Fig. 2.1 *The Navy Needs You* (1917), poster by James Montgomery Flagg. Courtesy of Department of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. James Montgomery Flagg (1877–1960) was appointed Military Artist for New York State during World War I. He made about fifty posters for the United States government.

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Culture and the State in America

During 1989–90 the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) underwent a fierce attack because it indirectly funded allegedly anti-Christian work by Andres Serrano and a Robert Mapplethorpe photographic exhibition considered pornographic by some.* In 1991 a revisionist, didactic display of Western art at the National Museum of American Art (part of the Smithsonian Institution) aroused congressional ire, yet that latter episode now seems, in retrospect, a fairly calm fracas compared with the controversy generated in 1994–95 by "The Last Act," a long-planned exhibition concerning the end of World War II in the Pacific that was canceled by the Secretary of the Smithsonian because of immense political pressure and adverse publicity emanating from veterans' organizations and from Capitol Hill.

Throughout 1995 those who hoped to eliminate entirely the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and NEA, the Institute of Museum Services, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and to reduce

* This essay was delivered as the presidential address at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians in Chicago, March 29, 1996.

support for the National Trust for Historic Preservation did not succeed, although they did achieve devastating budgetary cuts. Moreover, Speaker Newt Gingrich insisted in a two-page essay in *Time* magazine that "removing cultural funding from the federal budget ultimately will improve the arts and the country."[1]

All of these controversies and attacks, taken together, have had me wondering for years why it is that most nations in the world have a ministry of culture in some form, whereas the United States does not. Indeed, the very notion seems politically inconceivable in this country. It has actually been proposed from time to time, most notably in 1936–38 (offered in Congress during Franklin Roosevelt's second term as the Coffee–Pepper bill), but each time abortively.[2] It has been considered and rejected by several presidential administrations. Comparative investigation of state support for cultural projects, examined in historical perspective, provides grist for the mill of anyone inclined toward a belief in American exceptionalism, by which I mean difference, not superiority.[3]

The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to examine, in several different ways, the development of a historical context that has shaped contemporary relationships between government and culture in the United States along with contested attitudes concerning those relationships. I am persuaded that our controversies (as well as our current options) cannot be understood without historical perspective.

As a historian who entered the profession in the mid-1960s, my own views on this subject have been formed by essential legislation and events that occurred in 1965, a year that seems to me the pivotal turning point (in a positive sense) for the relationship between government and culture in the United States. I personally do not believe that the federal government should have or seek a national cultural policy in the French sense, meaning a specific agenda for a ministry of culture and related agencies determined in a highly centralized fashion.[4] I do, however, believe in governmental funding at all levels, sometimes on a collaborative basis, for cultural programs and institutions of many different sorts. Although I certainly cherish and applaud support from foundations, corporations, and private individuals, there are cultural imperatives, ranging from preservation to scholarly innovation, that will be achieved only with encouragement and help from the state. Although he carries the idea to an extremist conclusion that I do not share, I am intrigued by an assertion once made by the philosopher Horace Kallen: "There are human capacities which it is the function of the state to liberate and to protect in growth; and the failure of the state as a government to accomplish this automatically makes for its abolition."[5]

Complexities, Ironies, and Anomalies

Numerous complexities, ironies, and historical anomalies are evident in the relationship between government and culture in the United States. Three of them seem especially noteworthy. First, it has not simply been persons uninterested in cultural programs and those with a reflexive distrust of federal expansion who oppose government support for culture in the United States. To be sure, such conservative politicians as congressmen George A. Dondero of Michigan, H. R. Gross of Iowa, and Howard W. Smith of Virginia were frequent and formidable opponents. When legislation creating the two endowments neared passage in 1965, it was the irrepressible Representative Gross who offered an amendment that would have expanded the definitional scope of arts activity to include belly dancing, baseball, football, golf, tennis, squash, pinochle, and poker.[6]

A year later, when the Historic Preservation Act moved haltingly toward approval, Representative Craig Hosmer of California presented a comic version of the time-honored argument in opposition, using Al Capp's America as his point of reference. "Let us keep the hands of Washington, its resources, and its politics out of the arena of local historical interest," he declared. "In short, if Jubilation T. Cornpone's birthplace is to be preserved, Dogpatch should do it."[7]

Gross and Hosmer provide familiar voices of protest. Much less expected, however, is the opposition, mainly before 1965 to be sure, of such creative figures in American culture as Edward Hopper and Thomas Hart Benton, Duke Ellington and George Jean Nathan, Gilbert Seldes and John Cheever.[8] The painter John Sloan said that he would welcome a ministry of culture because then he would know where the enemy was. And in 1962 Russell Lynes, a widely read cultural observer, warned that

> those who administer the subsidies first must decide what is art and what is not art, and they will have to draw the line between the "popular" arts and the "serious" arts, a distinction that is increasingly difficult to define. . . . Having decided what is serious, it will follow that those who dispense the funds will also decide what is safe . . . able to be defended with reasonable equanimity before a Congressional committee.[9]

From a historian's perspective, then, there really has been an astonishing reversal. We tend to forget that in 1964–65, when NEA was being hesitantly created, some of the most prestigious artists, art critics, and arts institutions felt suspicious of politicians and believed that they had more to lose than to gain from any involvement in the political process. Three decades later that

pattern of mistrust has been turned inside out. Now it is numerous politicians who regard artists and arts organizations as tainted and unreliable. Consequently the former feel that they have much to lose if they endorse government backing of cultural programs.

A second anomaly worthy of attention arises from the fact that the United States actually does not lag behind all other industrialized countries in *every* respect where preserving the national heritage and environmental culture are concerned. We were the very first to set aside large and spectacular natural areas as national parks, a precedent followed by Canada and eventually by other countries.[10] Moreover, the United States created a precedent in 1917–18 when it became the first nation to allow federal tax deductions for cultural gifts to museums and nonprofit cultural organizations. The pertinent legislation has been altered several times since then, sometimes in ways that seem inconsistent to the point of being bizarre, but the operative principle has been an immense boon to cultural institutions. Moreover, the principle has become increasingly attractive to quite a few European countries during the past decade or so.[11]

A third complexity verges upon anomaly in the eyes of some, but is not widely or well understood. In accord with our commitment to a federal system of government, we have had since the early 1960s state agencies for the arts, and a network of state humanities councils since the mid-1970s. Their existence is reasonably well known to scholars, to nonprofit organizations such as local historical societies, and to civic leaders. Less familiar, though, are the quite separate state offices of "cultural affairs" (in some but not all states) that frequently have as their primary mission the promotion of tourism and related commercial activities within the state. Quite a few of these agencies, however, have been created in recent decades to do at the state level, and with little or no controversy, what many Americans apparently mistrust at the national level. In North Carolina the Department of Cultural Resources was the first such cabinet-level entity to be established in any of the United States. It emerged from the State Government Reorganization Act of 1971 as the Department of Art, Culture, and History. Its name was changed to the present designation a few years later.

