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Funding for the arts

Columnist James Kilpatrick questions the value of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and has posed the question, "What is the federal government doing in the arts business?"

His conclusion that it is a waste of taxpayers' money ("Artists, writers and composers should make it on their own, or not at all") was a hastily drawn, one-sided picture of the arts.

His line of thought helps imprison millions of Americans behind a television screen because they cannot afford or have no access to quality entertainment.

The real problem is that the government still doesn't take enough interest in the arts.

If NEA "wasted" \$6,000 sponsoring an experimental art project that Kilpatrick didn't appreciate, it was pittance compared to the billions of dollars allotted to the scrapped B-1 bomber, or subsidies to wealthy oil companies, or CIA covert operations in foreign countries.

If we are willing to spend billions to promote death and destruction, then we have a moral obligation to use a fraction of that to improve life.

Furthermore, public funding for the arts, which is not new, contrary to that columnist's Constitutional reference, is a valuable training ground for young aspiring writers, composers, artists.

Thousands of future politicians, business people and journalists are gliding through college on national



scholarships and grants. If we offer these students the privilege of a higher education, how can we deny the dancer or filmmaker his chance for a career, simply because it lies outside the conventional classroom?

Here in Wisconsin (which ranks 47th in the nation for arts funding), the federally funded CETA program has opened many positions for unemployed artists. Thanks to CETA, thousands of people in every part of the state enjoyed quality entertainment free.

Children who had never heard of mime and adults who hadn't been to a play in years participated in free workshops and performances.

Unless an artist becomes famous in this country, he is looked upon as a second class citizen who doesn't deserve serious consideration. It is time to wake up and recognize this nation's most valuable resource. — Elliot Niles Gross, Spring Green.

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