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1995

## Arts: Policy and Talking Points (1994): News Article 03

Harry Belafonte

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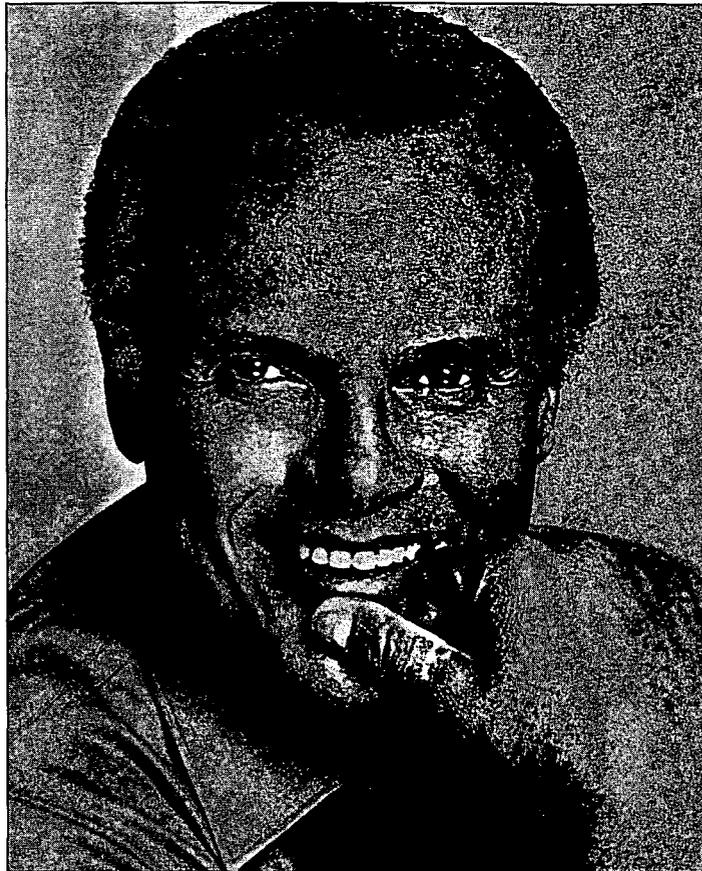
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**"Don't  
Cut  
Endowment  
for the  
Arts"**



*Harry Belafonte, an actor and singer, is a trustee of the American Council for the Arts.*

*By Harry Belafonte*

Many of our distinguished elected representatives are perilously close to being hijacked by a point of view that most Americans don't share: the termination of federal support for the arts. The coming Senate vote on appropriations for the National Endowment for the Arts can already be viewed as a clear victory for those who have never wanted the federal government involved in supporting art and culture. They have succeeded in reducing the issue of NEA appropriations to a debate on a single issue: Should the federal government support only "decent" art?

The Senate Appropriations Committee, headed by Robert C. Byrd, has allowed the enemies of the NEA to trot out their most recent example of art that strains or offends mainstream sensibilities and to use the minuscule financial role the NEA played in its presentation as a litmus test for support of the entire agency. The committee voted to cut the arts endowment's budget by \$8.5 million, a 5 percent reduction, because some members objected to a performance that occurred at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, which the NEA indirectly supported with \$150.

That performer and his performance are not the issue here.

The issue is that responsible and level-headed elected officials have swallowed the hook baited by Sen. Jesse Helms, which seeks to create controversy from the work of a few contemporary artists while ignoring the enormous public benefits the agency creates and stimulates.

As one who has performed across the land, I can tell you that our country and our youth need more of what the arts have to offer. When performers like Anna Deavere Smith created great theater works out of the racial acrimony she found in Williamsburg, Brooklyn and Los Angeles, the endowment was there lending financial support. Smith's performances have helped communities that are racially polarized bridge some of their differences.

When I see thousands of young people participating in NEA-supported dance, theater and arts workshops around the country, I know that they are being given tools that help them resist the violence and drug scourge that permeates many of their communities.

For 29 years the National Endowment for the Arts has helped younger generations of American citizens find and nurture their creative muses. Can we as a nation turn the clock back?

*Washington Post article reprinted by special permission of Harry Belafonte*



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## AMERICAN • COUNCIL • FOR • THE • ARTS

### PROFILE

The American Council for the Arts (ACA) is a national organization whose purpose is to promote public policies that advance and document the contributions of the arts and artists to American life.