The legislature of West Virginia created a Division of Culture and History in 1977 that includes five sections: Archives and History, Historic Preservation, Arts and Humanities, Museums, and an administrative unit. The state museums of New Mexico are run by the Office of Cultural Affairs. In Iowa the Cultural Affairs Advisory Council's mission is to advise the director of the Department of Cultural Affairs on "how best to increase the incorporation of cultural activities as valued and integral components of everyday living in Iowa." Wyoming now has a Division of Cultural

Resources, and in Hawaii the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts prepares programs designed to promote and stimulate participation in the arts, culture, and humanities.

As more American states create such governmental departments and programs, the process suggests a gradual, almost evolutionary (rather than revolutionary) departure from the long-standing preference for leaving to private and local groups the determination of decisions affecting the creation and conduct of cultural institutions. It has to be acknowledged, however, that in some states these bureaus cooperate harmoniously with the state arts and humanities councils, while in others a sense of rivalry exists; in a few the bureaus keep one eye nervously on the state legislature and the other warily on the arts and humanities councils that really ought to be their natural allies.

Thoughts on Not Having a National Cultural Policy

At the end of the 1960s UNESCO mobilized in Monaco a Round-Table Meeting on Cultural Policies and commissioned a series of booklets about state cultural programs in diverse nations of the world. The United States paper that was prepared for presentation in Monaco opened with this categorical yet somewhat enigmatic statement: "The United States has no official cultural position, either public or private." The author of the American booklet that resulted, Charles C. Mark, called his opening chapter "Cultural Policy within the Federal Framework" and offered this explanatory definition:

> The United States cultural policy at this time is the deliberate encouragement of multiple cultural forces in keeping with the pluralistic traditions of the nation, restricting the federal contribution to that of a minor financial role, and a major role as imaginative leader and partner, and the central focus of national cultural needs.[12]

Simultaneously, Roger Stevens, the first chairman of NEA (1965–69), declared that his agency did not have a cultural policy as such, and his successor, Nancy Hanks, reiterated that position. By the autumn of 1977, however, spokesmen for the Carter administration asserted that by means of special task forces in tandem with state and national conferences, a cultural policy for America would be forthcoming. The following year Joan Mondale led a concerted effort to activate the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, which had been inert since its legislative creation in 1965. One of the council's first responsibilities would be to review "the arts and cultural policy of the United States."[13]

Ambivalence and uncertainties ensued, though. In 1980 Representative Sidney R. Yates of Chicago, chairman of the House Appropriations Sub-

committee on Interior and Related Agencies, requested a full-scale review of both NEH and NEA operations. The report that emerged more than eight months later concluded that NEA had failed to "develop and promote a national policy for the arts." When Yates called for clarification of NEA's objectives, its chairman, Livingston Biddle, was distressed on the grounds that compliance would require him to become a "cultural czar" and exercise control, a role highly inappropriate in a democratic society. After two intense days of hearings, Congressman Yates shelved the committee report and did not subsequently mention the need for a national cultural policy. Former Congressman Thomas J. Downey puts it this way, semifacetiously: "We have a cultural policy by the seat of our pants. We do it ad hoc."[14]

I am persuaded that what emerged during the Carter years—namely, the desire by a few people to articulate a national cultural policy—represented an aberration, albeit a recurrent one in the American past. For the most part we have not had such a policy because it seemed inappropriate in such a heterogeneous society as well as a potential flashpoint in the view of many political leaders. (The 1965 legislation creating the two endowments explicitly advocated "a broadly conceived national policy of *support* for the humanities and the arts. . . ." [my italics].) Ever since the administration of John F. Kennedy, despite very significant changes in the visibility of cultural activities in public life, it has remained essentially inexpedient or imprudent to advocate a full-blown national cultural policy.[15]

A notable exception to that generalization, however, involves Nelson A. Rockefeller, a man who once remarked that "it takes courage to vote for culture when you're in public life." Rockefeller remained a staunch advocate of government support for culture. New York created the first state council on the arts in 1960, a major precedent, during Rockefeller's first term as governor, and not by happenstance. Nancy Hanks served her apprenticeship as an arts administrator when Rockefeller hired her as a member of his advisory staff.[16] It has not been adequately recognized that John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard M. Nixon all accepted the idea of federal support for culture rather reluctantly because Nelson Rockefeller loomed as a potential threat for the presidency. Political consultants warned them that the active governmental role envisioned by Rockefeller appealed to an increasing number of major campaign contributors and influential local elites as well as voters. That was the advice given to Nixon, for example, by Leonard Garment, his closest advisor on cultural matters. It is revealing that directly following his reelection in 1972, Nixon no longer felt any need to keep pace with Rockefeller's freewheeling agenda for cultural programs. "The arts are not our people," Nixon told his aide, H. R. Haldeman. "We should dump the whole culture business."[17]

Nixon unleashed his cynicism once he knew that he would never again have to compete with Rockefeller for the White House. When John F. Kennedy campaigned in 1960 he refused to commit himself to federal support for cultural programs. During his presidency, according to August Heckscher, Kennedy always used the word "marginal" when questions of federal funding arose. And considering Lyndon Johnson's rage at writers and artists as a result of their critical reaction to his foreign policy and, more particularly, their negative response to the White House Festival of the Arts in June 1965, it seems almost a miracle that only a few months later he actually signed the legislation that created NEH and NEA.[18]

So the United States government has never had a national cultural policy—unless the decision *not* to have one can, in some perverse way, be considered a policy of sorts. (Unquestionably, creation of the national endowments in 1965 marked a notable break with tradition and legitimized the concept of *federal* support for culture.) Two partial exceptions to my assertion ought to be acknowledged, however.

