'm not talking about government agencies in general; I'm talking about ministries of culture. The fact, for example, that there are opera companies in virtually every little town in Germany has less to do, I would argue, with the fact that there was a funder or state government involved than it does with the tradition of classical music in Germany, starting in the schools and communities.

There is also some evidence that dominant funders can dominate, reducing opportunities for those outside, if you will, the traditional or avant-garde mainstream. The ancient Greeks had an interesting way of supporting theater, which Bob Brustein told me about. Their theater, which most people would argue was pretty excellent, at least the parts which have survived, was supported by a range of things: by the city-state of Athens; the people in the chorus, who were the wealthy patrons of the theater; and by the audience, who paid for tickets to come. That meant that no one aspect of the support system was dominant.

Secondly, on the federal system. Our federal system is really based on a division of powers among the nation, states and localities. Areas of intellectual activity—arts, humanities and science—have been left primarily to state and local initiative. And where federal initiatives have taken place, and I'm just speaking historically, they've been done at the "sub-cabinet level," and often in support of some other government function.

This is true of science as well. The National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health have billions of federal dollars. So does the Department of Defense, which funds a lot of science, and so does the Department of Energy. And EPA and NOAA (the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency) and others have hundreds of millions of dollars in science; and Education has science programs. None of these, except Education and Defense, are cabinet-level agencies, and they've come about in this intellectual area of science primarily to support either basic research or other aspects of the public purpose. My guess is that this pattern of funding in our country doesn't necessarily constrict money, but it does provide for a different, more diverse way of funding, in accordance with government missions. As for the arts—and Joanie's article mentions 200-plus programs at the federal level—they are supported by a wide range of federal offices—reflecting the American way.

Humanities is more difficult to characterize. I wrote in my notes here that it's a bit of an orphan. And while the science faculties of institutions of higher learning have had no trouble getting fairly substantial funding, humanities faculties have had a more difficult time.

Thirdly, the unique American tradition of supporting the arts and humanities has been one of primarily private support to particular institutions in particular localities, obviously accompanied by tax deductions. Ninety percent of annual arts and humanities funding comes from this source today—\$10 billion, roughly speaking. And the tax expenditures—in other words, the taxes foregone as a part of this—are the largest single component of federal arts and humanities support. The upside of this system is that no one dominates, and there is real personal loyalty to the particular projects and institutions. But the downside is that there is a dominance of those with resources versus the broader public interest. And the issue, of course, is who decides what the broader public interest is. Often it is a question of (I'm using all the pejorative terms) social engineering or pork barrel funding. In other words, there are downsides as well as pluses.

Fourthly, the new technology, the Internet, which is becoming increasingly important to almost everything that is done in the world today (and my own view is that it will be even more important as time goes along), has no direction, no support. It started as a Defense project, out of the Defense Advanced Research Program, but now it's an amorphous thing that no one controls. And no one who uses computers would ever want to control it or have support come forth from any one place. I would argue that this is going to be an increasingly important part of how culture gets transmitted—and that, again, cuts in the direction against any one source of support.

Finally, I would suggest that now is not the right time for a cultural ministry. Excepting the mandatory programs such as Social Security and Medicare, the feds have been shrinking since the Carter administration. Discretionary programs have been going down in real terms since the Carter administration when some of these budgetary constraints first came to light. And politically, as a practical matter, there is no appetite on the part of either Republicans or Democrats to add new structures or to spend additional money. So my own view is that I don't think a cultural ministry is practical: the downsides outweigh the upsides today.

SM: Thanks, Frank. I hope that if this did come to pass, it would be called a "department," like our other "ministries."

Lonnie, how about you? Do you think we're ready for a cultural department?

Lonnie Bunch: Clearly, as a nation, we aren't ready for a cultural department. Frank has outlined a lot of the reasons why. For me, there are two central reasons why we're not ready. I spent all day today fighting Congress, the Administration and the Smithsonian's bureaucracy to get an exhibition up. And I realized that I'm not sure I want to live in a cultural community where the bureaucracy that we now have gets expanded in a way that makes it more difficult to do the work we want to do as historians and people who interpret culture. But even more important than that, I think, is the fear of an official culture, the fear of what happens when a czar—a cultural czar—takes over. There is a fear that funding of programs through a cultural czar may lead to mediocrity or to an official culture that won't be as flexible and diverse and alive as we would like it to be.