To accomplish its mission, ACA conducts programs including: the *ACA National Arts Policy Clearinghouse*, one of the nation's leading centralized resources for arts information whose holdings include over 4,000 publications, studies, research papers and other specialized materials on the arts. The Clearinghouse responds to inquiries for research information, provides access to its holdings to individuals conducting research, and maintains an extensive growing database that will soon be available on-line. Future plans for the Clearinghouse include the publication of a quarterly journal on arts policy.

In conjunction with the National Arts Policy Clearinghouse, ACA also operates *The Visual Artist Information Hotline*, a national toll-free telephone referral service for visual artists which has served over 14,000 individual artists since its inception in 1990. The Hotline provides callers with information on national, state and regional funding programs and services available to visual artists such as fellowships, group insurance, residencies, public art programs, studio and living space, health and legal assistance.

*ACA Books* produces and distributes specialized publications on the arts that identify resources, teach new skills, and educate about arts policy. *Advocacy* programs are an essential part of the ACA mission and include Arts Advocacy Day in Washington, DC, the annual Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy, conferences and special events, and distribution of *ACA UpDate*, a monthly newsletter providing current information on arts advocacy activity. ACA also distributes fax action alerts for constituent response on pending arts legislation.

ACA's *Arts Education* activities include advocacy for education, the facilitation of partnerships between the public and private sector in support of arts education, special studies, public awareness campaigns and national conferences. ACA's recent conference *Arts Education for the 21st Century American Economy* brought together over 300 corporate, education, arts and government leaders including Jane Alexander, Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts; Richard Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education; performer Ben Vereen; John Ong, Chairman and CEO of BF Goodrich; Richard Gurin, President and CEO of Binney & Smith, Inc.; Donald Greene, President & CEO of the Coca-Cola Foundation and many others. The conference reaffirmed the importance of keeping the arts part of the core curricula in schools in order to produce a work force prepared for the challenges of the future job market and world economy.

ACA maintains an affiliate relationship with the *National Coalition of United Arts Funds*, (NCUAF) a seventy-three member national service organization committed to fostering and promoting united fund raising for arts and cultural organizations and programs. Last year, UAF's helped to generate over \$80 million in support of arts organizations in their respective communities. ACA will continue to work closely with the NCUAF to promote increased private sector support for the arts. Current year activities will include a study on employee giving to the arts.

ACA's *Arts Policy Program* provides data and analysis on arts policy through national symposia, commissioned papers, books and other publications.



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## AMERICAN • COUNCIL • FOR • THE • ARTS

### FACT SHEET: FUNDING FOR THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES IN THE 104TH CONGRESS

#### The Threat

In a number of TV and radio interviews, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich of Georgia has strongly favored "privatizing" the NEA and the NEH. This is another way of saying: withdraw all federal funding from both agencies.

In his weekly television program on his National Empowerment Network, Mr. Gingrich said: "One of the things we're going to do this year, is to zero out the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which has been eating taxpayers' money." (December 6).

This is a far more extreme position than was taken by the agencies' opponents during the 103rd Congress. The Penny-Kasich proposal of 1993, which was narrowly defeated by a vote of 219-213, would have cut funding for the NEA, NEH, CPB, IMS, National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian Institution by 10 percent over five years, for a total of \$531 million. (That figure is also to be found, under the listing "Reduce Arts and Humanities" in an attachment to the "Contract with America" described as "possible offsets" for costs incurred by the contract's programs).

One of the sponsors of that proposal, Rep. John Kasich of Ohio, is now chairman of the House Budget Committee. He is quoted in the December 1994 issue of the American Art Alliance's *Legislative Update* as promising a "budget revolution." It is not too difficult to conjecture that the "revolution" will involve cuts of much more than 10 percent for the arts and humanities agencies. In a December 11 *Boston Globe* article, Maureen Dezell indicates that some House Republicans are now calling for a "60 percent reduction in NEA funds... the arts are not a necessity but a luxury."

The same article states that House Majority Leader Dick Armey of Texas "has been crusading to cut off federal arts funding since 1985... his spokesperson Pat Sturbridge says he will continue the quest... the NEA is just not necessary."

There are few deviations from this theme by new Republican chairmen of House committees involved in reauthorizing and funding the agencies. Appropriations Committee Chairman Rep. Bob Livingston of Louisiana, according to an advisory from People for the American Way Action Fund, is preparing a rescissions bill to freeze uncommitted current NEA and NEH funds. In addition, the ACA has learned, Rep. Livingston has said that he hoped to short-circuit the process of deauthorizing programs by killing them as part of the appropriation process.

