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National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (1965-1967): Speech 03

Lyndon B. Johnson

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NATIONAL FOUNDATION ON THE ARTS AND THE HUMANITIES

1800 G STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506



National Endowment for the Arts
National Council on the Arts

April, 1966

EXCERPTS FROM STATEMENTS BY PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON ON THE ARTS

Following are excerpts from statements by President Lyndon B. Johnson on the meaning and purpose of the arts, the arts in the "Great Society," the role of government in support of the arts, and on arts and humanities legislation.

MEANING AND PURPOSE OF THE ARTS

"In the long history of man, countless empires and nations have come and gone. Those which created no lasting works of art are reduced today to short footnotes in history's catalogue. Art is a nation's most precious heritage. For it is in our works of art that we reveal to ourselves, and to others, the inner vision which guides us as a nation. And where there is no vision, the people perish." (Upon signing the Arts and Humanities Bill in the Rose Garden, September 29, 1965)

"Our civilization... will largely survive in the works of our creation. There is a quality in art which speaks across the gulf dividing man from man and nation from nation, and century from century. That quality confirms the faith that our common hopes may be more enduring than our conflicting hostilities. Even now men of affairs are struggling to catch up with the insights of great art. The stakes may well be the survival of civilization." (At Ground-breaking Ceremonies for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C., December 2, 1964)

"The vitality and the well-being of the people is closely related to their capacity to always produce a high level of art and to enjoy it, and to appreciate it." (Upon signing S.J. Res. 136, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the White House, January 23, 1964)

"No people can afford to neglect the creative minds among it. They enrich the life of the nation. They reveal the farthest horizons of man's possibility." (At the White House Festival of the Arts, the South Lawn, June 14, 1965)

THE ARTS IN THE "GREAT SOCIETY"

"History has shown that, if we are to achieve The Great Society for which we are all working, it is essential that the arts grow and flourish." (Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, August 18, 1964)

"Pursuit of artistic achievement, and making the fruits of that achievement available to all its people, is among the hallmarks of a Great Society." (Upon transmitting the Administration's recommendations for a National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities to the Special Subcommittee on Labor in the House and the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities in the Senate, March 10, 1965)

"It is important to know that the opportunity we give to the arts is a measure of the quality of our civilization. It is important to be aware that artistic activity can enrich the life of our people, which really is the central object of government. It is important that our material prosperity liberate and not confine the creative spirit." (At Groundbreaking Ceremonies for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C., December 2, 1964)

"Statistics can describe past trends, analyze present developments and predict future possibilities. But they cannot tell us about the soul of man. The quality of our life must become as much a national issue as the quantity of our goods and services. Human progress is much more than a summary of our economic transactions. It is a matter of how well we live." (To the AFL-CIO Convention in San Francisco, California, December 9, 1965)

"The world, at home and abroad, offers no promise of quiet years ahead. We can expect a constant testing of our nation's leadership and our nation's purpose. Unless we stimulate individual enterprise, unless we regard individual accomplishment, we will be the servants and not the masters of change... In art, we welcome the growth of mass markets for books, painting and sculpture. But we must also seek to nourish the artistic talent which has not yet achieved a buying public." (At Swarthmore College Commencement, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, June 8, 1964)

"Almost every industrialized nation in the world, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, has one or more national centers for the arts. Washington has lagged behind. Far too often, American actors and singers and musicians must travel to foreign countries to even be heard. Now, because of President Kennedy's leadership and your efforts, they will have a stage here in the capital of their own country. I expect this Center (The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts) to be a living force for the encouragement of art. Washington needs new theatres and new concert halls. But if that is all that we are building, we will have fallen far short of today's expectation and promise. This Center will have a unique opportunity to bring together worlds of poetry and power -- and bring them to the benefit of each of us. It must give special attention to the young, to increasing their interest and stimulating their creativity. It can serve as a model and instructor to other cultural centers around our Nation. It should open up new opportunities to be heard to young singers and filmmakers and playwrights. It must take the lead in bringing the best in the performing arts to every part of our beloved and rich country, so that theatre and opera are not the privilege of the lucky citizens of just a few metropolitan centers. Yes, this is our ambitious program. But so was the vision of the man in whose memory this Center is today named." (At Groundbreaking Ceremonies for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C., December 2, 1964)

"Tomorrow's school will reach out to the places that enrich the human spirit: to the museums, the theatres, the art galleries... I am not describing a distant Utopia, but the kind of education which must be the great and urgent work of our time." (To the American Association of School Administrators Convention, Atlantic City, February 16, 1966)

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE ARTS

"We fully recognize that no government can call artistic excellence into existence. It must flow from the quality of the society and the good fortune of the nation. Nor should any government seek to restrict the freedom of the artist to pursue his calling in his own way. Freedom is an essential condition for the artist, and in proportion as freedom is diminished so is the prospect of artistic achievement. But government can seek to create conditions under which the arts can flourish through recognition of achievements, through helping those who seek to enlarge creative understanding,

through increasing the access of our people to the works of our artists, and through recognizing the arts as part of the pursuit of American greatness... In so doing we follow the example of many other nations where government sympathy and support have helped to shape great and influential artistic traditions." (Upon transmitting the Administration's recommendations for a National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities to the Special Subcommittee on Labor in the House and the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities in the Senate, March 10, 1965)