But I would argue, ultimately, that even though the time is not right for a cabinet-level position, there are strong reasons why we *should* have one. And I would argue strongly that because the time isn't right, it doesn't mean that the time is not right to work in that direction. It's important on several levels. First of all, as an historian, I agree with Frank that the humanities *are* orphans. But it seems to me that one of the things that's missing is real leadership—not just coordination and consolidation of a variety of programs, but real leadership in the cultural community, leadership that can do many things, that can continue to deconstruct and analyze what we do. And I believe that while we take great satisfaction in the fact that the number of visitors is up in the museums, while we take great satisfaction that large percentages of the population are touched by culture, when we really look, we see that support is not very deep. And what the studies suggest is that many of the people who visit museums really don't support them or understand why it's essential to support the kind of research and work that goes on in cultural institutions. I would argue that the leadership that is needed is not just deconstructive; it has to provide the kind of cabinet-level discussion for the broad range of cultural policies that are out there. Whether the issue is stolen property or Nazi art, or archeological treasures taken from

Mali, or issues of repatriation, issues of rights on the Web, or heritage and tourism. In essence, there are an awful lot of cultural issues that do not get the kind of attention they deserve because there is a lack of leadership at the cabinet level.

Also, I think it's important that at a cabinet level you have an entity and an individual who can stand up and articulate in the appropriate places why it's important to do the kind of work we do. I'm always struck by how the Smithsonian doesn't do a very good job of dealing with Congress or dealing with the Administration when we are criticized for something like the controversial Enola Gay exhibition. But part of it is that we need someone to provide leadership. Perhaps it ought to come from within, but there really was no one to stand up when the Smithsonian was getting attacked—whether it was from the Hill or within the Administration—to say, "This is why we do this work. This is what the Smithsonian should be about." I think it's important to have such an individual.

I would also argue that it's important to have, or at the very least to think about having, a cabinet-level position for several other reasons. One is to make decisions about the kind of research and scholarship that needs to go on in particular fields. If you look at what museums and institutions do now, we do a lot of serious work on a variety of content. We look at a subject, whether it's art history or African American history, and we explore it very well. What we don't do is a good enough job of looking at the profession, exploring the issues of the exhibition medium, looking at the kinds of statistics that help us understand who comes to museums and why. One of the things I'm struck by in countries that have ministries of culture is that they also have a body of critical literature that provides guidance and support to institutions and permits them to do the work they want to do.

Ultimately, I would argue that while the country is not ready, it doesn't mean that we—those who support the arts and culture—shouldn't help push, define and clarify what a cabinet position for culture would do. I, for one, would be very supportive of those endeavors.

SM: Thanks, Lonnie. Now, Annie, our honorary American, what do you think?

Annie Cohen-Solal: It's difficult to reconcile the fact that you don't have a minister of culture in this country with the fact that we come to this place and see such wonderful art on the walls. It's something I've never seen anywhere—especially not in France. So my problem is that here you have a system of cultural policy that is more or less the opposite of the French one. Nonetheless, the system produces something very active, something very positive, that the French are very jealous of. Especially in the visual arts. You know, everybody is talking these days about the 20th century as being the American century.

The book I am preparing attempts to explain what made the Americans term the 20th century the American century in the visual arts. Mid-19th century American painters were laughed at when they came to Paris. They looked like absolute peasants, the Hudson River School and others. Within half a century, New York had become the center of the visual arts. What are the elements that turned this country into the center of the visual arts? There are many, many wonderful factors that made it possible—among them, women patrons, the leftist radicals, the Native American culture and the move west, the WPA period with the FDR public policy in the arts. And something which I have discovered about the Museum of Modern Art—the way the Modern was created in 1929. It was a combination of three wonderful things: three women patrons—Abby Rockefeller and her friends—who went to Paul Sachs (who was teaching museum history at Harvard) who came from the German Jewish tradition. And so there was the money of the women patrons and the expertise of the German Jewish intellectuals. And then they asked Paul Sachs whom he could suggest to open a modern art museum. And immediately he said, Alfred Barr. Alfred Barr was 27 years old. He went to meet with Abbey Rockefeller in July 1929. Five months later the first show opened at the Modern, handled by a guy who was 27 years old! Within 10 years, Alfred Barr would go through Europe and screen the best of the best and bring it back to New York. You would never find that in Europe. I think this is the genius of America—the expertise of some people, the money of some others, and the guts of still others, joining forces to create something new. Another example is gallery owner Leo Castelli, who is turning 92 years old now. Castelli, already an art dealer, arrived in New York for the first time in 1941, and he had been all through Europe. He saw the collection of Alfred Barr at the Modern and said, "Well, this is an encyclopedia of contemporary European art!" He said no country in Europe could do that. Barr could create the collection, including the Russian Futurists, the German Expressionists and the French Surrealists, because of all the support he had. And already, New York in 1941 functioned like a pan-European country, integrating something that the European countries could not integrate.