It became apparent during the first half of the nineteenth century that public architecture would follow the classical revival model, a policy strengthened and extended between 1836 and 1851 when Robert Mills served as Architect of the Public Buildings in Washington, D.C. Having been a student of Jefferson, James Hoban, and Benjamin H. Latrobe, Mills mingled Palladian, Roman, and Greek motifs. By the end of his tenure a pattern had been firmly established that would endure. Although Mills certainly did not create the classical revival, he made it ubiquitous in prominent public structures. In this particular instance, the government's architectural policy turned out to be the lengthened shadow of one man's drafting board and engineering skills.[19]

The second partial exception, in my view, occurred during the Cold War decades, most notably 1946 to 1974, when a pervasive concern to combat and contain Communism prompted an unprecedented yet uncoordinated array of initiatives by the federal government to export American culture as exemplary illustrations of what the free world had to offer Europe as well as developing nations. A new position was created, Undersecretary of State for Cultural Affairs, with Archibald MacLeish as the first incumbent—America's closest counterpart, perhaps, to André Malraux of France. The State Department actually purchased and sent 79 works by contemporary artists abroad for exhibitions.[20] The Fulbright Scholarship Program emerged. The United States Information Agency came into being in 1953, and soon had

jazz bands like Dizzy Gillespie's making international tours. Such exports achieved undeniable popularity wherever they went, and they were perceived as the music of individualism, freedom, pluralism, and dissent—fundamental qualities obliterated by Communism.[21]

From 1950 until 1967 the CIA covertly funded the Congress for Cultural Freedom, whose publications ranged from the widely admired monthly magazine *Encounter* to a slew of foreign language journals. What their editors and authors held in common was a liberal or even a radical hostility to Communism. Although Allen W. Dulles and other leaders of the CIA did not exactly share the values of such men as Dwight Macdonald and Melvin Lasky, they assumed that anti-Communist statements coming from the Left would carry special credibility.[22]

After 1963, when rumors of CIA support for the Congress for Cultural Freedom began to spread, the Congress gradually became discredited, especially following the escalation of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam in the spring of 1965. Stalwarts like George Kennan, however, defended the millions of dollars used by the CIA to disseminate Western values, and he based his support on curious yet symptomatic grounds. "The flap about CIA money was quite unwarranted," Kennan wrote. "This country has no ministry of culture, and the CIA was obliged to do what it could to try to fill the gap. It should be praised for having done so, and not criticized."[23] I find it intriguing that an American ministry of culture, rarely considered politically viable by anyone, might be envisioned by George Kennan as an appropriate vehicle for anti-Communist and ideologically related literature.

Culture and the State before 1965

Taking the long view, there were some unsuccessful efforts at government support, some highly expedient initiatives, and some embryonic moves that provide historical context for the major breakthrough that occurred in 1965, yet also help to explain why many participants in the polity still have ambivalent or even negative feelings about the existence of NEH and NEA.

Let's begin late in 1825, when President John Quincy Adams sent Congress his recommendations for a national university, astronomical observatories, and related programs. Congress scornfully rejected his initiatives and they never even reached the stage of serious consideration. Martin Van Buren and John C. Calhoun led the opposition with contemptuous charges of "centralization," a catchphrase that would become a standard rallying cry for more than a century among opponents of federal support for cultural projects.[24]

The federal government did fund exploring expeditions at intervals throughout the nineteenth century, the best known being the ones led by Lewis and Clark, Captain Charles Wilkes, Ferdinand V. Hayden, and John Wesley Powell. Although each of their ventures had assorted scientific objectives, including ethnography on some occasions, they received validation primarily because they served the national interest and, in the trans-Mississippi West especially, they also opened entrepreneurial vistas, ranging from railroad routes to water use for agriculture and ranching.[25]

The early history of the Smithsonian Institution provides us with a symptomatic object lesson for the subsequent story of government and culture in the United States: uncertain, politically troubled, and contentious. In the very year of the Smithsonian's inception, 1846, a Princeton scholar offered these rhetorical warnings to Joseph Henry, the first secretary (director):

> Is there any adequate security for the success or right conduct of an Institution under the control of Congress, in which that body have a right and will feel it to be a duty to interfere? Will it not be subject to party influences, and to the harassing questionings of coarse and incompetent men? Are you the man to have your motives and actions canvassed by such men as are to be found on the floor of our congress?[26]

As for inconsistency and uncertainty, Joseph Henry spent much of his tenure as secretary, 1846 to 1878, trying to *prevent* any merger between a proposed National Museum and the Smithsonian. His successor, Spencer Baird, however, promptly reversed that policy.[27] There would be many other vacillations and reversals in years to come. Cultural institutions, like any other kind, are bound to redirect their course, but the Smithsonian's prominence, and its peculiar circumstances as a privately endowed public institution, meant that its policies would be closely scrutinized. Unpredictability in those policies, especially under Baird's successor, Samuel P. Langley, made it all the more likely that the Smithsonian would come to be regarded as the "nation's attic," an institution of memory rather than its guiding gyroscope or compass for cultural affairs.

In 1904, two years before his death, Secretary Langley included at the outset of his annual report an upbeat assessment of the Smithsonian's political autonomy. He even specified the principal sources of that sheltered status: Congress and the Institution's Board of Regents.