In a kind of Catch-22, Rep. Ralph Regula of Ohio, who chairs the appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior and Related Agencies -- which has authority over funding for NEA, NEH and IMS -- favors a reverse blocking technique. A December 1 *Philadelphia Inquirer* story says that he will not consider any appropriations bill for any agency that has not been reauthorized. "People who are proponents of NEA," he is quoted as saying, "must get the agency authorized. It won't be protected as has happened in the past. Things are different now."

What is different, obviously, is that House opponents of the arts and humanities agencies -- who were barely a minority in a vote to cut them back two years ago -- are certain that they can now command an oppositional majority. And the top controlling House leadership -- Majority Whip Tom DeLay of Texas as well as Mr. Gingrich and Mr. Arney -- have been persistent opponents of the agencies.

And, while the top majority leadership and key committee chairpersons in the Senate are generally considered more moderate in their attitudes toward the agencies, their record in key votes shows little significant difference from their House counterparts.

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An additional warning sign-of-the-times was the discernible beginning in December of a cut-the-arts trend in state and local budgeting. Perhaps predictably, these developments took place in Washington, D.C. itself and in the neighboring state of Virginia.

The D.C. Council slashed the budget of the city's Commission on the Arts and Humanities by \$900,000 beyond initial cuts made only weeks before. Since the beginning of the fiscal year, the council has eliminated 55 percent of the city's primary support for the arts and humanities.

In Virginia, the budget proposed by the governor would cut in half the state's small pool of arts grants as well as appropriations for public television... and would eliminate all funding for public radio.

Until now, federal arts funding has stimulated positive state and city matching. A new era of cutbacks could be "matched" by local retreats.

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The anti-arts atmosphere has evoked vindictiveness from some voices in the print press and broadcast media. You are being asked to take a measured, rational pro-agency stand within a charged media atmosphere.

Syndicated newspaper columnist Charles Krauthammer celebrates the anticipated demise of "the welfare check writers for the intellectual classes." And Tom Kilgallon, on the Christian Action Network, exults: "Eliminating the NEA is finally within our reach."

## THE CASE FOR THE AGENCIES

### What They Are/What They Do/What They Cost

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) were founded in 1965 "to help create and sustain not only a climate of encouraging freedom of thought, imagination and inquiry but also the material conditions facilitating the release of creative talent."

The Institute of Museum Services (IMS) was established in 1976 "to encourage and assist museums in their educational role."

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), created in 1967, funds the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR), which in turn support public television and radio stations of all sizes throughout the country in their educational and community programming.

Appropriations in the current fiscal year are: \$167 million for NEA; \$177 million for NEH; \$275 million for CPB; and \$29 million for IMS. The aggregate total of \$648 million represents an infinitesimal part of the federal budget... and *comes to about \$2 per taxpayer.*

### How They Affect the Economy

The National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies' recent economic impact findings, *Arts in the Local Economy* (full summary sheet is enclosed) documents economic impact of the arts at the local level, states:

- The non-profit arts industry contributes \$ \$36.8 billion to the national economy each year which accounted for 6% of the Gross National Product.
- The 1.3 million jobs supported by the arts industry resulted \$25.2 billion in paychecks earned by and paid to workers in every industry in the country with \$3.4 billion in federal income tax; accounting for \$1.2 billion in state government revenue and \$790 million in local government revenue each year.
- Jobs supported by the nonprofit arts industry represent, alone, nearly 1% of the entire U.S. workforce. Comparatively, jobs in the legal services industry comprise only .84% of the U.S. workforce and jobs in the building construction industry only .98%, according to U.S. Department of Labor data for 1992.

### Are They Worth the Expense?

*The American people think so. Every President since the founding of the first agency has said so. Even the conservative Heritage Foundation agrees.*

A 1993 National Cultural Alliance survey found 81 percent of Americans agreeing that "the arts and humanities contribute to the economic health and well-being of society."

A 1992 Lou Harris poll, prepared for ACA, showed that 69 percent of Americans would be willing to pay \$5 more in taxes per year to support federal government efforts in the arts; 64 percent would pay \$10 more... and *56 percent would pay \$15 more.* THIS IS SEVEN AND A HALF TIMES MORE THAN THEY ARE PAYING FOR THEM NOW.