"The personal preferences of men in government are not important -- except to themselves... The role of government must be a small one. No Act of Congress or Executive Order can call a great musician or poet into existence. But we can stand on the sidelines and cheer. We can maintain and strengthen an atmosphere to permit the arts to flourish, and those who have talent to use it. And we can seek to enlarge the access of all of our people to artistic creation." (At Groundbreaking Ceremonies for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C., December 2, 1964)

"Art is not a tender or fragile thing. It has kept alive in the habitations of cruelty and oppressions. It has struggled toward light from the manifold darkness of war and conflict and persecution. Yet it flourishes most abundantly when it is fully free -- when the artist can speak as he wishes and describe the world as he sees it without any official direction. In no country in all the world -- East or West -- is the artist freer than here in America. There are pressures. But they come from inner desire and not external coercion." (At the White House Festival of the Arts, the South Lawn, June 14, 1965)

"It is only the free man who can dare to strike away the bonds of conventions and the claims of ideology in order to express the world as he sees it. It is only when men and women are free that they can shape the intensely personal vision which is the heart of the artistic enterprise. So...artists have a very high personal stake in the defense of freedom. And...I would remind you that all the rest of us have a very high stake in seeing that you remain free so that we may learn and so we may receive pleasure and so we may be greatly enriched by all you do." (To a group of Italian Artists in the Diplomatic Reception Room, Washington, D.C., February 26, 1965)

"There has been an encouraging growth of interest in the arts... But there are many problems in the fields of the arts which not only limit their development, but threaten their very existence. Private initiative is, and should undertake the major responsibility for resolving these problems. However, they are also of vital concern to the Federal Government. The formation of a council of outstanding

representatives of the arts fields...will help us express that concern and provide a method of cooperation with private groups that will have lasting benefits for all the people. In addition, this council will provide the much needed recognition of the artist, assure his place in society, and stimulate audience participation." (Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, August 18, 1964)

"We can work to create an atmosphere for the arts to thrive. Fundamentally, this flows from the values and the thoughts and the hopes of the nation itself. It is shaped by our schools and by our surroundings and by the nature of our society...By honoring artists and their work, by recognizing the importance of their contribution, we not only reflect, but we help to mold the values of this country." (At the White House Festival of the Arts, the South Lawn, June 14, 1965)

"To produce true and lasting results, our states and our municipalities, our schools and our great private foundations, must join forces with us. It is in the neighborhoods of each community that a nation's art is born. In countless American towns there live thousands of obscure and unknown talents. What this bill (National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965) really does is to bring active support to this great national asset, to make fresher the winds of art in this great land of ours. The arts and the humanities belong to the people, for it is, after all, the people who create them." (Upon signing the Arts and Humanities Bill in the Rose Garden, September 29, 1965)

ON ARTS AND HUMANITIES LEGISLATION

"I propose that we honor and support the achievements of thought and the creations of art... We must also recognize and encourage those who can be pathfinders for the nation's imagination and understanding." (State of the Union Message, January 4, 1965)

"This Congress will consider many programs which will leave an enduring mark on American life. But it may well be that passage of this legislation, modest as it is, will help secure for this Congress a sure and honored place in the story of the advance of our civilization." (Statement upon transmitting the Administration's recommendations for a National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities to the Special Subcommittee on Labor in the House and the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities in the Senate, March 10, 1965)

"We in America have not always been kind to the artists and the scholars who are the creators and the keepers of our vision. Somehow, the scientists always seem to get the penthouse, while the arts and the humanities get the basement." (Upon signing the Arts and Humanities Bill in the Rose Garden, September 29, 1965)

"The talented and the distinguished members of that Council (the National Council on the Arts) have worked very hard. They have worked creatively. They have dreamed dreams and they have developed ideas. This new bill, creating the National Foundation for the Arts and the Humanities, gives us the power to turn some of those dreams and ideas into reality... Working together with the state and the local governments, and with many private organizations in the arts, we will:

Create a National Theater to bring ancient and modern classics of the theater to audiences all over America.

We will support a National Opera Company and a National Ballet Company.

We will create an American Film Institute, bringing together leading artists of the film industry, outstanding educators, and young men and women who wish to pursue the 20th Century art form as their life's work.

We will commission new works of music by American composers.

We will support our symphony orchestras.

We will bring more great artists to our schools and universities by creating grants for their time in residence.

But those are only a small part of the programs that we are ready to begin. They will have an unprecedented effect on the arts and the humanities of our great nation." (Upon signing the Arts and Humanities Bill in the Rose Garden, September 29, 1965)

"...This great nation, this country that we love so much, is looking to this handful of extremely talented individuals (the National Council on the Arts), looking to you as the representatives of all fields of the arts, for ways in which the Government can maintain and can strengthen an atmosphere which will permit the arts to flourish and to become a part of everyone's life." (At the Swearing-In Ceremony of the National Council on the Arts, The Cabinet Room, April 9, 1965)

"Last September, I signed a bill establishing the National Council on the Arts. Versions of this proposal had been under consideration since 1877. I intend to consider other ways in which government can appropriately encourage the arts." (At Groundbreaking Ceremonies for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C., December 2, 1964)