> The appreciation of the work of the Institution by the American people is best testified by their representatives in Congress. This has been clearly demonstrated through many successive terms regardless of political change; by the judgment with which their representatives upon the Board of Regents are

selected; by the care by which they protect the Institution in its freedom from political entanglements. . . .[28]

Moving forward swiftly, as I must in this survey, we find that the American film industry received major federal support during the 1920s, a decade prior to the one we customarily emphasize in terms of federal support for cultural activities. It should be acknowledged, however, that the film industry's "angel" was the Commerce Department, which assumed that it was helping to sustain a fledgling but potentially important international industry, rather than "culture" as such. When World War II cut off the extremely lucrative European market that provided half of the income for Walt Disney's corporate enterprises, the U.S. government helped Disney develop audiences in Latin America. In 1941, moreover, when Disney was on the verge of bankruptcy, the federal government began to commission propaganda films that became Disney's mainstay for the duration of World War II.[29]

The proliferation of cultural programs during the New Deal—almost entirely for reasons of economic relief rather than as a result of any sudden epiphany about the importance of art for its own sake—has been so well documented that it requires no more than a mention here. Writers and painters, sculptors and photographers, folklorists and dramatists were able to feed their families, sustain or even launch careers, and they made some innovative as well as enduring contributions to the arts in America.[30]

We cannot ignore, however, the lingering hostility that led Congress to end these programs in the years 1939–41. It was not simply that the programs had already served their purpose, or that funds and human resources had to be redirected to a global military struggle. A great many politicians didn't believe the products had justified the expense. Congressmen had not been converted to the notion that government had a permanent role to play as a cultural entrepreneur or advocate. And theatrical productions, in particular, came to be regarded as leftist critiques of traditional American values. Representative Clifton Woodrum of Virginia, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, expressed his determination to "get the government out of the theater business," and he succeeded.[31]

Nevertheless, the mid- and late 1940s, not customarily regarded as a propitious decade for governmental support of culture, produced promises of changes to come. Discussions of a national portrait gallery occurred even as World War II drew to a close. (The initiative for such a gallery actually dated all the way back to Charles Willson Peale, was raised again when the British Portrait Gallery was created in 1856, resurfaced once more after

World War I when paintings of the Versailles peace treaty negotiators and war heroes like Pershing were commissioned, and was envisioned by Andrew Mellon during the 1930s when he purchased works specifically for a portrait gallery that would be a separate entity from the projected National Gallery of Art.) As an illustration of how indirect support for the arts could occur, in 1949 Alan Lomax got Woody Guthrie a job writing and singing songs about venereal disease for a radio program on personal hygiene sponsored by the U.S. government. (Guthrie produced at least nine songs, a few of them clever and moving but most of them considered raunchy or outrageous.)[32]

During the 1950s the long-standing pattern of hesitancy and inconsistency persisted. In 1954 a special subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor considered bills to establish arts foundations and commissions, including a proposed national memorial theater. A majority recommended against the bill, explaining that it would be an inappropriate expenditure of federal funds. "It is a matter better suited for state, local, and private initiative," they said.[33]

A forceful minority report, however, called attention to the propaganda value to the Soviet government if the United States stopped participating in international festivals of art, music, and drama. A New Jersey Democrat warned that the Soviet Union and its satellite states "picture our citizens as gum-chewing, insensitive, materialistic barbarians." Albert H. Bosch, a Republican from New York City, responded and probably spoke for many Americans at that time: "We are dubious, to say the least, of the contention that people abroad are drawn more easily to Communism because we have failed to subsidize, or nationalize, the cultural arts in the United States."[34] No one involved in that dialogue, however, had said anything about *nationalizing* the arts.

Change was clearly in the air by the later 1950s—most notably for our purposes an awakening sense of popular pride in American cultural activities, broadly defined, and the proliferation of cultural centers all across the country that could house those programs. The renaissance in American cultural awareness customarily identified with the Kennedy years actually had its genesis several years before Kennedy took office. In 1960, for example, *Life* magazine devoted a laudatory two-page editorial in its twenty-fifth anniversary issue to "The New Role for Culture."[35] Simultaneously, the American Assembly, based at Columbia University (created in 1950 by Dwight D. Eisenhower while he served as president of Columbia), invited August Heckscher, a patrician long prominent in New York's cultural life, to contribute an essay concerning "The Quality of American Culture" to a volume published in 1960 under the title *Goals for Americans:*

Programs for Action in the Sixties, Comprising the Report of the President's Commission on National Goals. Pieces like Heckscher's and the widely noticed editorial in *Life* suggest a new peak of interest and enthusiasm at all taste levels: highbrow, middlebrow, and mass culture.

The penultimate section of Heckscher's essay, called "Government and the Arts," acknowledged that "where government has entered directly into the field of art, the experience has too often been disheartening. Political influences have exerted themselves. ... The art which has been encouraged under official auspices has almost always favored the less adventurous and the more classically hide-bound schools." Heckscher then proceeded to turn the discussion in a new direction, however, one that would be followed during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and beyond. "From this experience," Heckscher observed, "leading figures in the art world have drawn the conclusion that anything is better than the intrusion of government."

> It may be questioned, however, whether such men are not thinking too narrowly as professionals, without adequate understanding of the governmental methods and institutions which in other fields, no less delicate than art, have permitted the political system to act with detachment and a regard for the highest and most sophisticated standards.[36]

(Heckscher clearly had the National Science Foundation in mind.)

During 1961 and 1962, when John F. Kennedy and his advisors briefly considered the creation of a cabinet-level department of fine arts or cultural affairs, August Heckscher was envisioned as the secretary of such a department and served JFK as Special Consultant on the Arts in 1962–63.[37]

Meanwhile, in the spring of 1960, eight months before moving from Harvard to Washington as Special Assistant to the President, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., published a short piece titled "Notes on a National Cultural Policy." Much of it addressed what he called "the problem of television," and revealed a very different perspective when compared with the hands-off stance of cultural critics from Gilbert Seldes's generation. Schlesinger insisted that "government has not only the power but the obligation to help establish standards in media, like television and radio, which exist by public sufferance." There seemed to be no other way, he continued, "to rescue television from the downward spiral of competitive debasement." Much in this vigorous piece anticipated the famous address given by Federal Communications Commission (FCC) head Newton N. Minow in May 1961 to the National Association of Broadcasters, the well-remembered "Vast Wasteland" speech in which Minow threatened government regulation in order to improve quality control of television. (Late in 1960 Walter Lippmann called for the creation of a federal television network because he felt that program quality on the commercial networks was so low.)[38]

In his final two pages Schlesinger moved more expansively to the difficult issue of broad responsibility for cultural policy in general. He acknowledged that compared with regulation of the media, "the case for government concern over other arts rests on a less clear-cut juridical basis." He reminded readers that John Quincy Adams had "clearly stated that a government's right and duty to improve the condition of the citizens applied no less to 'moral, political, [and] intellectual improvement.'" Schlesinger did not mention that most Americans had ignored President Adams. He did concede, however, that "the problem of government encouragement of the arts is not a simple one; and it has never been satisfactorily solved."

