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Reagan Administration: Funding Cuts News Articles (1981-1982): Letter to the Editor 02

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Senator:

AC

Thought you should see this recent
op-ed piece by Lewis Lapham. He claims
the government "experiment" in arts
funding has failed. Some follow-up
letters to the editor are attached.

V. interests

ADC

4-2-81

Am surprised as

1 knows him.

Ny Times Jan 5, 1981

Arts, Humanities and a New Administration

To the Editor:

The sheer idiocy of advisory reports to President-elect Reagan on the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities cannot go unnoticed. And The Times, commenting on the Heritage and Rockefeller Foundation reports [editorial Dec. 15], just straddles the fence.

Mr. Reagan, who could reasonably be expected to have some sympathies for the arts — after all, that film career couldn't have been all for nought — should, if anything, act to embellish the reputation of the arts, not ridicule them.

The endowments should be depoliticized. Artistic integrity, and nothing else, should be the determinant as far as allocations go. And the circuses — the political ones we experience when an over-eager new Administration takes over such “mammoth” government programs as the arts and humanities endowments — must cease. Can you imagine such attacks on the military? On agricultural price supports?

It strikes me as being far more legitimate for the incoming Administration to consider the business impact — something its members presumably do normally understand — of arts cut-

backs. It is a fact that business contributes to the culture of our nation in proportion to government expenditures, and, furthermore, that urban renewal, jobs, housing and the economies of cities to an increasing degree depend on cultural support.

Government and the arts can coexist. The purely American phenomenon in Western culture of a tortured relationship between them could be put to rest by a Reagan Administration guarantee of *no* cuts in arts, and a redirection, where necessary, in arts funding, to be shaped gradually by professionals, not by bureaucrats. Furthermore, Mr. Reagan would be well advised to plan for and schedule early the Carter-forfeited White House Conference on the Arts.

There is a reason that cultural offerings consistently outpoll sporting events in America's cities: The people want them. The businesses want them. And if we faced the choice of giving up either our museums and theaters or our Congress and our White House, the people would have no problem in choosing.

Keep the endowments, nourish them, and let America live.

STEPHEN KAUFMAN
New York, Dec. 23, 1980

Relations With Hanoi

Fostering Mediocrity in the Arts

To the Editor:

As an artist, I found many misconceptions in Franklin H. Williams's Jan. 26 letter about the National Endowment for the Arts, which took issue with your editorial "Stop Funding Artistic Circuses" [Dec. 15, 1980].

For one, the American artistic scene by no means reflects only the European/white-American artistic tradition. One can, for example, find a very strong influence of black music in the commercial music sector and a strong Oriental influence in "serious modern music" (if I may call it that). A similar diversity is present in the many other art forms.

So when Mr. Williams feels the Endowment should support minorities, that idea strikes me as being an awkward gesture of affirmative action. But the problem lies deeper than that.

Mr. Williams speaks only of "groups," never of individuals. Without regard for individuals of promising talent, government support will almost always just enhance artistic mediocrity. Group projects rarely rise above that level. The preservation of cultural identity in America is a very bad excuse for this and runs counter to the old but valid notion of America being a cultural melting pot.

Supporting mediocrity at the expense of professionalism is the heart

of the problem. And that idea is very American indeed, as our educational system sadly proves. But without healthy professionalism, a country will go nowhere, be it in the arts or in any other field. The Chinese Cultural Revolution should have taught us all a lesson.

PETER BLAUVELT
Cambridge, Mass., Jan. 26, 1981