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President Lyndon B. Johnson recommended the creation of the Endowments "as a central part of the American national purpose." Since then, bipartisan support in the White House has been unflinching. These words by Republican Presidents are not only representative of that support, but also supply strong arguments against the contention that the agencies are insignificant fringe luxuries in American life:

President Richard M. Nixon: "At a time of severe budget stringency, doubling the appropriations for the arts and humanities might seem extravagant. However, I believe that the need for a new impetus to the understanding... of the American idea has a compelling claim on our resources."

President George W. Bush: "Direct federal expenditures... for preserving America's cultural heritage are a relatively small part of the budget... But they should never be viewed as so small that they should be overlooked, nor so insignificant that they might be dismissed."

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A Heritage Foundation report on the Endowments, prepared for President-elect Ronald Reagan in 1980, concluded that federal support for the arts and humanities represents "sound policy" and ought to be continued. After examining the stated rationale in the enabling legislation establishing the Endowments, the report also concluded: "Any future Administration, whether it be Democrat, Republican or independent, ought to have no difficulty in accepting the underlying premises."

### **Why Federal? Why Public?**

The logic of applying what seems to be prevailing current preferences -- for less federal and more state responsibility, and for less public and more private funding -- to the agencies is more apparent than real.

The experience of the past three decades has been that state and private funding in all areas increases when federal funding is strong. In the arts, funding by the agencies has leveraged funding many times over from state and private sources. The existence of federal "seed money" -- showing that support of the arts and humanities is public policy, expressing the will of the people -- is what attracts other funding. If that seeding is diminished or removed, growth in funding will inevitably be stunted in other sectors.

What has begun to happen in Virginia and in Washington, D.C. might very well prove to be the pattern in states and cities nationwide.

And "private philanthropy just doesn't adequately fund the arts." That's the judgment of Ann Kaplan, research director for the American Association of Fundraising Counsel, publishers of *Giving USA*, which tracks private sector philanthropy. Quoted in the December 11 *Boston Globe* article, she points out that much of private giving to the arts consists of capital gifts of buildings and art collections, benefitting only a few large institutions. "There is a documentable trend in the private sector," she reports, "away from the arts and into social services."

### **What Have They Achieved? How Do They Impact Community Life?**

For your review, the enclosed packet of materials includes pages of facts, figures and relevant information supplied by the agencies. They are well worth studying in their entirety; we believe you will find that they make a convincing case for retaining and strengthening the agencies, not cutting or eliminating them.

To lead you into that study, here are some highlights we feel are particularly telling and potentially useful in evolving your editorial stand:

#### **National Endowment for the Arts**

NEA has been instrumental in bolstering the growth of nonprofit theater, opera, dance and multi-media programs that not only entertain audiences -- often for less money than the commercial arts sector -- but also serve as training grounds for artists.

NEA represents a strong investment in the economic growth of communities in every congressional district in the country. Most of this year's \$167 million appropriations is used as seed money for cultural programs and institutions in those communities. State and local governments, and the nonprofit arts organizations receiving the seed money, use it to leverage almost 11 times that amount for some of the highest quality arts programs in the world.

NEA funding and what it leverages has the effect of stimulating business development, spurring urban renewal, attracting people to the community whose spending in conjunction with attending performances and exhibitions contributes significantly to the local economy.

#### **National Endowment for the Humanities**

NEH is the single largest source of support for humanities activities nationwide. Without this support, we would literally erode much of our history and our base of knowledge.

NEH makes possible the funding of such programs as *The Civil War*, universally acknowledged for contributing so much to national understanding of that catalytic event in United States history. The NEH also invites all Americans to participate in a program called the *National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity*, which allows them the opportunity to express their views on what it means to be an American.

## **Public Broadcasting Service (funded by CPB)**

PBS is the world's largest supplier of higher education telecourses. Since 1981, more than 2.5 million adults have earned college credits through courses offered by two out of three American colleges. Only public TV fully harnesses the educational value of television.

Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA), past chairman, Energy and Commerce Sub-committee on Telecommunications: "PBS is the most family-oriented network on television and there is no close second."

Leonard Garment, former advisor to President Reagan, in a December 21 op-ed piece in the *New York Times*: Hardest hit by PBS cuts would be "small stations that offer local programming no commercial station would consider... (some) stations offer high school equivalency and literacy programs and other educational courses, public health services and computer networking."

## **Institute of Museum Services**

IMS General Operations Support grants are matched with 17 non-federal dollars for every dollar of federal money.

IMS training programs, workshops and other support help small local museums care for collections and improve public programming. These museums are often central to a community's sense of identity and serve millions of youth, adults and families.

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