Schlesinger's closing remarks anticipated the new endowment initiatives implemented in 1965 and whose emergence has been fully described in several histories and memoirs:

> Government is finding itself more and more involved in matters of cultural standards and endeavor. The Commission of Fine Arts, the Committee on Government and Art, the National Cultural Center, the Mellon Gallery, the poet at the Library of Congress, the art exhibits under State Department sponsorship, the cultural exchange programs—these represent only a sampling of federal activity in the arts. If we are going to have so much activity anyway ... there are strong arguments for an affirmative governmental policy to help raise standards. ... Whereas many civilized countries subsidize the arts, we tend to tax them. [A series of recommendations followed.] ... As the problems of our affluent society become more qualitative and less quantitative, we must expect culture to emerge as a matter of national concern and to respond to a national purpose.[39]

The extent to which Schlesinger's recommendations (along with those of Robert Lumiansky of the American Council of Learned Societies and others a few years later) were implemented during the mid-1960s and after surely must have exceeded even the wildest dreams of any wistful or visionary academic historian.

Some Problematic Developments Since 1965

The history of governmental support for cultural programs and related activities during the past three decades is familiar in certain respects yet obscure and sorely misunderstood in many others.[40] Although space does not permit even a cursory survey, I want to call attention to four problematic matters.

First, because the perception of a tension between "quality and equality" has been troublesome, most of the conferences and blue ribbon reports that have appeared since 1965 emphasize, *pari passu*, the goals of "supporting excellence" and "reaching all Americans." One rubric that has resulted from these dualistic goals is "excellence and equity." Many of the key figures in the post-1965 period have believed that they could square the circle and achieve both. Hence Ronald Berman at NEH and Nancy Hanks at NEA both loved the so-called blockbuster museum exhibits during the 1970s because they brought first-rate materials to audiences of unprecedented size. When Joan Mondale led the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities late in the 1970s, she made this declaration: "If being an elitist means being for quality, then yes, I am for quality. If being a populist means accessibility, then yes, I am a populist. I want the arts to be accessible."[41]

Quite a few of the key participants in this narrative have insisted over the past twenty-five years that "excellence versus equity" is a false dichotomy, a nonissue, a diversion that obscures more important matters. As I read through pertinent texts and historical records, however, the fact remains that keen observers have regarded the tension as real and problematic. Many crucial policy makers, moreover, are divided, explicitly advocating either more emphasis upon excellence or else greater attention to the democratization of resources and opportunities.[42]

I find it curious that in so much of the discourse (including speeches, testimony, and commission reports) "excellence" is casually used with positive implications while "elitism" has pejorative connotations. Yet many of the advocates of excellence are essentially elitists in terms of wanting quality control, and many of the so-called elitists are guilty of nothing more than insisting upon rigorous peer review procedures because they believe that taxpayers' money should be used accountably to support those projects most likely to have enduring value. Livingston Biddle, who drafted much of the 1965 legislation that created the endowments, recently clarified for me his vision at that time: namely, that excellence would be made available to the largest number of people, which is not the same thing as "trying to make everyone excellent," an unrealistic goal.[43]

My second observation about the past three decades is that the art forms that are most distinctively American—musical theater, modern dance, jazz, folk art, and film—had to struggle very hard indeed to achieve recognition as genuine cultural treasures. For many years, for example, the NEA was not notably supportive of jazz, a pattern that changed in 1977-78 because Billy Taylor, the jazz pianist, played a persuasive role on the National Council for the Arts.[44]

My third observation in the problematic category is that the two endowments have sparred with each other on occasion, competing in ways that were not constructive for the politics of culture in the United States. It is no secret that Nancy Hanks and Ronald Berman (respectively the heads of NEA and NEH) had different agendas during the 1970s and developed a cordial disdain for one another, despite the fact that each endowment, at different times, has done so much to sustain its sibling politically. Moreover, relations have not always been optimal between NEA and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. Ever since the mid-1970s many of the state arts agencies have really wanted something closer to *partnership* with their federal parent, and not just patronage. They have sought, even demanded, a larger role in policy formation.[45]

My fourth observation concerns a phenomenon that may, in the long run, be just as significant as the much-noticed politicization of the endowments: the proliferation of state humanities councils as well as state and local arts agencies. State arts agencies first appeared early in the 1960s, were then mandated by the federal legislation of 1965, and became a complex, architectonic reality by the mid-1970s and a major source of cultural funding by the 1980s.

The structural and funding differences between the state agencies and councils are significant but not widely or well understood. All arts agencies are funded by their states as well as by NEA (at a higher percentage of its annual budget than what NEH is required to provide for its dependents). They are much broader in their operations than the state humanities councils, and collectively they now receive four times the amount of funds, per annum, as NEA itself. State arts agencies fund institutions, organizations, and individuals. They are the single most important source of support for the arts, and their work is supplemented by local arts agencies that are funded by the states, mayors' offices, small foundations, businesses, and county boards.[46]

State humanities councils, on the other hand, are not state agencies. They are comparatively small nonprofit organizations that fund projects, usually involving one or more appropriate scholars along with other expenses associated with a program. Because they do not fund institutions, they tend to be mission- and theme-driven. More often than not, their objective is to shape a civic culture in their respective states by providing support for humanities programs that engage public (i.e., nonacademic) audiences. A fundamental distinction also remains as true today as it was thirty years ago: Most people who are at all interested in culture understand what the arts are and mean far better than they understand what the humanities are all about. According to a catchphrase that some administrators have been known to use: "If they do it, it's art. If they talk about it, it's humanities."[47]

The unwanted aspect of this bilevel, yet asymmetrical federal structure, as I have noted, is that rivalries and tensions occasionally occur between the state and national bodies. (For those with historical knowledge reaching back to New Deal cultural programs, this offers a vivid sense of déjà vu. The state-based writers' projects during the 1930s chafed at the degree of control exercised by officials in Washington.[48]) The competitiveness and occasional resentments are more serious on the arts side than on the humanities side. There has also been a lot of cooperation, to be sure; during 1995 the state bodies did a great deal that was politically efficacious in helping, quite literally, to save, the national endowments.[49]