My position is a bit different from all of you because I came here in order to deal with French culture in this country, and my first role was comparable to that of an anthropologist going to see an African tribe. As I was watching you all, I discovered things that were very, very weird to me. The first thing I found that was weird was when Jasper Johns was invited to the White House in September of 1990 to get a medal—you know in France we get lots of medals—and Bush was coming back from Australia, and the plane was delayed, and Jasper Johns said to me, "Well, if he's replaced by Dan Quayle, I'm not going. So I felt there were enemies—enemy camps—and the artists and the politicians don't always belong to the same camp. That was the first experience that made me aware of that.

Another weird thing was how scattered the direction is; that's one of the many battles I had the pleasure of fighting with Sondra. One day, it was actually during the same period, Sondra invited me to a meeting of cultural advisors to the governors of the United States who were meeting in Washington, DC, to put together an agenda on how to work together. I mentioned it to John Frohnmeyer, the Chairman of the NEA who succeeded Frank [Hodsoll]. And he was not even aware of it. I found that weird, too. So, I invited him to join the meeting of all cultural advisors from the U.S.!

Also, it's difficult for us to understand Puritanism in this country. Because in France, the artist has the moral right—and it's not only a right, it's a duty—to stand in front of the State. Even though the State supports the artist, the artist stands in front of the State and accuses the State. That's what the artist is expected to do; the ethics of subversion is very strong with us. And so I was very surprised by the compartmentalization I saw—not only between the NEA and the cultural advisors, but also between the academic and cultural communities.

Something else very strange in the U.S. is the way you look at Europe. It swings between an inferiority complex and a superiority complex, and doesn't really find a good balance. Why is it so that African American artists of real American culture—jazz and so on—have never been supported as well here as they are in France? I remember, for example, the funeral service for Miles Davis. The French minister of culture asked me to speak on his behalf, and he had written something which really moved me very much. Davis had said, "when I went to France in 1946, it was the first time in my life that I felt what it was to be treated like a human being." Why do you reject your own cultural product—the real American cultural product—and look at Europe as something better? Why do people make such a fuss about the little Michaelangelo statue that was on Fifth Avenue in front of the French embassy and not as much about Miles Davis? Why is it so that everything from Europe should be better than what has been produced in the United States?

Last, when I served here as cultural counselor and observed your culture—as an anthropologist would—I felt how lucky I was to observe the dynamism of your museums. It's incredible! But also in my position, when I tried being a cultural policy maker, I saw how difficult it was. I think cultural policy may not be for me. So I think there are two issues here. The first issue is the legitimacy of culture in the United States. The second, for me, has much more to do with the openness of American culture to foreign cultures. And I think that the two issues are linked. Because a strong culture is an open culture. That's more about culture, of course, than cultural policy.

Here's an incident that touches on policy. The American Center in Paris has been closed. It was a very vital place. When it was on Boulevard Raspail in Montparnasse, everybody went there. And we could learn "American." And a lot of American artists came. Then the Center moved to another place—into a beautiful Frank Gehry building. And because of a variety of practical problems, largely financial—the building was too expensive—it had to be closed. I asked the chairman of the board why, and he said he had tried to bring in the Ambassador, Pamela Harriman, but she was not ready to help. What they really wanted from her was her commitment of support. That's why I completely agree with you, Lonnie, that cultural leadership would be a big help.