The endowments and their state programs have gone far beyond the New Deal arts projects in terms of intellectual coherence and enduring value. New Deal relief programs improved people's cultural lives in ways that were positive yet utilitarian and largely passive in terms of public engagement. There were guidebooks, murals, and plays for viewers to enjoy. But America's cultural heritage was more often romanticized than preserved, and the New Deal programs provided scant basis for the public to become culturally interactive, except perhaps to protest some murals that they did not want in their local post offices and courthouses.[50]

In contrast, engagement has been a major success of government support at several levels over the past thirty years: preservation, creation, dissemination, and interaction. We recognize, for instance, that museum attendance and activities have reached unprecedented and unanticipated levels during the past quarter-century. Diverse stimuli are responsible, but a very major one, surely, has come from initiatives supplied by both endowments.[51]

Essential though they were at the time, New Deal projects did not sustain exhibits of history and art (accompanied by conferences and symposia) that enlarged understanding of American culture in multifaceted ways. They did not support seminars for the enrichment of teachers and the overall improvement of education. They did not sustain humanistic research, especially long-term projects that require collaborative efforts, such as bibliographies, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and critical translations. They did not launch interactive public programs by promoting partnerships among libraries, historical societies, universities, and schools. They did not engage the public culture through innovative films with compelling humanistic content, up-to-date interpretation of historic sites, and stimulating occasions that bring scholars together with lay audiences.

Despite some slips of judgment, despite some inevitable elements of trial and error, despite some unhelpful competitiveness and bureaucratization, the two endowments, the Smithsonian Institution, the Institute of Museum Services, the National Park Service, and the National Trust for Historic

Preservation, along with an array of state cultural agencies that have emerged or else been transformed during the past generation, all have redefined their mandates and modes of operation as circumstances dictated. In doing so they have altered not merely the nature, but the very meaning of public culture in the United States.

If we believe that culture is a necessity rather than a luxury, if we feel that public dialogue and comprehension of a heterogeneous social heritage are essential, if we are committed to a more inclusive audience for scholarship, then there simply has to be sufficient governmental support for such an agenda.

What our historical experience has shown, beyond any doubt, is that public money spent on cultural programs has a multiplier effect—in terms of *participation by people* as well as in economic terms.[52] What the critics of state support for culture dismally fail to understand is that a diminution or elimination of public support will not prompt an increase in private support. Quite the contrary, it leads to a loss of private support. That, in turn, impoverishes the nation, with implications and outcomes that are truly lamentable.[53]

Comparisons and Explanations

Most industrialized nations, and many of the so-called developing ones, have a cabinet-level ministry of culture. Poland, Denmark, Argentina, Haiti, and France are among the notable range of highly diverse examples. André Malraux really wrote the script for such a department in France, and the actress Melina Mercouri made it quite visible in Greece some years ago. In Spain the Minister of Culture played an important role in 1992–93 when his country arranged a genuine coup: the acquisition for $350 million of a phenomenal art collection belonging to the Swiss industrialist Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza.[54]

Because a full-scale comparative study of these ministries has not yet been made, however, those of us in the United States who think about them at all tend to assume that they must do pretty much the same kinds of things because they have fundamentally similar titles and mandates. In reality there is far more variation than we recognize. (The European Economic Community even has a commissioner of cultural affairs, and the European ministers of culture meet regularly on a monthly or sometimes a bimonthly basis to discuss their differences and possible modes of cooperation.)

The French Ministry of Culture, created in 1959 under Malraux, who earnestly wished to democratize culture, is probably the best-known and

surely the most publicized. A four-page explanation of the government's cultural policy, prepared in 1983, begins with this paragraph:

> France has long had a tradition of supporting the arts. French monarchs considered themselves protectors of the arts, and since the republic was founded the public sector has viewed "culture" (the arts and the humanities) as its responsibility to encourage. And though private support for the arts and the humanities has existed, the major thrust most often has come from the central government if only to preserve the heritage of the country.[55]

Although particular projects or initiatives of the minister may turn out to be controversial, the ministry itself normally is not.[56]

In Germany, by way of contrast, because it is a Federal Republic but also owing to pressure from the Western Allies following World War II, the establishment and maintenance of most cultural facilities is the responsibility of provincial government (*Länder*). The Allies wanted an end to state-controlled culture as propaganda. All legislation pertaining to cultural matters, therefore, with a few exceptions, is the prerogative of the separate federal states. There is no federal ministry of culture.[57]

In Great Britain, where the Department of National Heritage enjoys cabinet-level status, the most significant connections between culture and the state for more than four decades have been found in national museums and archaeological sites, in broadcasting, in arts councils, and in historic preservation activities. Curiously, however, the Department of National Heritage under Prime Ministers Thatcher and Major has been quite candid about its entrepreneurial aspirations. It also happens to run the National Lottery (a modest portion of the "take" goes to support cultural programs), it advocates "sport and recreation," and lists as its sixth objective on page one of its informational brochure that it seeks to "encourage inward [from abroad] and domestic tourism so that the industry can both make its full contribution to the economy and increase opportunities for access to our culture and heritage."[58]

In a country such as Botswana (formerly Bechuanaland Protectorate), the Ministry of Culture deals primarily with the preservation of aboriginal culture because the Bushmen of the Kalahari are a diminishing presence. In many other so-called developing nations the ministry of culture enjoys an autonomous existence at times, is sometimes combined with the ministry of education, and often is mainly concerned with tourism. In Brazil individual states have a secretary for cultural affairs. In Bahia during the early 1990s, for example, that position was held by Gilberto Gil, an immensely popular musician and advocate of Afro-Brazilian culture.

To the best of my knowledge, virtually no historian has systematically

examined two closely related questions: Why is the United States so distinctive in not having a ministry of culture? And why is that office comparatively noncontroversial in some nations yet politically or ideologically problematic in others—above all, in our own? Although I cannot answer those questions exhaustively, I would at least like to propose a plausible hypothesis.