SM: Thanks, Annie. Clement, are we ready for a cabinet position for culture?

Clement Price: I'm troubled by the prospect of a cabinet-level position for culture. First of all, I think it's an overreaction to the culture wars, which I've argued are not so much wars as an ongoing discourse or debate—usually between academics and advocates for culture—people safely ensconced in the middle class. We Americans have been fighting that battle for the longest time, as well we should. So before we consider the establishment of a cabinet position for culture as a very important objective, I think we should historicize the wars. They have changed. Some of the victors are now vanquished, and the scholarship has certainly improved to the point that those who argue that there was a single American culture have been successfully challenged.

My other worry has to do with the "who" who might be in support. Who constitutes this group that might be ready for, or in favor of, a cabinet-level position? I suspect it would be those who represent the bigger art centers; I suspect it would be those who are now located in major American urban centers; who have felt the wrath of the sunbelt and of the new conservative coalition that has taken shape over the last 30 years. The group that would probably oppose—for reasons that Frank Hodson stated so well—a cabinet-level position, would probably be those who see this in many ways as a European construction; that is to say, that our culture is so diverse and our culture is so unlike Europe, that we would venture down a rather dangerous path if we gave to one cabinet officer and his or her staff the responsibility of articulating on behalf of American culture. Actually, I agree with those conservatives who argue that that might be an elitist approach to conceptualizing and promoting culture. I'm of the opinion that there are several cultures in America and that they have been, on occasion, in conflict. One of the reasons why jazz artists, in the main, were not recognized as artists until very recently, was because of race. And race is a very important part of America's culture wars—in fact, in many ways, race might *drive* a significant part of the culture wars.

The other thing which concerns me about the cabinet position for culture is that our culture is increasingly being marketed as a form of entertainment. And I think that this minister, or this cabinet position, would ultimately come to represent the more corporate-connected parts of American culture. And I wonder about that. I quipped with my dear friend and colleague, Lonnie Bunch, that if there were to be a cabinet [post], I would vote for Ray Charles as the first Secretary. And Lonnie said Eartha Kitt. And we laughed back and forth, and then we stopped laughing because I think we both realized that we would want to make sure that this cabinet position and the individual who held it would speak to the *variety* of cultures represented in America. We Americans, over the course of what has been dubbed—I think erroneously—the American century, have tried to wean ourselves away from what is perceived as European culture. I think we have come to grips with the fact that our culture—what is distinctly American—really comes from the depths of our society, not from the top of the society.

So I'm not persuaded that the various elements of American society are calling for a cabinet position, number one. Number two, I think this, to some extent, represents an overreaction to the culture wars—which, quite frankly, I hope will continue to be waged—because that's the nature of American society. Indeed, we *should* do battle, to an extent, over what our past has made of our culture.

SM: Thank you, Clement. I am interested in what I sense is a suspicion of the cabinet position for culture by cultural advocates, quite different from what is happening in other policy realms. I don't share the fear of such elevated status, but I am interested in knowing how strong it is in many quarters.

Now let's expand the discussion.

Comment from Audience: I fear that the interaction of government on the cabinet level would restrict access to culture and dictate and limit its contents. Would you comment?

SM: It is my impression that when the public sector gets involved, the hope and the intention are that the enterprise becomes *more* accessible to people of all economic classes rather than less so. And certainly there would be greater access to culture if there were more support, with or without a cabinet-level position. Frank, do you want to answer?

FH: I would like to add to that. There's no question that culture is as important as anything that happens in our society. But the difference is that in the case of most cabinet departments, it's something that government was required to do, whereas culture exists independently. I would argue that culture—its artifacts, its fashions, its customs—provides the context for everything we do—as a society and in relation to other societies. Culture happens everyday, without our knowing that it's happening, and it affects everything we do. So in that sense, it is extraordinarily important. Exactly what government does to help or hurt it—that's a separate issue.

Comment from Audience: We have lots of art, but no policy that encourages it. What would the cabinet secretary for culture do? Act as a facilitator? An administrator? What is the job description?