Suppose we consider those countries of continental Europe where the ministry of culture not only is ordinarily noncontroversial, but where the cultural authority of the state is highly centralized—a concentration of control long feared and resented by so many in the United States. We can illuminate the contrast if we look back more than three centuries to a period when the consolidation of royal power occurred in such sovereign entities as France and what became the Austro–Hungarian Empire.[59]

Because the appearance of royal strength and attendant splendor mattered a great deal, patronage of the arts developed in an uncontested manner that was regarded as perfectly natural. The Habsburgs seem to have sponsored music because the Roman Catholic Church had done so. The Bourbons were more attracted by theater, and the French were especially partial toward regally supported architecture as well as music. The Louvre, which became the model for all state art museums, had its origins in the French royal picture collections. It opened as a public museum in 1793, at the height of the French Revolution. Whatever their pet projects may have been, however—and they changed from one ruler to the next—all of these regimes established and sustained cultural institutions on a grand scale: opera houses, theaters, museums, and so forth. Equally important, perhaps, they created an enduring environment in which support of the arts came to be widely accepted, both among those at the very apex of the social pyramid as well as among those who aspired to be. Even municipalities felt a sense of civic reponsibility for culture. In 1767, for example, the City of Paris decided that it would make an annual subvention to the Opéra.[60]

What seems notable and significant for our purposes, moreover, is that such supportive attitudes survived the overthrow or decline of absolute monarchy, enlightened or otherwise. Moreover, the diverse regimes that succeeded those absolute rulers continued to support the cultural institutions that had been lavishly established by the dynasties they replaced. (It should be acknowledged that in nineteenth-century France a struggle took place between church and state for control of cultural patronage.) The blurred lines of distinction that dated back to the later Renaissance—did cultural patronage truly come from the state, or from the private purse of a monarch or some noble grandee?—remained ambiguous, albeit less so, even in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

By contrast, in countries whose destinies were determined by the Protestant Reformation and by the evolution of constitutional monarchy, such as Great Britain and the Netherlands—which happen to be the nations that founded the colonies that became the original United States—kings and queens did not find themselves in such an absolute position to spend quite so lavishly on cultural projects as a means of glorifying their reigns. Consequently they relied more heavily on what we would consider the private sector, both as a matter of policy and of necessity. Moreover, the appearance (if not always the reality) of austerity required by Calvinism, even in historically modified forms, would not allow for the kinds of cultural luxury and artistic life that continued to flourish in Roman Catholic countries such as France and Austria–Hungary.

The constitutional monarchies were not exactly abstemious, to be sure; they also provided varying amounts of cultural patronage. But compared with the courts of central and southern Europe, conspicuous consumption in the realm of culture was not commonplace. Historian Janet Minihan, for example, demonstrated how stingily Parliament supported the British Museum during the nineteenth century, and as a consequence that national treasure grew in a haphazard fashion. Although the government eventually purchased those notorious Greek marble reliefs from Lord Elgin, it did so reluctantly and ungraciously.[61]

In sum, it is obviously the case that state support for cultural endeavors has been much weaker in the United States than in Europe. It should surprise no one that we can locate the antecedents of our own reluctance to spend public money on artistic and humanistic programs in the eighteenth- and especially the nineteenth-century cultural costiveness of the very countries that colonized what became British North America. We also know that Congress looked carefully at the Arts Council of Great Britain as a kind of model when launching the two endowments in 1964-65, especially in order to maximize protection for the endowments from political interference. In 1946 Britain became the first country to create a quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organization (QUANGO) to be the primary conduit for government support of the arts.[62]

In closing this section devoted to comparisons, it is essential for us to acknowledge a major irony.[63] For more than a decade now there have been clear signs that European countries are increasingly interested in and attracted to the American model. Without exception they all insist that they would like a policy of decentralizing support for art and culture. More particularly, as governmental budgets grow leaner, political leaders abroad express envy for the American tradition of private support. They are especially fascinated by the matching grant concept even though there have been only modest attempts thus far to implement that mechanism in Europe. Matching grants have worked successfully at the provincial level in Canada.[64]

Owing to economic contraction, moreover, Europeans are becoming more inclined to emphasize excellence above equity, and to insist that cultural creativity can be encouraged but not purchased. We now hear echoes of a letter written by Flaubert back in 1853:

> Have you ever remarked how all *authority* is stupid concerning Art? Our wonderful governments (kings or republics) imagine that they have only to order work to be done, and it will be forthcoming. They set up prizes, encouragements, academies, and they forget only one thing, one little thing without which nothing can live: the *atmosphere*.[65]

When budgets shrink in our own time, encouraging an optimal "atmosphere" looks like a prudent yet easy alternative. Mere encouragement is not sufficient, however.

Conclusions

Anxiety at the prospect of a Leviathan state—ranging from social services to cultural programs—has been a persistent legacy in American political culture for a very long time. Fears about centralization prompted the opposition of Van Buren, Calhoun, and many others to the cultural and scientific agendas of John Quincy Adams. Those concerns resurfaced prominently during the later years of Franklin D. Roosevelt's second administration, once again during the early Reagan years, and in 1995 when Republicans sought to fulfill their Contract with America.[66]

I believe that those nagging concerns can be turned to the advantage of those who value cultural growth, achievement, and institutions—in particular, those of us who are persuaded that NEH has been the single most important source of support for humanistic endeavors in the United States during the past generation. Major cultural organizations and significant, broad-gauge scholarship must be sustained at the national level. Federal dollars are absolutely indispensable in order to leverage local and private funds. The federal imprimatur has meant legitimacy for cultural programs at all levels.

An important rationale for fostering closer collaboration between federal and state entities (meaning consultation and the sharing of resources) is that it might help to depoliticize culture. Support at the state and local levels is less likely to provoke controversy. Cultural localism and regionalism may not make a big splash, but neither do they ordinarily alienate citizens and

suffer from distortion or sensationalism in the national media. Increased cooperation among levels and sources of government support simply makes sense in a country that everyone acknowledges is diverse in terms of taste levels, opinions, and what is perceived as being in the public interest. It is worth bearing in mind that Nancy Hanks's phenomenal success as the chair of NEA owed a great deal to her carefully organized network of support at the grass roots. Moreover, former Congressman Thomas J. Downey, who chaired the Congressional Arts Caucus from 1982 until 1987, regarded the state arts agencies as "invaluable" because they constantly pressured members of Congress and made them aware that support for cultural programs was both essential and politically viable. As Downey put it, they provided validation from the districts on economic as well as cultural grounds. They also undercut those who contended that federal support for the arts was elitist.[67]

It is particularly noteworthy, I believe, that during the 1995 campaign to save NEH and NEA, advocates scored effective points by constantly calling attention to positive achievements made at the state and local levels. Those are the levels most appealing to members of Congress, and we cannot escape the reality that we are discussing a highly political process. Congressional supporters of cultural programs are partial to the phrase "building from the bottom up." That's a crucial reason why the state councils and agencies are so essential.