SM: Well, I don't think we can give the job description tonight, although we could all work on it. But I would say that you should look to other cabinet-level positions for the kind of skills that person should have and the things she or he should do. Obviously, the person would be appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, which means he or she couldn't be a rank partisan, which would preclude the acceptance of both camps. I think that, by and large, most cabinet appointments have been fairly worthy of respect by Americans. I think it's fair to say that people of stature and ability have most often been chosen; and so I would expect that the same kinds of qualifications would be looked for if we reach the point that we're looking for a cabinet-level position for culture. And, obviously, the person would be expected to have expertise in the arts and humanities.

CP: And that's what worries me. Because I don't think there's a proper fit between culture, creativity in the arts, and what has become of cabinet positions. A cabinet position, as I see it, is first of all a bully pulpit. And, as I suggested, there are so many cultural strains in the country, I can't imagine one person speaking adequately to all of them. Secondly, cabinet officers are not supposed to make mistakes. Those of us who know something about culture and the arts know that mistakes are some of what drives creativity. And finally, the cabinet officer is to make the President and the Administration look very, very good—which really scares me—given the fact that the office of the presidency is so susceptible to getting the kind of person who might not be a good leader.

LB: I hate to disagree with Clem, but it seems to me one of the things we have to take into consideration when we talk about a cabinet-level position is structure. We're talking about people who bring expertise in a variety of areas of culture, who get to sit around the table with the secretary, to begin to shape and make decisions about cultural policy. So I don't think you're talking about one individual. But I do think it's important to realize that everything we've said today has really raised this question of the naiveté of many of us in terms of what we expected the NEA and the NEH to do. And we expected these panels to be somehow free of politics, and they never have been. And never will be. The key, it seems to me, is to recognize that and to move accordingly. And, I would argue, recognizing and moving accordingly means thinking about the kinds of structures as well as individuals that would lead to a secretary of culture. That is not just a reaction to what has happened over the last five years, it's a careful reading of what's happened over the last 30 years. And I think it really points out that we're going to face the same kinds of issues as in the past—because, Clement, you're absolutely right: that is the way of life in this country. But I think a ministry, a secretary of culture with the requisite structure, would provide an effective antidote.

Comment from Audience: Let's go back in time. During the Depression we really had a model of what could be done. And if you look at it closely, you can see there was enough for everybody. There was a lot of art. There was even a circus—a WPA circus. There were meetings here at The New School on art and culture. But I think it's the context that's important. If we get a secretary and we don't have a broad cultural movement, then we have nothing. We would probably be better off without one. And my concern is that people who are interested in culture are not willing to fight. Change has never come about without a lot of struggle—and these cultural experts dive under the table. Once we develop, stiffen our own backbones, and believe that it's something to fight for—and something to live for—then you'll see that we'll do it.

AC-S: Not everything is rosy in France. I like the fact that you mention the WPA program. It was a unique experience in this country. One of the things that puzzles me, though, is that by sticking to a cabinet-level position for culture, you are still looking at a European model. You're still looking for something. And you're still glued to this model from abroad, which is supposedly beautiful. I think the WPA program was a truly American program, born from need. I was reading the speeches of Holger Cahill, who was in charge of the WPA. He was fantastic. The WPA was really building an American art. So he went all over the country saying, "What is American art?" and really developing ideas with people from different states. I think, perhaps, that if you could express yourselves differently, it might be constructive to ask, "What needs to be improved? What has to be improved? What in the cultural field in the United States is not going right?"

In France, we have a budget for culture that is 1% of the total national budget. And it increases every year, more than the national budget does. We have more than \$7.5 billion for culture. And altogether, public and private money, we have ten times more per citizen in France than you have in the United States. But that doesn't mean that we produce great artists in France these days—we do not. And so the legitimate question for me would be, "Is strong public support for the arts a guarantee of great creativity?" And I don't think they necessarily go together. So, for me, the question should be handled differently. What I think you are really worried about is the legitimacy of culture in this country. I think that's what your problem is. And it is *your* culture: Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans. It is putting together all these things and forgetting about the European model. There is a wonderful book by Neal Harris about the making of the American artist. He explains that Protestant ministers were the ones who really thought of art as coming from Europe and art being a synonym for pleasure and horrible things like that. Then, when America became an industrialized nation, urban clergy needed to pull more people into their congregations. So they changed their speeches about art. And that's how art started to enter a bit more into American life. This was around 1850 or 1860. All in all, I think that you need to go back to your history and try to understand what is distinctly yours, and not borrow a model from outside.