From the perspective of historians, state programs have had, and will continue to have, the salutary effect of broadening the audience for history. They transmit far beyond academe new historical interpretations and an understanding of what American history is all about—something that many scholars have long been saying needs to be done. State councils transmit money to local historical societies and discussion groups that meet at public libraries, and professional historians play a prominent role on state humanities councils. They can have a profoundly influential impact by determining what kinds of history will be disseminated and discussed at the grass-roots level.

I do not for a moment mean to suggest that the state agencies and councils are prepared or able to resolve all the vexed issues involving culture and government in America. Historical experience has demonstrated their limitations. Generalizations about fifty-six different entities are dangerous, but overall they are more oriented to the contemporary than to the historical. They do not *directly* support scholarship. Their assistance to museums goes for public and educational programs rather than for basic curatorial, cataloging, or even exhibition needs. On occasion, some members of the state councils have even been disdainful of scholarship.[68]

The obvious point, therefore, is that state and local cultural organizations do things that complement what only the national entities are able to do. We need *all* of them, working in concert, if we genuinely hope to achieve excellence *and* equity. It is imperative that we strengthen the connective links of cultural federalism because that is the way American governmental politics works most successfully in so many instances.

Earlier, when I supplied cursory descriptions of the state humanities councils and arts agencies, I emphasized contrasts between the two because their histories are so asymmetrical and not clearly understood. There is, however, a key area in which they have been moving in sync. In more than thirty states (by the mid-1990s) the state agencies and councils do some kind of cooperative or shared programming. Several states now have a joint standing committee on the arts and the humanities, a collaborative arrangement in which Ohio has been the leader.[69]

For about two decades the humanities councils have emphasized a concept that they call the public humanities. Basically, that means disseminating fresh perspectives to a broad, nonacademic audience. As the philosopher Charles Frankel phrased it: "Nothing has happened of greater importance in the history of American humanistic scholarship than the invitation of the government to scholars to think in a more public fashion, and to think and teach with the presence of their fellow citizens in mind."[70]

Similarly, both NEA as well as the state arts agencies have promoted what is called "the new public art," meaning art put in public places for its own sake rather than the commemoration of some politician or military hero. Doing so entails a vision of art that can humanize and enliven public places—art to be enjoyed. Needless to say, Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* certainly did not achieve such an outcome in lower Manhattan; but responsibility for that debacle rests with misunderstanding on all sides. Alexander Calder's *Grand Vitesse* commission for Grand Rapids, Michigan, provides an illustration of communication and explanation eventually leading not merely to acceptance but pride.[71]

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It may help to clarify our thinking if we reflect comparatively on the historically determined nature of our situation. During the eighteenth century, what later became Germany was a fragmented set of societies partially bonded by a common culture. A *Kulturvolk* existed rather than a cohesive polity. In the nineteenth century, after the fall of Napoleon, when Germans wanted a political structure worthy of that rich culture, and commensurate with it, they regarded the nation that emerged as a

Kulturstaat: a state defined by the vigorous presence of a common culture.[72]

In striking contrast, when the United States emerged as a nation in 1789 it came to be defined by its distinctive *political* structure and by the founders' desire and rationale for that republican structure. Unlike Germany, a common culture had not yet been defined, and it might very well be argued that the task of defining a common culture in the United States has become more difficult, rather than less, in the intervening two centuries.

Henry Adams perceived that problematic reality more than a century ago when he wrote an open letter to the American Historical Association, which he served as president in 1894. He fully anticipated the flowering of intellectual and cultural diversity in the United States. Efforts to "hold together the persons interested in history is worth making," he wrote. Yet his candid realism followed directly: "That we should ever act on public opinion with the weight of one compact and one energetic conviction is hardly to be expected, but that one day or another we shall be compelled to act individually or in groups I cannot doubt."[73]

I feel certain that solutions to the complex interaction between culture and the state in the United States can be found in improved institutional and organizational relationships—connections that belong under a rubric that might be called cultural federalism. The state now has a strong tradition of encouraging and supporting cultural activities when doing so seems to be in the interest of the state. That is exactly why federal support for culture accelerated during the Cold War decades.

It is no coincidence that a broadly based acceptance of government support for culture waned precipitously once the Cold War ended in 1989. Many of those who had long feared alien ideologies have subsequently projected their anxieties on to domestic "enemies" such as artists, intellectuals, and institutions who communicated unfamiliar views or unconventional positions critical of orthodox pieties. The historic hostility toward unusual, dissident, or revisionist views described so forcefully by Richard Hofstadter in 1963 resurfaced with renewed political potency after 1989, resulting in mistrust of artists, intellectuals, and many cultural programs because they appeared elitist or else unpatriotic.[74]

Cultural federalism—government support for cultural needs along with collaboration *at all levels*—could go a long way toward minimizing anti-intellectualism, fear of innovation, and mistrust of constructive cultural criticism. That is why the notion of public humanities really matters. It is an idea whose time has come because it is sorely needed at this juncture.

3

Temples of Justice: The Iconography of Judgment and American Culture

Nineteenth-century Americans tended to be tardy in their commemorative observances, and the centennial of the Judiciary Act of 1789 turned out to be no exception.* In September 1889, a committee formed by the New York City Bar Association finally got around to discussing a celebration planned for February 2, 1890. All the nation's federal judges as well as New York State's appellate judges were invited to attend. Better late than never. Then, on December 7, 1889, the Judiciary Centennial Committee met at the Federal Building in New York City to adopt a plan that had been submitted for festivities honoring the hundredth anniversary of the first sitting of the Supreme Court of the United States. It would take place on February 4, 1890, at the Metropolitan Opera House in Manhattan. Former president Grover Cleveland consented to preside over ceremonies attended by the entire Supreme Court. Following remarks by the chief justice, President Benjamin Harrison would give an address. The

* This essay was presented in Washington, D.C., on September 22, 1989, at the Bicentennial Conference on the Judiciary Act of 1789.