SM: Thank you. We're coming toward the end of this discussion. I'd like to take some quick comments from the floor and then give our panel the chance for a last word before we adjourn.

Comment from Audience: Whether or not we have a cabinet-level position for culture, what are your views on federal support for culture?

CP: I would increase the funding level. And I would also, as far as the NEA is concerned, restore funding to individual artists. I don't think the NEA and its infrastructure is broken. It's underfunded.

FH: As usual, I'm going to agree with Clem. I think you could quadruple, or maybe quintuple, the amount of money that NEA spends, and you would have no danger, whatsoever, of dominating culture. And money is needed to put to good use. We should all try to make that happen. Indeed, if there were a department of culture, I think it would have many of the attributes of the NEA and some of the other programs that exist, as well as some new ones. Having said that, I don't think it would make that much difference. I have spent most of my life in the federal government, in a variety of different departments, and I have seen cabinet departments totally ignored. It all depends on whether or not the secretary has a relationship with the President and key congressional people. It's a political system. Any government operation is a political system. I got along okay because I knew Ronald Reagan and I could go into the White House whenever I needed to, not because I was the Chairman of the NEA, but because of our relationship. I could

have been a "Secretary of the Arts," and if I didn't have a relationship with the White House and some of the key people in Congress, I would have been a total disaster. The point I'm making is that it's the political connection. It doesn't make a hoot of difference whether you're the head of a department or an office.

I know some National Science Foundation directors who were enormously influential and others who had no influence at all. And so the question then becomes, does going for departmental status put things on the table that actually may defeat what I think is the most important thing — having more money for the arts and the individual artists? And number two, if there were to be such a position, it should be a job and department that can attract people, not just the head of it, but also the kinds of peer panels and the other things that go with it, that will be respected in the artistic community and the political community, and in the larger American community, so that we can get some good work done. That's the most important thing.

Comment from Audience: I've been working in the arts for years now. First of all, I would like to hear some comments about artists. Number two, I'm a little bit concerned. I respect and feel all the myriad concerns that have been expressed here—everything from corporate interests, political power, race and censorship. And it seems that the core issues are funding and money and the control of it. Just last month I had two extraordinary experiences: one, I was invited to the White House to speak on some of these very issues of cultural policy; and I was also invited by the government of Taiwan, their cultural ministry, to visit and look at what they're doing and how they do it. And I bring up those two invitations, those extraordinary experiences, because they taught me—particularly the visit to Taiwan—that funding is only a very small part of what they do. And as a cultural practitioner, what I worry about are the conditions of leadership that Lonnie suggested.

For example, in my work organizing festivals, nobody in the arts community is aggressive in the realm of visas and immigration. We have a \$180 million art facility. Our congressman regularly brings people to that facility to show off the work that we do. I flew to Washington to meet with him, and I said, "Are you out of your mind?" I said, "We bring artists to the Center from all over the world, especially Africa. And you come and show it off, and yet I have to fight with the Immigration office to get these folks here. When I do get them here, do you realize that our government requires them to pay 30% of the fee that I give them in taxes?" What sense does it make when an artist from Mozambique, the poorest nation in Africa, comes here and gets paid \$30,000 and then has to pay \$10,000 in taxes to the U.S. government? We need someone to deal with these issues.

I also want somebody to deal with issues of art education. And I'm not just talking about children. Adults need art education. University level college students need art education. To me, funding and grant making are a very small and insignificant part of the state of the arts. If we artists, practitioners, and advocates don't do something, if we don't get our backbones up and do something about these issues ourselves, the politicians are going to do it for us. They will create their own policy, whether it's written, co-signed, codified, or not, and will just take over the arts, period. And we will be left out in the cold. So if we don't define what cultural policy is, if we don't define what it is we need, somebody else will do it for us.

SM: Thank you.

Comment from Audience: We might look at Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky, and his position as champion of poetry. Although we do have many kinds of cultures in America, we don't have any one person who is a lightning rod to help draw attention to culture and to encourage excellence. Perhaps that's a model that would work.

Question from Audience: How secure are our current cultural agencies?

FH: I'm not sure I'm totally current at this point. But my impression is that the danger to the endowment, both endowments, Humanities as well as Arts, is largely past for the moment. The leadership in the House of Representatives is not taking this on in a major way, like they were last year when they lost on the Floor. It's not to say there are no battles, but I think the major problem is not there at the moment. That's my own personal view.

LB: For me, the issue is leadership and legitimacy. I think it is a question of being proactive and creating a structure—creating a system—that allows us to bring together the variety of issues and positions that are out there; that allows us, in a very political sense, to be effective political beings who can influence members of Congress the way we need to. And ultimately, even though we may be critical of many of the cabinet choices, the fact of a cabinet-level position is meaningful. One thing creating the position of Secretary of Education did, was to legitimize, for millions of people, the importance of education. I would argue that while those of us in this room who live and breathe culture on some level every day see it as something that everybody cares about, it isn't true. And I really believe that having a secretary of culture or cultural affairs would allow us to legitimize our commitment to culture for the American people. It is our hope that they will become the supporters we need, and will exert the necessary political pressure to get the financial support that we need.

SM: Annie?

AC-S: I feel like I have taken part in a very private family discussion. You know, it is truly an American problem. Those of us from abroad cannot really help, but only watch and say what we see from the outside. I benefit from French culture, from my French passport, and so I'm lucky enough. But I have also benefited from a lot of things in this country, which I am very grateful that you showed me. I think the problem of the legitimacy of your culture should be resolved and that culture in the U.S. should not be too linked with the European model. And that will happen—slowly. Because we *are* seeing changes. And I think strong leadership is essential to create broad-based recognition of this legitimacy. And you will meet, too, another problem, which is much more important to me—that is the openness of American culture, and how American culture deals with other cultures. Because you really must face this issue. The fear of American cultural hegemony is palpable in Europe and around the world. We need a good international discussion of it.

If the 19th century belonged to Europe, and the 20th century belongs to America, the 21st will belong to the world. So I'm going to leave you with your private affairs. I'm going to make an appointment for the year 2010 to see what has happened. I really believe in this country a lot—and I think the tensions discussed here are very positive, because you can express them.

SM: Thank you, Annie. Frank.

FH: I'd just like to make a couple of comments. First of all, the idea of having an endowment that would be separate from annual appropriations is something that a number of states are already trying. Missouri was the first of them, and then I think Nebraska has gotten into it. And Colorado, and a number of others. The jury is out as to whether these devices will attract, in addition to the state and public money, enough other funding to be viable over a long period of time. At the national level, it would take a huge amount of money in corpus to produce an endowment of \$150 million or \$200 million a year. But as long as you have annual appropriations, then politics will be a part of it. In any case, there are some current efforts at establishing private endowments. It will be interesting to see whether they succeed.

I was quite taken with the gentleman in the back who talked about the poet laureate. I was there when we invented the title, "Poet Laureate"; it was "Consultant to the Library of Congress for Poetry" before that—a somewhat infelicitous title—certainly not poetic. But to be frank with you, if you look at the kinds of poets—whether a consultant or a poet laureate—and if you look at some of the English poet laureates, it makes no difference what the title is. Robert Pinsky is fantastic! Not just as a poet and a translator of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. He's just a great spokesman for poetry. I don't know anybody else like him. But I can think of other poets who would not be as good in that position. Still, it's an interesting idea.

And finally, I guess I have to admit to my own predilection for messiness. I'm very worried about the words "cultural policy," whether created by a department or an endowment or some other device. A policy implies that there is some *authority* for the policy. And policy is also a singular word; but policies can be invented by many different people. I also worry that if there is a policy, it will be outdated before it's enunciated. Because the political system often does that as a matter of course, in almost every subject. So, bottom line, I'm for messy *policies* that allow a lots of different flowers to bloom, that allow a lot of different centers to come about, and that allow them to fail, too. In the long run, while very inefficient, I think the world would be better off with that "messiness."

SM: Thank you, Frank. And thank all of you in the audience for coming. I suppose you all knew that we wouldn't resolve this question tonight. But I hope that you will go away thinking more about the question, and discussing it with your colleagues and friends. Please join me now in thanking the members of this wonderful panel for expressing their views.



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